

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 24 April 2024** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor S Quinn (Chair)

Durham County Council:

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

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 J Blakey, J Chaplow and C Varty.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2024 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 received 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 677 cremations were undertaken during the period 1 January to 31 March 2024 which was 65 cremations less compared to the comparable period last year. It was noted that 196 families were from Durham, 30 from Spennymoor and 451 families were from other areas.

The total number of cremations in 2023/24 was 2,433 compared to 2,513 in 2022/23, which was a decrease of 80 cremations.

The 2023/24 budget was set at a prudent assumption of 2,200 cremations during the year. The actual number of cremations undertaken was therefore 233 more than the budgeted position. This was reflected in an over achievement of cremation fee income of £137,234 which was included in the budgetary control report.

The total number of direct cremations for 2023/24 was 138, an increase of 36 compared to the previous year.

The number and value of memorial plaques sold were 82 / £23,274 compared to 97 / £26,798 in the comparable period last year, a small decrease of 15 memorials sold and £3,524 in terms of income decreased.

With regards to staffing, a casual relief crematorium attendant had left the Authority and the remaining relief was covering a 10-month crematorium attendant appointment who had been appointed as Bereavement Officer. Following a recruitment process, two casual relief crematorium attendants had been appointed and commenced their duties on 2 April 2024.

It was reported that the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain would be held at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool from Monday 24 to Wednesday 26 June 2024. Arrangements would be made for the Chair and Bereavement Services Manager to attend the conference and represent the Joint Committee.

It was noted that the Crematorium was in the process of changing the current software provider for crematoria's and cemeteries to a new provider Plotbox, following a soft market exercise and demonstrations from other providers.

In response to questions from Town Councillor D Ranyard with regards to the new software, the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that training had already been provided and the new software would be fully operational by September 2024.

Town Councillor C Maddison queried whether the cheaper option of direct cremations had an impact on Durham Crematorium. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that direct cremations were allocated earlier time slots which did not affect scheduled service times and additional fees would be charged if additional services were requested.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be noted.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2024

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).

Town Councillor D Ranyard referred to the capital programme and queried the reason why improvement work to the garden fountain had stopped. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar explained that Northumbrian Water had stopped the work as additional work was required with regards to compliance and the cost for a new fountain had exceeded previous estimations, therefore work was currently on hold.

Resolved:

That the April 2023 to March 2024 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 Risk Register Update 2023/24 Review 2

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 outcome of the half-yearly risk review in March 2024 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

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

8 Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24

The Joint Committee received a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager that provided an opinion which made conclusions on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Committee's framework of governance, risk management and control (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Auditor advised that the report provided a 'Substantial' overall assurance opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance, risk management and internal control arrangements operating across the Joint Committee in 2023/24 and the 'Substantial' opinion identified that there was a sound system of control.

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 2023/24 be noted.

9 Any Other Business

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

Letter Regarding Potential Sale

The Joint Committee were informed that a letter asking to purchase the Crematorium had been received. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar responded to the letter advising that the Crematorium was not for sale.

10 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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

11 Proposed Changes to the Medical Referee System

The Joint Committee received a report of the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar which provided an update relating to the changes with regards to the Medical Referee system currently in use (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.