

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Committee Room 1A - County Hall, Durham on **Friday 27 April 2012 at 10.00 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor O Temple (Chair)**

### **Members of the Committee:**

#### **Durham County Council**

Councillors A Bainbridge, J Nicholson and B Stephens

#### **Gateshead Council:**

Councillors P Ronan and D Davidson

### **Apologies:**

Apologies for absence were received from (Durham County Council) Councillor(s) J Docherty, M Hodgson, J Hunter, O Johnson and J Wilson. (Gateshead Council) Councillor(s) K Dodds, M Ord, P Mole and M Wallace.

## **1 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

## **3 Quarterly Report of the Superintendent & Registrar**

The Committee received a report of Graham Harrison, Bereavement Services Manager which provided an update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of minutes).

With regards to performance it was reported that there were 349 cremations undertaken during 1 January 2012 to 31 March 2012, compared to 369 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 20. However the total number of cremations to 31 March 2012 showed an increase of 5.89% to that of the previous year.

With regard to the take up of memorial plaques it was reported that during quarter 4 the total sale of plaques was now 4, with further interest from customers noted.

Further to discussions relating to the development of procedures and policies and logistics for the overall operation of the scheme, the Bereavement Services Manager advised that

following detailed work to look at schemes in place across neighbouring authorities it was recognised that the majority of those authorities who offered a renewal scheme, charged half of the total cost of a plaque for a ten year renewal period. It was therefore proposed that renewal should be offered, and the charge set at approximately 50% of the full cost of the purchase price. Further details were then reported with regard to storage and disposition of plaques which were not renewed.

At this point Councillor Temple referred to discussions at the previous meeting regarding the policy for renewal of memorial plaques. Members unanimously agreed that the policy as outlined within the report adequately met those concerns as raised at the last meeting. Councillor Bainbridge commented that he was pleased to see that once the 10 year lease had expired, an extension period for renewal would be permitted.

Councillor Temple added that he was also pleased to see that a clear policy was now in place.

Moving on to operational matters, the Bereavement Services Manager reported on staffing and the current situation with regard to the Superintendent and Registrar.

Further details were also provided with regard to additional payment which had been made as a result of a review of the Crematorium Assistant's terms and conditions.

Information was also provided in relation to the progress against FSA registration for the provision of pre-payment cremation bonds, the Green Flag application and recycling of metals scheme.

With regards to surplus generated from the recycling of metals scheme, it was noted that nominations were sought for a charity for surplus to be distributed to. It was noted that as Saltwell Crematorium had not as yet joined the recycling scheme it was suggested that the Crematorium Joint Committee nominate Willowburn Hospice. Councillor Temple sought agreement from members for this charitable organisation to be nominated. Members unanimously agreed that Willowburn Hospice be nominated.

Following discussions at the previous meeting the Bereavement Services Manager went on to provide an update on the development of the service asset management plan. He advised that a full report would be presented at the AGM scheduled to be held in June.

Councillor Ronan queried how long the works identified within the plan were expected to take to complete. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that the plan covered a 4 year period, and some of the works identified had already been actioned. The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the full plan including costings and timetable for actions would be considered in full at the next meeting of the joint committee.

Resolved:

- That the the content of this report with regards to current performance of the crematorium be noted along with;
- The current situation with regards to the sale of Memorial Plaques.
- The proposal to charge approximately 50% of the full cost of the purchase price of a new plaque when renewal is required subject to annual increases.

- To store plaques if not renewed in order that families can collect these.
- The current situation with regards to the Superintendent and Registrar.
- The current situation with regards to the Pre-Payment bond and progress working with DCC legal team
- The current situation with regards to the Green Flag Judging.
- The current situation with regards to the Recycling of Metals Scheme and to seek nominations from Members for future Local or National death related charities.
- Note the current quotes now received with regards to the Service Asset Management Plan and agree to the internal decoration and the replacement of windows to staff room which are long overdue.
- That Members note the current situation with regards to the Accessibility Audit and associated costs of required works and agree to these works being carried out over the coming years and subject to budget provisions.
- That Members note the current situation with regards to the Fire Safety Audit.

#### **4 Financial Monitoring Report 2011/12: Provisional Outturn - Revenue and Capital**

The committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director, Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 together with, the provisional outturn position for 2011/12, highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level (for copy see file of minutes).

It was reported that the provisional outturn was showing a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to the partners authorities) of £319,253 at the year end against a budgeted surplus to the partner authorities), £76,363 more than the budgeted position.

This compares with the previous forecast position of an additional surplus of £66,921 at year end and therefore reflects an improvement of £7,442. The reason for this is mainly two fold, income being £25,689 better than previously forecast and employee costs increasing by £17,868.

Explanations of variances were provided within the report and reflected those reported at the previous meeting in January 2012.

Paul Darby, Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the figures presented may change slightly once the closure of the accounts had taken place, however this was expected to be minimal.

Councillor Temple at that point thanked all of the finance staff who were involved in preparing the accounts for consideration at this meeting.

Resolved:

- That Members note the provisional outturn position for 2011/12.

## **5 Annual Internal Audit Report**

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director Resources, which summarised the work undertaken by Internal Audit during 2011/2012 and provided an independent opinion on the assurance of the effectiveness of the Joint Committee's control environment (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The report further included the revised internal audit charter which had been changed to include a more risk based approach to the audit.

The Manager of Internal Audit and Risk went on to provide a summary of the audit work undertaken and assurance work, further detailing the Annual Audit Plan 2012/13 work which was being undertaken in preparation for next year including planned audit days and timetabling.

Moving on to discuss Corporate Governance checklist the Manager of Internal Audit and Risk advised that the internal audit had concluded that appropriate Corporate Governance arrangements were in place and working effectively.

The report further detailed key areas for opinion and assurances provided against each. In conclusion the Internal Audit Manager reported that the Joint Committee had a sound system of internal control and based upon the work undertaken a substantial assurance opinion was given.

### **Resolved:**

- (i) That the Annual Internal Audit Report and the overall opinion provided on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Joint Committee's control environment for the year 2011/2012 be noted.
- (ii) That the revised Internal Audit Charter and programme of work for the year 2012/2013 be approved.

## **6 Response to the 2011/12 Internal Audit report**

The Committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director, Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Head of Financial Services presented the report which provided a response to the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee Internal Audit Report for 2011/2012.

The Internal Audit Report had provided Substantial Assurance on the Joint Committee's systems of internal control highlighting only very minor weaknesses which have resulted in some system objectives being put at risk.

The three recommendations made by Internal Audit were as follows:-

- Requests should be sent to 'Neighbourhood Services Debtors' email address to improve the timeliness of raising invoices.
- Payment vouchers for medical referees should be sent to creditors for processing to improve the efficiency of the system.

- Staff should be notified of the need to code Book of Remembrance Income for VAT. In addition, adjustments should be made to ensure all Book of Remembrance income already received correctly accounts for VAT.

Some of the above actions had already been implemented and the action plan further indicated the Joint Committee's level of commitment in ensuring all systems of internal control were as robust as possible.

**Resolved:** That the Internal Control requirements and the action plan contents, both implemented and required with regards to addressing the Internal Audit recommendation be noted.