

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee held in Conference Room 4b, County Hall, Durham on Wednesday 26 April 2017 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor M Plews (Chairman)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, J Chaplow, P Conway, K Corrigan, N Foster and B Kellett

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors JV Graham (Vice-Chairman), GD O'Hehir and D Taylor

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from B Moir, M Simmons and D Stoker.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 25 January 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed and initialled by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from January 2017 to March 2017 and the comparison to the same period for 2016, highlighting that there was a net increase of 11 cremations. It was explained that Funeral Directors had noted similar increases, with the death rate having been higher despite the mild winter period. It was noted there was a total of 676 for the three month period with the January to March 2017 profile breakdown showing 246 from Durham, 27 from Spennymoor and 403 from outside of the area. Councillors were asked to note that the figure for the total number of cremations to 31 March 2017 was 2,324, compared to a prudent budget assumption of 2,200 cremations, representing an over-achievement in cremation fee income of £66,740.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted the performance over the previous seven financial years and asked Members to note the number of memorials sold in comparison to the same period the previous year, a decrease of £2,663 in value terms.

The Joint Committee noted that a Trainee Crematorium Operative had been in post since June 2016, and Members' recalled at the time the Crematorium had been unable to fill the vacant position for Cremator Operative. It was explained that it was now felt to be an appropriate time to re-advertise the post which would also be available for the Trainee Crematorium Operative to apply for.

Members noted that on 26 May 2017, Mr Stephen Tinkler, Cremator Technician, would have worked at the Crematorium for 30 years. It was added that on 5 May 2017, the Bereavement Services Manager would also have worked in the bereavement services industry for 30 years. Members were asked if they wished to mark the occasion in some manner at the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained that a number of problems had been encountered at the Crematorium in terms of drains collapsing due to multiple fractures and root mass build up. It was noted that ongoing repairs had resulted in a revenue overspend of £9,148 in the current financial year and was set out within the Financial Monitoring report. It was added that investigation had revealed that the drains required repairs estimated at £25,945 and as these were not included within the 2017/18 budget, Members were asked to approve the essential repairs from the Major Capital Works reserve in 2017/18.

Councillors noted the usual arrangements had been made for representation at the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and Cremation Society of Great Britain, to be held at Stratford-upon-Avon from Monday 3 to Wednesday 5 July 2017.

The Bereavement Services Manager informed Members that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had generated a sum of £5,000 for Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity (SANDS) and that arrangements were being made in respect of the cheque being presented to the charity.

The Chairman thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and asked him to leave while they discussed the issues in terms of the 30 years of service.

Members noted several possibilities, with the Facilities Manager, Spennymoor Town Council, Colin Ranson adding that as employees of Durham County Council any suggestion must be in line with their policies and procedures. It was noted by Members who had served on the former City of Durham Council that long service awards such as engraved medals had been produced, however, since the new unitary Durham County Council from 2009, such awards had not been made. It was suggested that as there was no policy in place that the next meeting of the Joint Committee be held at the Crematorium and the Officers be invited to attend to be thanked in person for their service.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) To re-advertise the Cremator Operative post.
- (iii) To hold the next meeting of the Joint Committee at Durham Crematorium, South Road at 5.30pm and invite the Officers who had reached 30 years of service to attend.
- (iv) That the Major Capital Works Reserve be utilised to fund the forecast additional costs of the essential drainage repairs as outlined.
- (v) That the attendance at the Burial and Cremation Conference be noted.
- (vi) That the distribution of recycling income to the respective charity be noted.

5 Financial Monitoring Report - Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2017

The Principal Accountant, Ed Thompson referred Members to the Financial Monitoring Report, with the provisional outturn as at 31 March 2017 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that the updated projected revenue outturn was showing a surplus, of £813,495 against a budgeted surplus of £686,308. It was noted that the major variances were set out within the report.

Members noted that in terms of the capital programme, this was reported as being £140,747 under budget, with the underspends being attributed to: a delay in the tarmacaking of the roads and car park bays and staff car parking; cremator relining; and the coffin charger being replaced at no additional cost. It was noted those items would be carried forward into the 2017/18 Capital Budget.

It was explained that contributions from earmarked reserves were forecast as £127,187 more than originally budgeted, primarily due to additional unbudgeted income arising from the additional cremations and the reduction in business rates. The Joint Committee noted that, in line with the policy to maintain a general reserve of 30% of the income budget, a transfer from the General Reserve of £32,250 had been required. Members noted a projected total reserve of £1,436,753 at the year-end, giving a strong financial position.

Resolved:

That the April 2016 to March 2017 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated Provision Outturn position at 31 March 2017 be noted.

6 Risk Register Update 2016/17

The Principal Accountant asked Members to note the Risk Register Update 2016/17 report, the Joint Committee considering updates on a 6 monthly basis. Members recalled that the report set out Strategic Risks and Operational Risks with risks regularly reviewed by the DCC Risk Management Team and the Bereavement Services Manager.

It was noted that three risks had been removed from the service risk register; one risk, sickness absence of key staff, had been re-evaluated from insignificant to moderate; and one risk had been removed from the operational risk register with details set out at Appendices 4,5,6 and 7 to the report.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note the content of the report and the updated position following the March 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, the next one to be completed in September 2017.

7 Annual Internal Audit Report 2016/17

The Audit and Fraud Manager, Stephen Carter referred Members to the Annual Internal Audit Report 2016/17 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Audit and Fraud Manager thanked Members for the opportunity to present the report on behalf of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager and reminded the Joint Committee that the Annual Internal Audit Report fulfilled the requirements of Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and CIPFA Local Government Application note for the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager to deliver an annual audit opinion.

Members were informed that the report looked at the Joint Committee's systems of governance, risk management and internal control and that, from the work undertaken, the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager was able to provide a "Substantial" overall assurance opinion of the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control operating across the Joint Committee in 2016/17. Members were reminded that "Substantial" was the highest level of assurance rating.

The Audit and Fraud Manager noted that the appendices to the report set out the work undertaken by Internal Audit and that there had been no recommendations in terms high, medium or best practice priorities.

Councillors N Forster and P Conway asked as regards ongoing issues and the Chairman explained that the matters were being looked into.

Resolved:

That the content of the Annual Internal Audit Report and the overall "Substantial" opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Joint Committee's control environment for 2016/17 be noted.

Signed by Councillor:
(Chairman of the Joint Committee held 28 June 2017)