

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Committee Room 1A , County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 31 January 2024** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor S Quinn (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, J Blakey, D Brown, J Chaplow, K Robson, A Simpson and 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 Councillors M Stead and M Wilson.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2023 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 Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that 793 cremations were undertaken during the period 1 September to 31 December 2023, which was 7 cremations less compared to the comparable period last year. It was noted that 251 families were from Durham, 35 from Spennymoor and 507 families were from other areas.

The number and value of memorial plaques sold were 92 / £26,614 compared to 82 / £21,214 in the comparable period last year, an increase of 10 memorials sold and £5,400 in terms of income generated.

With regards to staffing, one casual relief crematorium attendants had now left the Authority and the remaining relief was now covering a 10-month appointment for one of the crematorium attendants, therefore 2 casual reliefs would be advertised.

An application for the Green Flag Award will be submitted for the 2024 award and progress will be reported back to future meetings. A management plan to maintain the required standards will be updated and any required works will be covered by existing budgets.

Collections in the second round of Metals nominations for 2023/24 had resulted in another round of nominations being made available, therefore two charities were nominated, READLEY - Asbestos and Mesothelioma Support and County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust. A payment of £7,000 would be made to each charity.

St. Cuthbert's Hospice had requested that they be allowed to continue to provide a Christmas tree again in 2024. The Hospice would supply the tree and decorations at no cost to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee.

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs had carried out a consultation on proposed new guidance that would replace the existing crematoria guidance PG5/2 (12). The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar responded to the consultation, however if some of the proposed new guidance was implemented then there would be additional costs involved for the service. From 1st January 2027, all cremators would need to be fitted with appropriate fuel and electricity metering. The fitting of Nitrogen oxide (NOx) equipment may be required in the future. Also increased costs with regards to emission testing would be required, as well as the removal of the CAMEO scheme. Once confirmation of the changes and additional costs were received, it would be factored into future budget setting.

In response to a query regarding the cremations breakdown, the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that figures for Ushaw Moor were included in the Durham figures.

Resolved:

- i) That the report be noted;
- ii) That St. Cuthbert's provide a Christmas tree for 2024 be agreed.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/23, 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 of 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 December 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.

7 Provision of Support Services 2024/25

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasure to the Joint Committee that sought approval of 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 2024 to March 2025 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that the proposed charge for 2024/25 was £38,970 and represented a 5% increase on the recharges levied in 2023/24, which took into account the impact of pay and price inflation.

Resolved:

That the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 for the year 2024/25 be approved.

8 Fees and Charges 2024/25

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 set out details of the proposed fees and charges for the Central Durham Crematorium for 2024/25 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Climate Change highlighted the inflationary and cost pressures facing the crematorium and presented the proposal to increase the fees and charges for 2024/25 by £30 (3.77%) per cremation from £795 to £825, which was £101 below the average charges currently levied across the region. It was also suggested that a mid-year increase in fees and charges be considered, due to the widening gap

between fees at Durham Crematorium and the average cremation fee across the region.

The Joint Committee discussed the proposed fees and charges noting inflation and rising costs. Durham Crematorium provided a good quality service and value for money, however there were concerns that Durham Crematorium fees fall too far behind other facilities which could raise questions that a more substandard service would be provided. The Joint Committee agreed that a mid-year increase be considered to reduce the widening gap in cremation fees across the region.

Resolved:

- i) That the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2024, which sought to increase cremation charges by £30 (3.77%) per cremation from £795 to £825 (inclusive of £30 medical referee fee) be approved and be incorporated into the 2024/25 budget;
- ii) That a mid-year increase in fees and charges be considered, due to the widening gap between fees at Durham Crematorium and the average cremation fee across the region.

9 2024/25 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 2024/25 revenue and capital budgets for the Central Durham Crematorium (for copy see file of minutes).

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 2025 (set out at Appendix 2) be noted.