

## **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 23 January 2013** at **5.30 pm**

**Present:**

**Councillor M Plews (Chair)**

**Durham County Council:**

Councillors N Foster, G Holland and L Thomson

**Spennymoor Town Council:**

Town Councillors J Marr (Vice-Chair) and JV Graham

**A1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Blakey, J Chaplow, M Williams and Councillor J Wood.

**A2 Minutes of the meeting held 26 September 2012**

The minutes of the meeting held 26 September 2012 were conformed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**A3 Declarations of Interest, if any**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**A4 Report of the Superintendent and Registrar**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Superintendent and Registrar which provided Members with the quarterly update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of minutes).

Members noted the performance figures from September 2012 to 31 December 2012 which highlighted that there was a net increase of 52 cremations on the comparable period last year.

Performance was further reported in respect of the sale of memorials sold during the same period and noted that there had been a small decrease of 6 memorials sold in that period, which was equal to £4061.02.

Moving on to report operational matters the Superintendent and Registrar reported that the DCC Solicitor had now submitted the application for FSA registration in relation to the Pre-Payment Bond scheme. It was noted that this application had now been approved and further proposals relating to this scheme could now be considered by the Joint Committee at their meeting in April 2013.

Details were then provided regarding the completion of the job evaluation scheme and advised that changes to staff's terms and condition had been implemented from 1 January 2013 and any financial impact had been factored into the financial monitoring report.

Members further noted that further to discussions at the last meeting of the joint committee regarding the recycling of metals donations from the scheme were now being forwarded to the Chyrelle Addams Breast Cancer Trust. A further request for nomination had now been received from the Tees Valley and Durham Branch area of C.R.U.S.E. and it was proposed that this nomination be accepted for the next distribution of recycling of income.

Moving on details were provided regarding the recent Crematorium User Survey and details of the results of which were appended to the report at Appendix 3. In view of those results a budget provision had been made within the 2013/14 budget for a feasibility study to be undertaken, to look at addressing those issues identified. It was proposed that this study be reported to the joint committee in September 2013 including options and costings to carry out any identified works.

The Superintendent and Registrar then went on to provide an update relating to heat recovery, and proposals to further utilise surplus heat from the cremators which were currently exhausting heat into the atmosphere. It was noted that discussions were ongoing between the Carbon Management Team and a firm within Europe who specialise in electricity generation to discuss ways in which the surplus heat could be utilised. The Joint Committee further noted that a more detailed report would be reported to the Joint Committee in April 2013.

It was also reported that the necessary arrangements had been made for the Chairman and the Superintendent and Registrar to represent the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee at the Joint Conference of Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and The Cremation Society of Great Britain conference on 1 to 3 July 2013 at Stratford-upon-Avon.

The Superintendent and Registrar advised that St. Cuthbert's Hospice would like to supply a Christmas tree and baubles with a facility for visitors to write a personal message again in 2013. The tree had in previous years proved to be popular with visitors.

The committee further noted that there had been a recent incident at the crematorium whereby thieves had stolen sections of the copper roofing. Temporary repairs had been carried out and following this, discussions were taking place between DCC Design Services team with a view to putting forward an alternative to replacing the copper roofing, which could again be vulnerable to theft. These options would also be included within the feasibility study.

Discussion then ensued regarding the theft of the copper roofing and options for its replacement. It was noted that a full list of options with costings would be brought to the committee for discussion. Councillor N Foster suggested that the council may be able to weigh-in the remaining copper and use any money generated from its sale to fund the replacement of the roof.

In conclusion the Superintendent and Registrar advised that there had been a recent complaint received regarding the use of the organ at services and the fee which was imposed if mourners wished to sing to recorded music. It was noted that the policy which had been in place since 1990 did outline the terms regarding organist's fees and therefore it was proposed that existing arrangements continued.

Councillor G Holland commented that the results of the survey relating to seating had shown that the seating situation within the crematorium was inadequate and clearly in need of review. It was noted that this would also be picked up within the feasibility study.

He further commented that it was important that the policy on organ fees was very clear and further communication with Funeral Directors was required to ensure that this information was correctly relayed to the customer.

**Resolved:**

That the update report be noted.

**A5 Service Asset Management Plan Update**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Superintendent and Registrar which updated Member on the development of a Service Asset Management Plan as recommended in the Annual Internal Audit report (for copy see file of minutes).

The Superintendent and Registrar advised that the feasibility study which was currently being undertaken would form the blueprint for the Asset Management Plan, the joint committee would be given the opportunity to fully consider proposals alongside costings for their implementation.

Councillor Marr commented that he was pleased to see that paragraph 2 of the report had been amended to accurately reflect the agreement between the two authorities.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the content of the Durham Crematorium Asset Management plan be noted.
- (ii) The costings for work as outlined within the report be agreed.
- (iii) To consider the full report including the feasibility study be presented at a future meeting.

## **A6 Risk Register Update 2012/13**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources: Treasurer to the Joint Committee which provided an update with regards to the Risk Register for the Durham Crematorium Committee, in accordance with the arrangements established for the routine reporting of risk issues.

It was reported that the Risk Register had been reviewed in January 2013 in accordance with the Durham County Council methodology / approach to Risk Management and updated accordingly.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) commented that the Risk Register team frequently commented upon the Crematorium's staff and their pro-active approach to managing risk. The report further provided assurance to the joint committee that risks were being adequately managed.

Councillor G Holland raised a query with regard to the risk identified relating to Pre-Payment Cremations Bonds and asked for further clarification on this risk. In response the Superintendent and Registrar advised that as this scheme had not yet been implemented the risk was in fact theoretical. As uptake and charges were not yet known the level of risk could not be determined accurately.

Further discussion took place regarding the scheme and how payments would be held. It was noted that the Crematorium would hold the payments as an earmarked receipt and would during that time gain interest. Further details on the scheme would be reported at a future meeting.

### **Resolved:**

- (i) That Members note the content of the report and the updated position following the January review.
- (ii) That the Risk Registers be kept up to date and continue to be reviewed by Joint Committee on a half yearly basis the next one to be completed in June 2013.

## **A7 Financial Monitoring Report - Spend to 31/12/12 and Projected Outturn to 31/03/13**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources: Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of income and expenditure for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 December 2012, together with the forecast outturn position for 2012/13, highlighting areas of over / under spend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level (for copy see file of minutes).

The report further set out details of the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2012 and the projected position at 31 March 2013, taking into account the forecast financial outturn projection of income and expenditure this year.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the projected outturn showed a surplus of £392,334 against a budgeted surplus of £313,250, £79,084 more than the budgeted position. Variances for any significant variances were detailed within the report.

Details were also provided regarding earmarked reserves and it was reported that contributions from the revenue surplus towards earmarked reserves were forecast as £79,084 additional to budget. Therefore the retained reserves of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee at 31 March were forecast to be £644,065 along with a General Reserve of £424,060, giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £1,068,125 at the year end.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the current level of reserves was held at between 30/40% however moving forward it may be prudent to reduce this to 20/30%. He explained that if the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee agreed to certain works within the feasibility study in the future this may result in loss of business whilst works were carried out, therefore more prudent financial planning would be beneficial to cover for any loss of income during that time.

D Singleton, Accountant, Spennymoor Town Council referred to the significant challenges which had been faced by Spennymoor Town Council during their budget setting process and asked that during the finer accounts process for 2013/14 that the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee review the level of reserves held and justify why currently held at 30/40%. Spennymoor Town Council had commented that if the level of reserves held was reduced that consideration be given to redistributing this between the two Authorities in line with the agreement.

In response the Head of Finance (Financial) Services advised that further details on the general reserves policy and explanations for its current level be brought to the next meeting of the Joint Committee in April 2013.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.

**A8 Fees and Charges 2013/14**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources: Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of the proposed fees and charges for the Central Durham Crematorium for 2013/14 (for copy see file of minutes)

Details of the proposed charges were detailed within the report alongside comparable charges imposed by Crematorium's within the North East area.

A query was raised regarding the difference between the charges for adult cremations between Durham and Mountsett Crematoriums.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) clarified that the Mountsett charge was split as an environmental surcharge of £50 was paid separately. Therefore the overall cost was the same across both crematoriums; although on paper appeared to be lower.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the proposed fees and charges for 2013/14 be approved with effect from 1 April 2013.
- (ii) That all fees and charges be incorporated into the 2013/14 budget.

**A9 Provision of Support Services 2013/14**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources: Treasurer to the Joint Committee which presented for approval a proposed Service Level Agreement for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2013 to March 2014 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the Service Level Agreement covered the following functions:

- Management Services
- Financial Services
- Administration Services
- Payroll Services
- Human Resources Services.

The charge therefore proposed for 2013/14 was £29,300 (an £800 increase on the previous year). During 2013/14 a time recording exercise had been undertaken to ensure a true reflection of the cost of service provision. It was also noted that the fee applicable for 2013/14 also took into consideration the expectations from Service Asset Management Plan and Heat Exchange works to be undertaken.

**Resolved:**

That the Service Level Agreement be approved including the relevant schedule for the year 2013/14.

**A10 2013/14 Revenue and Capital Budgets**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources: Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out for Members' consideration proposals with regards to the 2013/14 revenue budget for the Central Durham Crematorium (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the budget for 2013/14 contained a number of one off items of expenditure which would not reoccur in future years' budget setting. The forecast had been set on a prudent basis although it was noted that the budget included additional cremations which were forecast for the year. Therefore the budget for 2013/14 was set at £1,134,246.

Discussion then ensued regarding staffing and it was noted that a member of staff employed by Spennymoor Town Council who had been on the pandemic cremator operator reserves had now left the authority. The Superintendent and Registrar advised that funding was available to employ two further pandemic cremator operatives from April 2013. He further advised that during recent periods of staff sickness these reserves had been called upon to assist over busy periods which had proved very successful.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the Joint Committee note and approve the budget proposals contained within the report.
- (ii) That the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2014 be noted.