

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 26 September 2018** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Chaplow (Chairman)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, D Brown, H Liddle, M McGaun, M McKeon and S Quinn

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors A Lamb and I Machin (Vice-Chairman)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Corrigan, P Jopling, J Shuttleworth and J Stephenson.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 27 June 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

4 External Audit Annual Review of the Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2018

The Joint Committee considered a Joint Report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Interim Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee relating to the External Auditors (Mazars LLP) issues Arising Report for the year ended 31 March 2018 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services, Paul Darby advised that the audit had now been concluded, adding that there had been no material weaknesses highlighted around the Joint Committee's system of internal control.

The Vice-Chairman noted the positive report and thanked the Officers for their excellent work.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee approve the Joint Committee's Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2018 including the External Report 2017/18 Certificate (attached at Appendix 2).

5 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 June 2018 to 31 August 2018 and the comparison to the same period for 2017, highlighting that there was a net increase of 28 cremations year on year. It was noted there was a total of 542 for the 3 month period with the June to August profile breakdown showing 159 from Durham, 17 from Spennymoor and 366 from outside of the area.

Members were asked to note that the number of memorials sold had decreased in comparison to the same period the previous year, with sales being £15,535 less than the comparable period last year. It was noted that this in part was due to a reduction of memorial plaques after the initial 10 period.

Councillors noted that for the seventh year running the Crematorium, in a joint bid with the South Road Cemetery, had achieved the Green Flag Award. It was added this was testimony to the dedication of the staff working at the Crematorium and South Road Cemetery and was in addition to the award of Gold Star Status by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management.

Members were reminded of the advertising of a Business Administration Apprentice position and noted that 8 applicants were shortlisted, 2 attended interview and the successful candidate had commenced their apprenticeship on 10 September 2018 and was settling in well.

Councillors were asked to recall the agreement at the January meeting to provide wi-fi connectivity to the Crematorium, with the Bereavement Services Manager noting that it had been established that several access points would be required to cover the facility. He added that he was awaiting an installation date and that works would be carried out on a weekend.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained as regards the Durham "Heritage Open Days" programme and reminded Members of the Crematorium's involvement over the last few years. He added that the between 13-18 September the Crematorium was open to the public for a behind the scenes look at the work undertaken and 60 visitors had attended over period with good feedback received from the public.

In respect of the Recycling of Metals Scheme, Councillors noted that a cheque in the sum of £5,000 had been presented by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to Cruse Bereavement Care.

It was added that in 2017/18 the scheme nationally had produced a surplus and a nomination for Solan Connor Fawcett Family Cancer Trust had been put forward and a cheque in the sum of £5,000 had been received from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management. It was noted that arrangements would be made with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for a presentation to the charity.

The Bereavement Services Manager referred Members to previous audit recommendations in terms of the Book of Remembrance; document retention and the donation box. It was noted that a specification for a tender in respect of the Book of Remembrance had been produced, and the possibility of being able to scan documents into the Crematorium's BACAS system would be explored. Members noted that in terms of the donation box, following the recommendation from Audit, Members were asked if they would wish for: the donation box to remain, and the funds to be for the maintenance of the memorial garden; the donation box to remain, and the funds paid to a nominated charity; or the donation box be removed to avoid any confusion on the part of members of the public.

The Bereavement Services Manager referred Members to the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) appended to the report which set out a number of proposed works, set out by priority: priority 1; priority 2; priority 3; and longer term works. Members noted some of the works included relining of the hearths and cremators, improvements to the roadway layout and re-decoration works.

The Chairman thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and asked for the Joint Committee's comments on the issue of the donation box.

The Vice-Chairman noted that the box did have signage stating it was for the purpose of the memorial garden and if changed there could be some confusion or lack of continuity for those that have donated. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that there was a separate donation box for any charity nominated by a family for a service. Town Councillor A Lamb asked if the issue had come to light through complaints or simply from an Audit recommendation. It was noted that it was not from a complaint, the issue having been raised by Internal Audit. The Audit and Fraud Manager, Resources, Stephen Carter explained that it had been raised as an issue prior to signage that clarified the purpose of the donation box. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that in financial terms any decision would not have a significant impact upon the Crematorium budget.

The Chairman noted the Joint Committee wished for the first option, and Members unanimously agreed.

Councillor D Brown asked in relation to a service that had been cancelled, the Bereavement Services Manager noted it had not been an issue in terms of Durham Crematorium and the Crematorium had only been advised of the cancellation 30 minutes beforehand.

The Vice-Chairman asked if the increased number of cremations had an impact in terms of the pace of maintenance for the cremators themselves. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that this was not an issue for the SAMP as such, and the Bereavement Services Manager noted that as the cremators were serviced twice annually and issues would be identified through that process.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the continued success with the Green Flag Award be noted.
- (iii) That the appointment of the new Apprentice be noted.
- (iv) That the updated position in respect of the wi-fi connectivity be noted.
- (v) That the involvement of Durham Crematorium in the Durham Heritage Open Days programme be noted.
- (vi) That updated position with regards the Recycling of Metals Scheme be noted.
- (vii) That the updated position in relation to procurement for entries in the Book of Remembrance be noted.
- (viii) That the updated position in relation to the procurement exercise relating to document retention be noted.
- (ix) That Option 1 be agreed in relation to the donation box, with the donation box to be retained and monies to be paid into the Crematorium's accounts to support the maintenance of the Gardens or Remembrance.
- (x) That the Service Asset Management Plan be approved and factored into budget planning in 2019/20 and beyond.

6 Financial Monitoring Report 2018/19: Position at 31/08/18 with Projected Outturn to 31/03/19

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services referred Members to Financial Monitoring Report, as set out in the usual format, for the period to 31 August 2018 and with projected outturn to 31 March 2019 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that there was a projected revenue outturn surplus of £257,573 more than the budgeted position, with the reasons for the major variances set out in detail within the report. It was added that this would be transferred to the Major Capital Works reserve for future use in terms of issues identified within the SAMP and for the eventual replacement of the cremators.

Members noted a projected total reserve of approximately £1.9 Million at the year-end, giving a strong financial position.

The Vice-Chairman asked when the loans taken out in terms of cremator replacement would be completed and whether further loans would be required in future.

The Chairman noted the healthy position in terms of the budget, income and reserves.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that the last year would be next year and therefore for the 2021/22 financial year he could provide options at that time for the Joint Committee in terms of potential of: investment of the monies that would have been allocated to service the loan; offering a reduction in the charge for services; accelerating the works as set out within the SAMP; providing additional surplus distribution to the two constituent Authorities.

Resolved:

That the April to August 2018 Financial Monitoring Report and associated provision revenue and capital outturn positions at 31 March 2019, including the projected year end position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee, be noted.

7 Risk Register 2018/19 - Update

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services asked Members to note the Risk Register Update 2018/19 report, the Joint Committee considering updates on a 6 monthly basis. Members recalled that the report set out service risk register and the health and safety risk register, with risks being regularly reviewed by the DCC Risk Management Team in conjunction with the Bereavement Services Manager.

It was explained that there had been no changes in risks, with no new risks having been identified.

Resolved:

That the updated position in relation to the Risk Register be noted.

8 Internal Audit Charter

The Audit and Fraud Manager, Resources, Stephen Carter referred Members to a revised Internal Audit Charter (for copy see file of minutes).

Members noted that Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) came into effect from April 2013 and were revised in April 2017 to be in line with the Institute of Internal Auditors global International Professional Practices Framework, with the update to the Internal Audit Charter reflecting those changes.

It was explained that the Charter defines the Internal Audit Service's purpose, authority and responsibility, as well as its relationship to the Joint Committee. Members noted that minor changes to the Charter were set out in bold for ease of reference. He noted these referred to review activity in the event of a limited assurance and wording in terms of priority actions and how they related to the levels of assurance.

Resolved:

That the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee approve the revised Internal Audit Charter as set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

9 Annual Review of the System of Internal Audit

The Audit and Fraud Manager stated that it was a requirement for the body that reviews the accounts to also have a review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit (for copy see file of minutes).

Members noted that part of the role of Durham County Council's Audit Committee was to scrutinise the performance and effectiveness of Internal Audit and had received a report at its meeting in June, a link to that report having been included in the agenda papers. It was explained that this provided assurance to the Joint Committee that the work carried out by Internal Audit was in line with best practice and the latest PSIAS. It was explained that as part of the standards there was a requirement for an external review every 5 years and this had been undertaken by Newcastle City Council in 2016 which concluded "that Durham County Council's Internal Audit Service conforms to the requirements of the PSIAS".

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their continued hard work and noted the assurance given to the Joint Committee.

Resolved:

That the information demonstrating the efficiency and effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service be noted.