

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Durham Crematorium, South Road, Durham** on **Wednesday 28 September 2011 at 5.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Marr (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors A Hopgood, D Stoker and M Williams

Spennymoor Town Council:

Councillors JV Graham and JL Wood

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from M Plews, J Blakey, J Chaplow, N Foster and G Holland

A1 Minutes of the meeting held 29 June 2011

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2011 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of typographical errors in relation to references to the Coundon Crematorium, and were signed and initialled by the Chair.

A2 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no Declarations of Interest.

A3 External Audit Report 31 March 2011

The Head of Finance (Financial Services), Paul Darby reminded Members that as the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee was now classified as a "Smaller Relevant Body" for audit purposes and that the Audit Commission had appointed BDO LLP as its External Auditor. Councillors noted that in June 2011, the Small Bodies in England Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2011 had been submitted to BDO LLP for audit under the limited assurance audit regime.

The Joint Committee noted the summary and report attached at Item 3 was the response from BDO LLP and that it noted no material weaknesses, though there were three recommendations in relation to minor issues. Members noted that the recommendations were in relation to issues identified in the Internal Audit systems report, coverage of the Asset and Investment Registers and the initialling of each page of the minute book for the Committee. All recommendations had either been addressed or were in the process of being addressed.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) noted the excellent job done by the Principal Accountant, Jo McMahon and the Accountancy Team and thanked them for their hard work.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Joint Committee note the issues and recommendations identified within the External Auditor's Issues Arising Report dated 15 September 2011.
- (ii) That the Joint Committee note the actions both implemented and required with regards to addressing the External Auditor's recommendations.

A4 Report of the Superintendent and Registrar

The Superintendent and Registrar, Alan José asked Members to note the performance figures from April to August 2011 and the comparison to the same period for 2010, highlighting that there was a net decrease of 67 cremations. Members were informed that this was not unexpected when factoring in the reduction in death rate and the increase in burial numbers currently being experienced. The Joint Committee noted that this was not thought to be as a result of cremations having been lost to the Crematorium at Coundon, with that facility only having around 400 cremations annually. The Superintendent and Registrar reminded Members that a prudent estimate was included in the budgets, providing for 150 less cremations this year compared with last year, due to the ongoing Cremator Replacement and associated works albeit there had been no disruption to services by the scheme of works. Members also noted that the number of memorials sold was in line with the equivalent period last year and were given a break down of the types sold.

The Joint Committee learned that the Job Description Document for the vacant Cremator Operator post had been finalised and advertised internally between the two constituent Authorities. Members were advised that it was hoped that any successful applicant would be appointed around October - November 2011, and in the interim the temporary member of staff was continuing in the role to ensure full staff provision.

The Superintendent and Registrar explained the updated position regarding the Cremator Replacement and Crematoria Redevelopment Project noting the new extension was watertight and secure and a temporary access was in use for the time being. Members noted the large receiving chamber and access around the three bays that would house the three new cremators the central cremator being a "large" cremator placed opposite the receiving doors. The Superintendent and Registrar noted the work of the Section Manager, Design Services, Richard Fenwick and the Team was running very smoothly with monthly update meetings and the results so far were excellent.

Members noted that the central heating equipment had been installed, together with the requisite pipework, lighting and electrical cabling and some temporary lighting was in place ready for IFZW to begin the installation of the new cremator equipment, scheduled for 18 weeks to be followed by an independent testing phase. Members noted that the IFZW equipment was the same as installed at the Crematorium at Newcastle and that their equipment had successfully passed testing, far exceeding the criteria as set out by legislation. Councillors were advised that the new drainage services had been completed and that the service yard was almost complete, with a wall not being constructed until after IFZW had completed their works, to enable easier access. The Superintendent and Registrar explained that the boiler equipment was in place and the formal handover of the new extension would take place on 30 September 2011.

The Joint Committee were reminded of the Green Flag Award which was given to good quality parks and open spaces and that the Crematorium, in a joint bid with the South Road Cemetery, had been successful in receiving the accreditation. Members were reminded that this was in addition to the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium (ICCM) "Gold Star Status" awarded earlier in the year.

Councillors noted that the Superintendent and Registrar had been asked to stand for the position of Vice-President of the ICCM. Members learned that following a vote the Superintendent and Registrar of Mortlake Crematorium, Natasha Bradshaw was appointed as Vice-President of the ICCM for the 2011/12 period.

The Superintendent and Registrar noted that he and the Chair of the Joint Committee had attended the Annual International Conference of Cremation and Burial Authorities in Bristol held 4 – 6 July 2011. Members noted a comprehensive account set out as an appendix to the report with the main points being:

- It was likely that the total number of abated Cremations in 2013 and onwards will be around 70% of the total, exceeding the Government's original target of 50%
- There would be a requirement to fit an individual gas meter to each Cremator, the independent testing to be carried out over 4 cremations per Cremator and additional requirements for monthly and six monthly reports to be sent to the Regulator.

The Joint Committee were reminded that during the works to provide the new car parking provision, a foul drain had been noted to be in very poor condition and accordingly a full Drain Survey was carried out by Lanes Drains and this had highlighted a number of sections that were in poor condition, several having collapsed. Members noted that the estimated costs to rectify the problems identified was £30,000 as outlined in the Financial Report within the agenda papers.

The Superintendent and Registrar added that the Pre-Payment Bond, as agreed in principal at the meeting of the Joint Committee on 29 June 2011, was proposed for introduction from 1 October 2011, subject to confirmation regarding registration requirements from the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

Members noted that discussions with the FSA were ongoing, in consultation with Durham County Council's Legal Section, and that if required registration would cost around £1,500 with the process taking approximately 6 months. It was noted that the scheme would not be introduced until the FSA requirements were fully addressed.

The Joint Committee were informed that the Crematorium had been approached by St. Cuthbert's Hospice as regards a "Tree of Life" as part of the Hospice's "Light up a Life" campaign which would run during late November and December. Members were made aware the proposal was for a Christmas Tree to be provided to the Crematorium to allow mourners and visitors the opportunity to place personal messages on the tree and make a donation to St. Cuthbert's Hospice if they so wished. Members were asked whether they would agree to the proposal, noting that a similar scheme had been in operation at Middlesbrough Crematorium and had proved sufficiently popular that it became a permanent feature.

The Superintendent and Registrar concluded by noting, for information of the Joint Committee, that changes to improve the process of Death Certification due to come into effect April 2012 had been put back to April 2013 as the Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) that would have administered the scheme were to be abolished and now Local Authorities would need to administer the process, appointing a Local Medical Examiner's Service.

Councillor D Stoker asked whether there was potential for thieves to target the Crematorium as metal theft was reported as increasing nationally. The Superintendent and Registrar noted that whilst the original Crematorium building roof was copper, the new extension was a substitute material that looked like copper that had attained the blue-green patina. The Superintendent and Registrar did take on board Councillor D Stoker's comment and information as regards the appropriate Police Officer to speak to as regards "Smart Water" marking of materials.

Members debated the issue of the "Tree of Life" proposal and Members agreed that it would be beneficial to both mourners at the Crematorium and to St. Cuthbert's Hospice.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee:

- (i) Note the update report in relation to current performance of the Crematorium.
- (ii) Note the progress and advertising date of the vacant post.
- (iii) Note the progress with regards to the Cremator Replacement and Crematoria Redevelopment Project.
- (iv) Note the achievement of obtaining the Green Flag Award.
- (v) Note the result of the Nomination for Vice-President of the ICCM.
- (vi) Note the information with regards the International Conference of Cremation and Burial Authorities.

- (vii) Note the progress with regards to the Crematorium Drains and associated costs.
- (viii) Note the current situation with regards the Pre-Payment Bond Scheme.
- (ix) Agree that Durham Crematorium work with St. Cuthbert's Hospice "Light up a Life" campaign in 2011 with a review of the project at the meeting of the Joint Committee in January 2012.
- (x) Note the current situation with regards to the Death Certification changes.

A5 Risk Register Update 2011/12

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) referred to the report within the agenda papers and reminded Members that there were two risk registers, a Strategic Risk Register and an Operation Risk Register, both subject to 6 monthly review by the Joint Committee. Members were reassured that the Superintendent and Registrar together with Crematorium staff had a very good understanding of risk and many of the issues relating to service/strategic risk had been mitigated as a result of actions or were at "a tolerable level" and could be closed. The Head of Finance (Financial Services) added that as regards operation risks, again those identified were deemed to be at a tolerable level. The Joint Committee noted that an emerging risk was the implications of the Health and Social Care Bill, relating to the Death Registration.

Councillor A Hopgood asked whether there was further information in relation to the impact of Job Evaluation/Single Status as set out as a risk within the report. The Treasurer to the Joint Committee and Corporate Director, Resources, Don McLure noted that the 26 October 2011 meeting of Durham County Council's full Council would receive a report relating to Single Status to seek approval to consult with Trade Unions in November in order to move forward in 2012. Members noted that Durham County Council staff would be regularly updated by the Council's Communications Team as regards this matter.

Resolved:

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

A6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/08/11, with Projected Outturn at 31/03/12

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) noted that this was the usual quarterly update on the financial position for the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee and for the first time also included the position regarding the capital budget in the one report.

Members were asked to note approximately £15,000 of underspend in gross expenditure and a slight increase in income leading to a net income increase of around £18,000 in comparison to the original 2011/12 Base Budget.

The Joint Committee were reminded that, in line with the Committee's wishes, any surplus would be retained and credited to the Major Capital Works Reserve and retained for the Crematorium.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) reminded Members that the total earmarked reserves balance at the start of the year was approximately £1.4 Million with £600,000 of this being allocated for part financing the cremator replacement programme. Members noted that the issue regarding the drains, as mentioned earlier by the Superintendent and Registrar in his report, was factored into the updated position, offset by savings made elsewhere.

The Joint Committee noted that the Capital Budget, for the Cremator Replacement and Redevelopment Works, was on track and that the percentage spend by August 2011 was 38%, though this would increase significantly with the installation of the cremators by IFZW.

Members thanked the Officers for their continued work and were pleased as regards the financial position of the Crematorium and the ongoing scheme of works.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Joint Committee note the April to August 2011 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated provisional outturn position at 31 March 2012.
- (ii) That the Joint Committee note the April to August 2011 Cremator Replacement and Redevelopment Capital Project spend and associated outturn.