

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Chapel - Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton on **Monday 30 January 2023 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Bradford (Vice Chair in the Chair)

Durham County Council

Councillors V Andrews, J Charlton, A Hanson, P Heaviside, D Oliver, K Rooney and M Walton

Gateshead Council:

Councillors D Bradford (Vice-Chair), L Green and S Green

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Batey and C Hampson (Durham County Council) and Councillors K Dodds and M Ord (Gateshead Council).

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitutes.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 September 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Vice Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

5 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 Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that during the period 1 September 2022 to 31 December 2022, there were 430 cremations, compared to 479 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 49 cremations for the period.

In addition, the number of memorials sold in the same period was 37 compared to 25 in the comparable period last year, an increase of 12 memorials sold and £1,374 year on year.

Moving on he provided an update on the Green Flag Application noting that an application would be submitted for the 2023 Award in due course, with progress being reported back to a future meeting.

In addition, he provided an update on the recycling of metal scheme, noting that collections in 2022 had resulted in a second round of nominations being made available. Further to requests from Members, two charities could be nominated at a time and therefore Red Sky Foundation and Cancer Research UK had been nominated to receive the next round of funds.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar referred members to discussion at the previous meeting relating to Energy Improvement works, noting that a sum of £75,000 was allocated in the 2022/23 budget to carry out remaining works to the building. However, an updated quotation of £110,000 had been received which included costs for cavity wall insulation. As a result, an additional £35,000 would be required in order to complete works to replace roof lights, remaining doors, cladding of pipework and electrical works and Members were asked therefore to consider the increased quotation.

Councillor Charlton asked whether any additional quotes had been sought for the cavity wall insulation. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that two further quotes had been sought however they had not yet been received.

Councillor Walton commented that a 50% increase on the original quotation seemed high and asked whether this could be negotiated down. The Bereavement Services Manager suggested that he would go back to them to discuss further.

Councillor Bradford also suggested that additional quotes be sought externally.

Resolved:

- (a) That the current performance of the crematorium be noted.
- (b) That the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award be noted.
- (c) That the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme be noted.
- (d) That the update with regards to increases in costs associated with energy improvement works be noted.

6 Financial Monitoring Report 2022/23: Position at 31/12/22 with Projected Outturn to 31/03/23

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 provided details of the projected outturn position for 2022/23 and the projected level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2023 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the April to December 2022 financial monitoring report and associated provisional outturn position at 31 March 2023, including the projected year position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

7 Provision of Support Services 2023/24

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 sought agreement of the proposed Service Level Agreement for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2023 to March 2024 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that the proposed charge for 2023/24 was £24,940 and represented a 5% increase on the recharges levied in 2022/23, which took into account pay / price inflation and was in line with budgetary assumptions.

Resolved:

That the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 for the year 2023/24 be approved.

8 Fees and Charges 2023/24

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 Mountsett Crematorium for 2023/24 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Charlton referred to comments she had made previously, noting that whilst he appreciated that this was a business, she felt that the increase was too high. The Finance Manager, neighbourhoods and Climate Change added that whilst he understood the concerns and points made, the level of increase at 3.9% allowed

the whole operation to remain sustainable, whilst also keeping charges amongst the lowest in the region.

Councillor Heaviside asked whether the energy charges were paid for under the wider Durham contract. In response the Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change confirmed that energy was purchased under the DCC NEPO contract.

Further discussion took place regarding the increased charges relating to memorials and memorial renewals, noting that whilst the proposed increase on paper may appear high, related charges had not been increased for around 10 years and would not be increased again for a period of time.

Following a question regarding direct cremations the Bereavement Services Manager advised that there had been increased interest in this lower cost funeral option. He suggested that whilst he did not have the figures he would look to report back to the next meeting with that information.

Resolved:

- (i) That members of the Joint Committee note and approve the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2023, which sought to increase cremation charges by £30 (3.92%) per cremation from £765 to £795.
- (ii) That the proposed fees and charges be incorporated into the 2023/24 budget.

9 2023/24 Revenue Budget

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out proposals with regards to the 2023/24 revenue budgets for Mountsett 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 set out in the previous report, the 2022/23 forecast outturn position and known expenditure pressures in the coming year.

Details of the proposed budget and main changes from the 2023/24 budget were detailed in the report at paragraphs 4 to 12. The report further provided details of the surplus redistribution and earmarked reserves.

Resolved:

That Members of the Joint Committee note and approve the budget proposals contained within the report (as set out at Appendix 2) and that members note the

forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2024 (also set out at Appendix 2).

10 Any other business

Correspondence from Kevan Jones MP

The Bereavement Services Manager provided details to the Joint Committee of correspondence which had been received from Kevan Jones MP's office, regarding a request from a constituent to have a 'Letters to Heaven' post box installed at Mountsett Crematorium.

Whilst the Joint Committee noted the sentiment, value to others and that some other crematoria were already offering this service, it was felt that this was not something which could be progressed at Mountsett, and a suggestion was made that the request be forwarded to local Funeral Directors for their consideration.

11 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

12 Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.