

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Chapel - Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton on **Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor A Batey (Chair)

Durham County Council

Councillors V Andrews, J Charlton, C Hampson, A Hanson, P Heaviside, D Oliver and K Rooney

Gateshead Council:

Councillors M Ord

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Walton (Durham) and Councillors D Bradford, K Dodds, L Green and S Green (Gateshead Council).

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Performance and Operational Report

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

The Bereavement Services Manager provided a summary of performance for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023. He advised that 410 cremations had been

undertaken during the period, compared to 416 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 6. The total number of cremations in 2022/23 was 1,445 compared with 1,463 in 2021/22, a decrease of 18.

The actual number of cremations undertaken was therefore 145 more than the budget position, resulting in an over achievement of cremation fee income of £90,985 in year.

Moving on to the sale of memorials the number and value of memorials sold of 25 / £5,306 compares to 29 / £5,597 in the same period last year, a decrease of 4 memorials and a small decrease in income of £291.

The Bereavement Services Manager further provided details of the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain which was to be held in June 2023.

Details were then reported regarding the recycling of metals scheme and it was noted that a payment of £6,000 was made to Cancer Research UK and to Red Sky Foundation following nominations from Members at the previous meeting. It was also noted that a new company was being trialled with regards to collection of metals for recycling which could increase distribution for more charities in the future.

With regards to energy improvement works, the Bereavement Services Manager advised that following discussions with the design services team it had been confirmed that they could not go out externally due to Health and Safety issues, and due to costs of materials, they were unable to reduce costs any further. Members were asked to consider the increase in costs and decide if they wished to go ahead with the works.

In conclusion, the Bereavement Services Manager considered it an appropriate time for Members to discuss the future options for the temporary cremator and the following four options were presented to Members:

1. Purchase the container that the cremator is currently housed in
2. Continue to rent the container
3. Contractor to remove the container and cremator
4. Contractor removes the container and the cremator is moved into storage

Due to the infrequent use of the temporary cremator and the financial implications, the Bereavement Services Manager recommended that Members approve Option 3.

With regards to the energy improvement works, Councillor Charlton asked what the long term benefits would be for the crematorium and questioned how long it would take for the costs to be returned in the form of energy savings. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that this was difficult to predict as energy costs were still rising. He informed the Joint Committee that some of the doors were old fashioned

and single glazed and some of the external doors had not been replaced since 1966.

Councillor Andrews believed if the work was essential, it needed to be done.

The Chair stated that the works were a huge cost but considered them necessary due to the age of the building and the lack of improvement works that had been carried out over the years.

E Thompson, Principal Accountant pointed out that the original sum of £75,000 was not a professional estimation and was based on the Bereavement Services Manager's best estimate over a year ago but costs have continued to increase since that time.

Councillor Ord believed it was better to do the works now as costs were continuing to rise.

Councillor Oliver asked for further clarification regarding the health and safety issue. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that if works were carried out externally, a coordinator would need to be appointed and this would be a further additional cost.

Councillor Heaviside confirmed that he was in support of the works and stressed the importance of good insulation to prevent further money being wasted.

Upon a vote being taken, the energy improvement works were agreed.

With regards to the temporary cremator, Councillor Quinn believed that option 3 was a sensible option.

Councillor Ord asked if the temporary cremator was used much. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that it had not been used at all during March 2023.

Councillor Heaviside noted there was spare capacity at Durham Crematorium which could be considered as a fallback position if required in the future.

Councillor Heaviside proposed that option 3 be approved. This was seconded by Councillor Charlton. Upon a vote being taken, option 3 was agreed.

Resolved

The Joint Committee

- a) Noted the current performance of the crematorium.
- b) Noted the attendance at the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain. The Joint

Committee noted the attendance of the Bereavement Services Manager and the Chair (to be appointed after the AGM in May 2023).

- c) Noted the distribution of recycling income to the respective charities.
- d) Considered the increase in costs of the energy improvement works and agreed for the works to go ahead.
- e) Considered the options for the temporary cremator and agreed to proceed with option 3.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2023

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

E Thompson, the Principal Accountant explained that the projected outturn is a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to the partner authorities) of £176,923 against a budgeted surplus of £331,742, £154,819 less than the budgeted position.

The Principal Accountant outlined some of the reasons for the significant budget variances which included premises, cremator replacements, energy budgets, supplies and income.

Contributions to the earmarked reserves were also forecasted to be £154,819 less than originally budgeted and in line with the MCJC Reserve Policy to maintain a General Reserve of 30% of the income budget, a transfer to the General Reserve of £10,289 was required. An additional transfer of £188,077 was required due to the forecast overspend in year and resulted in a net transfer from the Cremator Replacement Reserve of £198,366.

The total reserves and balances position was forecast to be £754,819 at the year end comprising of a retained reserve of £435,844 and a general reserve of £318,975.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

7 Risk Register Update 2022/23 Review 2

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and

Treasurer to the Joint Committee which provided details of the outcome of the half-yearly risk review in March 2023 (for copy see file of Minutes).

E Thompson, the Principal Accountant noted that since the previous review, one risk relating to potential non-compliance with Covid advisory safety measures had been downrated and it was anticipated that this risk would be taken off the register at the next review in September 2023.

Resolved

That the content of the report and the updated position be noted.

8 Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which presented the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2022/23 (for copy see file of Minutes).

P Monaghan, Audit Manager explained that the Annual Internal Audit Report provided an Opinion which made conclusions on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Committee's Framework of Governance, Risk Management and Control. The report provided a Substantial overall assurance opinion and identified that there was a sound system of control.

The Chair thanked the Audit Manager on behalf of the Committee for their hard work and good management.

Resolved

That the content of the Annual Internal Audit Report and the overall 'Substantial' opinion provided on the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance, risk management and control environment for 2022/23 be noted.

9 Other Business

The Chair raised an item of business.

Due to a recent personal experience, the Chair felt that the grounds of the crematorium were not friendly for those with a disability, pointing out that only two disabled bays existed in the car park, and the ramp to the side of the building was very steep. She also pointed out that there were cobbles which could be problematic for wheels on walking frames. The Chair felt the Committee should consider some maintenance work to help alleviate this issue or offer those visiting with a disability an alternative option for dropping off.