

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held at **Durham Crematorium** on **Wednesday 27 September 2023** at **5.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor S Quinn (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, J Blakey, D Brown, K Robson and M Stead

Spennymoor Town Council:

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

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Simpson, C Varty and M Wilson.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Minutes

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

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 External Audit Annual Review of the Return for the year ended 31 March 2023

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which presented the External Auditors (Mazars LLP) Annual Review of the Joint Committees Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager advised that the audit had been completed and no material weaknesses had been highlighted with regards to the Joint Committee's system of internal controls and accounting statements and reported no exceptions to the Return.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committees Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2023 including the External Report 2022/23 Certificate (attached at Appendix 2) be approved.

6 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 Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that 588 cremations were undertaken during the period 1 June to 31 August 2023, which was 8 cremations less compared to the comparable period last year. It was noted that 166 families were from Durham, 21 from Spennymoor and 401 families were from other areas.

The number and value of memorial plaques sold were 69 / £17,471 compared to 76 / £21,284 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 47 memorials sold and £3,813 in terms of income generated.

With regards to the appointment of relief members of staff to assist in the operational areas of the crematorium, it was confirmed that they had both undertaken all training and had recently passed the cremator operator test.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that the cremators were serviced in June 2023 and on inspection it was identified that there was an issue with the brickwork within the cremator as well as an issue with the charging door. A decision was therefore made to shut down the cremator due to health and safety concerns until a full reline could be undertaken which was due to be carried out September 2023. It was noted that this work was not included in this year's budget as it had been factored into the 2024/25 Service Asset Management Plan. A sum of £68,900 was required for this work and could be met from reserves.

Durham Crematorium was successful in obtaining a Green Flag Award for the twelfth year running and was a testament to the dedication of the Crematorium staff and also comes on top of the award of Gold Star Status in the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management Accreditation.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that Durham County Council had decided to withdraw from entering the green flag awards for cemeteries and sought views from the Joint Committee if they wished to continue with the green flag award for Durham Crematorium.

Referring to the Service Asset Management Plan, the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that the plan had been reviewed and updated to provide further direction and highlighted future budget pressures. It was noted that £1,648,130 had been estimated for Priority 1 essential works for 2024/25 and would need to be considered as part of the budget setting process for next year. Priority 2 works which would need to feature in 2025/26 budget plans had been estimated at £123,000 and Priority 3 works which would fall beyond the next two years had been estimated at £123,000. Longer term works had been costed at £401,400.

The Joint Committee discussed the Service Asset Management Plan and agreed the priority of works be factored into budget planning in 2024/25 and beyond. Councillor J Blakey suggested that the Crematorium seating be updated and be included in future budget planning.

The Joint Committee agreed to continue to apply for the Green Flag award as the Green Flag status was a positive accreditation for Durham Crematorium and County Durham. Responding to a query regarding costs, the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that the Green Flag application cost £360.00.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the crematorium be noted;
- (ii) That the current position with regards to the staffing be noted;
- (iii) That the updated position with regards to the Green Flag scheme be noted and to continue to apply for the award be agreed;
- (iv) That the content of the Service Asset Management Plan attached at Appendix 3, which will be factored into budget planning in 2024/25 and beyond be agreed.

7 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/08/23, with Projected Revenue and Capital Outturn at 31/03/24

The Joint Committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee that provided details of the provisional

outturn position for 2023/24 and the projected level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2024 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the April to August 2023 financial monitoring report and associated provisional revenue and capital outturn positions at 31 March 2024, including the projected year position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

8 Risk Register Update 2023/24 Review 1

The Joint Committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee that provided details of the outcome of the half-yearly risk review in August 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

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

9 Internal Audit Charter

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which sought agreement on the Internal Audit Charter to be applied to reviews undertaken as part of the Internal Audit plan for 2023/24 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the Internal Audit Charter set out at Appendix 2 of the report be approved.

10 Annual Review of the System of Internal Audit

The Joint Committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee that provided details of a review of the effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service, which was carried out by the County Council's Audit Committee in June 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

It was reported that there was a requirement for the service to be externally assessed once every five years. The latest external assessment, carried out by the Chartered Institute of Public and Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), in February 2022, concluded that 'Durham County Council's Internal Audit Service's self-assessment is accurate and as such we conclude that they FULLY CONFORM to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit

Standards and the CIPFA Local Government Application Note'. Internal Audit then completed a further self-assessment, for 2022/23, against the key elements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and CIPFA Local Government Application Note, which demonstrated that the Section continues to conform to the Code's requirements and was based on the revised PSIAS brought into effect on 01 April 2017.

Councillor J Blakey praised the Audit Team for their hard work.

Resolved:

That the information demonstrating the efficiency and effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service be noted.

11 Budget Strategy Report

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer which outlined issues to consider as part of the Medium Term Financial planning for the Central Durham Crematorium. The views of the Joint Committee were sought in advance of the 2024/25 budget setting process (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) That the proposed increase in the fees and charges, as identified in the report be approved;
- (iii) That the proposed increase in the surplus redistribution to Durham County Council and Spennymoor Town Council be approved;
- (iv) That a review of the budget strategy in September 2024 be agreed in preparation for the 2025/26 budget setting year.

12 Any Other Business

The Chair agreed that in order to keep members informed, the next items of business could be reported.

Apprenticeship

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that a member of staff would be retiring in September 2024 and they were considering apprenticeship opportunities for future development.

Crematorium Conference

The Chair provided the Joint Committee with an update following her attendance at the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Learning Convention and Exhibition conference.

Complaint

A complaint had been received in relation to the Joint Committee's decision to uphold the current terms and conditions with regards to artificial flowers. The Chair advised that she would contact the complainant and explain the views of the Joint Committee's decision.