

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in the Saltwell Room, Gateshead Council Offices on **Friday 29 January 2010 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors J Hunter and B Stephens

Gateshead Council:

Councillors M Ord, P Ronan and M Wallace

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from

Durham County Council

Councillors O Johnson, J Nicholson and J Wilson

Gateshead Council

Councillors K Dodds and J Hamilton

1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th October 2009.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on the 30th October 2010 be agreed as a correct record.

2 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

3 Report of the Superintendent & Registrar.

The Superintendent and Registrar presented the report which updated members' on the cremator replacement program and Mercury Abatement issues. The report outlined statistical information regarding cremation numbers for the period April – November 2009 together with comparative figures.

The Superintendent and Registrar continued to run through the report highlighting the recommendations.

Following discussion of the above it was

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted and support that in 2024/25, when the new cremators are installed, that the Mercury Abatement equipment is installed at the same time.
- (ii) That in 2010/11 and in subsequent years, the budget makes additional financial provision for the replacement of the cremators in 2024/25, with Mercury Abatement equipment as part of the provision.
- (iii) That the number of cremations undertaken in period 1 April to 30 November 2009 be noted.

4 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31 December, with Projected Outturn to 31/03/2010.

The Head of Finance, HR & Business Support presented the report which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April to 31 December 2009, with a projection of the anticipated outturn to 31 March 2010, highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level. The report further set out details of funds and reserves for the same period and provided the estimated position at 31 March 2010.

He advised that the Crematorium was forecast to over-achieve its operating surplus by approximately £40,000. The variances for such were outlined within section 6 of the report (for copy see file of minutes). It was noted that, the additional surplus was to be transferred to the earmarked reserves at the year end, rather than distributed as additional income to the partner authorities.

Following discussion of the above it was

RESOLVED:

- (i) that members note the report and associated forecasts in terms of the outturn position 2009/10.
- (ii) that approval be given for the transfers to earmarked reserves and balances as outlined within the report.
- (iii) that the Committee continue to receive quarterly reports for consideration in line with the Forward Plan.

5 Risk Register 2009/10.

The Head of Finance, HR & Business Support presented the report which provided an update on the current position with regards to the Risk Register for the Committee and to set out proposals for regular reporting of risk.

He advised that two risk registers had been prepared, separately identifying Service and Operational Risks, this had been benchmarked against the Durham Crematorium Risk Register to ensure continuity across the County.

He went on to provide some background as to how the Risk Register is maintained and suggested that to ensure that it is kept up to date, regular reviews should be undertaken.

Therefore it was recommended that the Committee shall receive 6 monthly reports plus an overall annual report to identify and new and emerging risks are identified, existing risks removed if no longer appropriate and existing risks reviewed taking into account current issues.

The Superintendent and Registrar added that the process had proved very useful. Councillor Temple thanked Officers for the report.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the content of the report and updated position be noted.
- (ii) That the Committee shall receive up to date Risk Registers for review on a half yearly basis.
- (iii) That an annual report be received by the Committee on the approach to risk management being prepared in April / May to inform the Annual Governance Statement.

6 Ground Maintenance Review - Grasscutting.

The Bereavement Services Manager presented the report which provided the Committee with options for improved grass cutting standard at Mountsett Crematorium. (for copy see file of minutes)

He went on to provide some background to the existing grass cutting contract and the standard of service received.

The Bereavement Services Manager then proceeded to outline the options for future grass cutting within the Crematorium, highlighting that Option 4 was favourable as it provided greater control over the service provided by using existing trained staff. The costs associated with this were outlined within the report for members' consideration.

Councillor Ord added that in his opinion Option 4 was the most suitable and viable option for the Committee to take, the Crematorium grounds were in a highly presentable place and he added that it was vitally important that this area was cut more frequently than had been done so by the current contractor.

Following discussion of the above it was

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.
- (ii) That Option 4 be adopted, as it provides a greater level of control over the services provided.
- (iii) The budget for 2010/11 be increased by £5,000 to meet the additional costs that would be incurred.

7 Fees and Charges 2010/11.

The Head of Finance, HR & Business Support presented the report which set out details of proposed fees and charges for the Mountsett Crematorium for 2010/11.

He advised that Durham County Council had developed a Fees and Charges Policy which provided a framework for the equalization of charging across the County. He advised that the proposed changes to fees and charges took into account the views of the Superintendent Registrar with regards to the local market and customer impact, further a benchmarking exercise had been undertaken looking at charges levied by other neighbouring facilities.

The proposals sought to harmonise policy with regards to charges with that of the Central Durham Crematorium.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support went on to outline the impact the changes in charges would have on levels of reserves as in paragraph 8 and 9 of the report.

He went on to advise that there was an amendment to paragraph 13 of the report as follows:-

Considering all of these factors, and working on the assumption that the partner authorities would not wish to see any financial detriment to their General Funds in 2010/11, the following revisions to fees and charges are proposed: *this is below the level of adjacent facilities.*

In conclusion he advised that that the two revisions to charges, Cremations and the Book of Remembrance would take immediate effect if agreed however all other fees and charges would remain the same as 2009/10.

Councillor Temple further questioned whether a decision should be taken over the proportion of surpluses by each Authority as outlined within paragraph 9 of the report.

Following discussion the above it was

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the content of the report be noted and the proposed changes in fees and charges be adopted.
- (ii) The approved fees and charges be incorporated into the 2010/11 budget.
- (iii) That the proportion of surplus retained by the authorities is brought in line with Durham Crematorium.

8 2010/11 Revenue Budget.

The Head of Finance, HR & Business Support presented the report which set out proposals with regard to the 2010/11 revenue budget for Mountsett Crematorium.

He advised that the budget proposals factored in the impact of increasing the charges in line with the previous report and the costs associated with implementing Option 4 of the grass cutting report. Further budgets proposals were outlined within paragraph 5 including additional investment in Premises, Supplies and Services, Income and increases to Earmarked Reserves, in line with the requirement to build sufficient reserves to cover the cremator replacement programme, incorporating mercury abatement equipment.

It was noted that additional investment in the Book of Remembrance and the procurement of a Wesley Music System had also been factored into the budget proposals.

Appendix 2 of the report provided members' with a breakdown of the budget proposals.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the budget proposals for 2010/11 as contained within the report be accepted.
- (ii) that the financial strategy as proposed within the report with regard to reserves and balances be accepted.

9 Such other business as in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Councillor Ord added that he had received a number of complaints regarding the lack of bus services to Mountsett Crematorium. Lengthy discussion took place regarding this subject and it was agreed that the Strategic Transport Manager and Portfolio Holder for Transport be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to discuss the matter further.