

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE**

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Tuesday 1 February 2022** at **2.00 pm**

#### **Present:**

**Councillor J Chaplow (Chair)**

#### **Durham County Council:**

Councillors J Blakey, D Brown, J Cosslett, S Quinn, K Robson, A Simpson, M Stead, M Wilson and B Kellett (Substitute) (substitute for C Varty)

#### **Spennymoor Town Council:**

Town Councillors N Foster (Vice-Chair), C Maddison and D Ranyard

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors A Surtees and C Varty.

#### **2 Substitute Members**

County Councillor B Kellett was substitute for County Councillor C Varty.

#### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

## **5 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar which provided an update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of minutes).

The Neighbourhood and Protection Manager provided a summary of the performance figures from 1 September 2021 to 31 December 2021 in comparison to the same period for the previous year. It was noted there had been 106 more cremations undertaken compared to the same period last year. There had also been an increase of 16 memorials sold, however there was a small decrease in the value of memorials.

It was noted that an application would be submitted for the 2022 Green Flag Award and progress would be reported to a future meeting.

Referring to the Recycling of Metals Scheme, it was reported that the nominated charity, Chyrelle Addams Cancer Support Trust had received £15,000 from the scheme on the 16 December 2021. The Neighbourhood and Protection Manager asked members to note that the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management had been asked to review the value of money awarded to allow more charities to benefit from the scheme.

A review of weekend and Bank Holiday opening hours for the crematorium had concluded and it was proposed that Sunday and Bank Holiday opening times change in line with times on a Saturday.

An update was provided in relation to the Service Level Agreements (SLA) in relation to Cleaning Services. The Joint Committee were asked to consider and approve the revised SLA for the period April 2022 to March 2024, costing £10,205 per year (a 3.6% increase on the recharges levied in 2021/22), which would include all labour and materials required to carry out the cleaning activities.

Referring to the Water Fountain maintenance, the Neighbourhood and Protection Manager advised that Durham County Council's Commercial Services Team could provide maintenance by way of a Service Level Agreement (SLA). The price quoted was £10,943 per year, which would include all labour and materials required to carry out the activities identified.

Members were advised that St Cuthbert's Hospice had requested that they be allowed to continue to provide a Christmas Tree at Durham Crematorium for 2022.

## **Resolved:**

- (i) That the current performance of the crematorium be noted;
- (ii) That the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award be noted;
- (iii) That the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals Scheme be noted;
- (iv) That the revised changes to opening times be approved;
- (v) That the SLA with regards to the cleaning of the crematorium be approved;
- (vi) That the SLA with regards to the cleaning of the water fountains at the crematorium be approved;
- (vii) That the request for St Cuthbert's Hospice to provide a Christmas tree for 2022 be agreed.

## **6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/21, with Projected Revenue and Capital Outturn at 31/03/22**

The Joint Committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee that provided details of the provisional outturn position for 2021/22 and the projected level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change highlighted the projected revenue outturn surplus of £1,096,084 against the budgeted surplus of £1,022,157, £73,927 more than the budgeted position.

In response to a query from Town Councillor D Ranyard regarding the forecasted overspend relating to the roadway entrance widening and new gates, the Neighbourhood and Protection Manager advised that it was not always possible to identify overspends when projecting costs and the project had resulted in unexpected works carried out. Further information would be provided.

Councillor J Blakey added that the cost of metal and materials had increased 75% since the pandemic which would have contributed to the overspend.

Councillor M Steads asked questions regarding additional dividends or one-off payments to the two Authorities if income levels were higher than predicted. The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that contributions to Authorities would remain the same. He explained that any additional income would go into the Crematorium reserves to finance future initiatives. It was noted that additional payment had not

been done previously and it was highlighted that money generated over and above could be unpredictable. He added that payments to constituent Authorities were set out in the budget report and suggested that a separate budget strategy could be provided setting out potential options for increasing payments to authorities and identifying other areas that require funds to be set aside.

Responding to a query from Councillor J Blakey regarding the generator that had been discussed at a previous meeting, the Neighbourhood and Protection Manager advised that it had been included in the budget and projections in the report would be updated to reflect that.

**Resolved:**

That the April to December 2021 financial monitoring report and associated provisional revenue and capital outturn positions at 31 March 2022, including the projected year position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

**7 Provision of Support Services 2022/23**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which outlined the proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2022 to March 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change reported that the proposed charge for 2022/23 was £35,345, a 3% increase on the recharges levied in 2021/22. The applicable fee takes into consideration the impact of pay and price inflation.

**Resolved:**

That the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 (including relevant schedule) for the year 2022/23 be approved.

**8 Fees and Charges 2022/23**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of the proposed fees and charges for the Central Durham Crematorium for 2022/23 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained that the report sought to increase the fees and charges as shown at Appendix 2 of the report by £25 (3.4%) per cremation from £740 to £765, which was £70 below the average charges currently levied across the region.

It was noted that the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change had consulted with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change on the proposed increase in charges and he was satisfied that the increase was appropriate.

Responding to a query from Town Councillor D Ranyard, the Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change confirmed that the proposed increase in charges had been agreed by Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee on 31 January 2022.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2022, which seeks to increase cremation charges by £25 (3.4%) per cremation from £740 to £765 be approved;
- (ii) That the proposed fees and charges are incorporated into the 2022/23 budget.

**9 External Audit Arrangements 2022/23 to 2024/25**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which presented proposals for the continued delivery of the external audit by Mazars for the three financial years 2022/23 to 2024/25 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that the quotation provided by Mazars for 2022/23 of £2,250 was £380 higher than the previous three years and the increase would be in line with CPI for the two years thereafter. The increase was in line with public sector audit cost inflation that was being experienced throughout the audit industry.

Town Councillor D Ranyard, while understanding the benefits of appointing the same organisation to conduct external audits, raised concerns that a tendering exercise had not taken place this time around. The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained the continuity benefits as a number of other authorities and organisations had missed audit deadlines. It was noted that Durham County Councils audit completion deadlines have all been achieved and would be beneficial to continue with

Mazars at this time. He advised that a full tendering exercise would be undertaken in the future.

**Resolved:**

That Mazars be appointed to undertake the external audit arrangements for the 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

## **10 2022/23 Revenue and Capital Budgets**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out proposals with regards to the 2022/23 revenue and capital budgets for the Central Durham Crematorium (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that the budget had been developed with the Bereavement Services Manager, taking into account the proposed Fees and Charges, the updated 2021/22 forecast outturn position and the known expenditure pressures in the coming year.

Councillor M Stead asked how much over the amount needed for investment are the current balances and reserves. The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that the general reserve policy recommends 30% of the income budget, however, it would be prudent to have a buffer which provides scope for unforeseen expenditure which is part of the actual reserves earmarked for future investment. The budget strategy could examine the reserves level and whether the general reserve policy percentage could be changed, however advised this could have knock-on implications.

The Neighbourhood and Protection Manager added that historically taking a prudent approach has allowed for cremator replacements and capital improvement works and advised it would be prudent to look at dividends when reserves were at a sufficient level.

Town Councillor N Foster acknowledged Councillor Steads point. He referred to the challenges during the pandemic and suggested it would be prudent to project future revenue and highlighted exploring new opportunities in technology.

The Chair commented that reserves will be essential with regards to exploring new technology as additional space would be required. She highlighted the need to keep up to date with changing times and provide a choice for families.

In response to a query from Town Councillor D Ranyard, the Neighbourhood and Protection Manager advised that due to Covid the meeting arranged to be held at Durham Crematorium had to be rescheduled and it was anticipated that the next Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee meeting in April 2022 would be held at Durham Crematorium. There would be an opportunity for members to look round the facilities after the meeting. He added if any members wished to visits the Crematorium before the meeting in April, the Bereavement Services Manager would be able to facilitate individual visits.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the revenue and capital budget proposals contained within the report (as set out at Appendix 2) be approved;
- (ii) That the forecast level of reserves at 31 March 2023 (as set out at Appendix 2) be noted.

**11 Exclusion of the Public**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

**12 Restructure Report**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Neighbourhood Protection Manager which provided details of proposals relating to changes within the Crematorium staffing structure (for copy see file of minutes).

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager and the Joint Committee expressed their appreciation to the crematorium staff for their excellent work and professionalism during an extremely difficult time.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations contained in the report be agreed.