

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 11 February 2019** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Chaplow (Chairman)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Brown, J Chaplow, K Corrigan, P Jopling, B Kellett, H Liddle, S Quinn, J Stephenson and K Thompson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillor I Machin

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bell, J Shuttleworth and A Lamb.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 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 Clerk to the Joint Committee

The Legal Manager (Litigation), Bryan Smith presented a report relating to the position of Clerk to the Joint Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

Members were reminded that the previous Clerk to the Joint Committee, Laura Renaudon had left the Local Authority. The report set out the Council's recommendation to the Joint Committee, to appoint the Solicitor (Litigation), Sarah Grigor as the new Clerk. It was noted she was unable to attend the meeting having annual leave that coincided with the rearranged meeting today.

The Legal Manager (Litigation) noted that the Solicitor (Litigation) had been the Clerk to the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee for over five years and therefore had a good understanding of Joint Committees and the operation of crematorium facilities.

Resolved:

That the Solicitor (Litigation), Sarah Grigor be appointed Clerk to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee.

5 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 September 2018 to 31 December 2018 and the comparison to the same period for 2017, highlighting that there was a net increase of 22 cremations year on year. It was noted there was a total of 756 for the three month period with the September to December profile breakdown showing 252 from Durham, 34 from Spennymoor and 470 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, however, revenue was slightly increased, £558 greater than the comparable period last year.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted that Members may have been aware of the sad passing of one of the Crematorium Attendants, Mr John Willis on 10 December 2018. Members noted Mr Willis had been employed by the Council since 1978 and had worked at the Crematorium since 1998. Members noted their respect for Mr Willis. The Bereavement Services Manager explained that an advertisement in respect of the vacancy would be placed internally within Durham County Council and Spennymoor Town Council initially.

The Bereavement Services Manager asked Members to recall that the Joint Committee agreed at its meeting in January 2018 to provide wifi connectivity at the Crematorium following several requests from members of the public, funeral directors and clergy. It was explained that it had been determined that there was a requirement for several access points in order to provide connectivity and while it had been envisaged that the works would have been completed prior to Christmas, due to the availability of contractors this had not been possible. It was added that the works were now taking place and would be completed by the end of the week.

Councillors were asked to recall that at the September meeting it had been 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 that an application would be submitted for the 2019 Award and progress would be reported back to the Joint Committee.

In respect of the Recycling of Metals Scheme, Councillors noted a cheque in the sum of £5,000 had been received from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management for the Solan Connor Fawcett Cancer Trust. It was added that arrangements had been made for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to present the cheque and a photograph of the presentation was included in the report at Appendix 3. It was explained that nationally the recycling of metals scheme had again produced a surplus and it was explained that the Great North Air Ambulance had been selected for the next available distribution of surplus and that this nomination had been submitted, the Bereavement Services Manager having recently received a cheque for £7,000.

Councillors noted the outcome from an Internal Audit report earlier in the year that had noted that entries in the Book of Remembrance had been completed by a single supplier, due to the specialist nature of the work. Members noted that, following internal Audit recommendations, a tender document had been drawn up by the Council's Procurement Team which would soon be advertised via the Procurement Portal.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained that another issue highlighted by Internal Audit was document retention. It was noted Internal Audit had acknowledged the existing paper records and the requirement to retain these for 15 years, however, Internal Audit had recommended to scan copies and only retain hard copies for one year. Members noted that an exercise was undertaken to look at how the scans could be linked to the BACAS system used by the Crematorium in order to retain the records electronically. It was noted that from the exercise, and looking at historic records, four options had been developed. It was explained that option one looked to scan all records, with the necessary retention of paper copies and disposal where appropriate. Members noted other options were: option two, scanning with a different provider; option three, secure storage with supplier one; and option four, secure storage as per option three, though with all records from 2018/19 being scanned annually at the end of each financial year. Members were given information on each option, including estimated costs and noted the recommendation from Officers was for option four.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted that for the seventh year running it had been agreed for St. Cuthbert's Hospice to provide a Christmas tree and baubles at the Crematorium, a facility to allow visitors to leave a personal message and place in on to the tree. It was noted that this had proved to be very popular again, with a substantial amount raised for the charity.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the advertising of the vacant Crematorium Attendant post be noted.
- (iii) That the continued success with regards the Green Flag Award be noted.
- (iv) That the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme be noted.
- (v) That the updated position with regards to the Book of Remembrance tender be noted.

- (vi) That the Joint Committee agree to Option Four in respect of document retention moving forward.
- (vii) That the provision of a Christmas tree by St. Cuthbert's Hospice in 2019 be approved.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/18, with Projected Revenue and Capital Outturn at 31/03/19

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2018 to 31 December 2018, together with the forecast outturn position for 2018/19, highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level.

The report further detailed the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2018 and forecast outturn position at 31 March 2019, taking into account the provisional financial outturn (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services, Paul Darby explained that the updated projected outturn showed a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to the partner authorities) of £949,647 against a budgeted surplus of £752,693 (£196,954) more than the budgeted position. Details of the significant variances were detailed in the report. It was noted that the major variances were set out at paragraph 7.1 onwards, by subjective analysis area.

Councillor S Quinn entered the meeting at 2.05pm

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services went on to advise that in terms of the retained reserves at 31 March 2019, they were forecast to be £1,411,136, along with a General Reserve of £485,175, giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £1,896,311 at the year end. It was noted this represented a very strong position going forward, especially in terms of funding for replacement cremators in the future.

Resolved:

That the April to December 2018 revenue spend financial monitoring report and associated provisional outturn position at 31 March 2019, including the projected year end position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

7 Provision of Support Services 2019/20

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which outlined the proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2019 to March 2020 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the two percent increase to the fee reflected the staff pay award and the details of SLA were set out at Appendix 2.

Councillor S Quinn asked as regards any proposals for a budget funeral plan. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted he would speak as regards options available at the Fees and Charges report.

Resolved:

That the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 (including relevant schedule) for the year 2019/20 be approved.

8 Fees and Charges 2019/20

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of the proposed fees and charges for Durham Crematorium for 2019/20 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services advised that taking into account inflationary and cost pressures, including the increase of the Medical Referee fee. It was recommended that the cremation fee increased by £20 (2.9 percent) to £700 inclusive of medical referee, and environmental surcharge fees where appropriate.

In reference to the earlier question from Councillor S Quinn, the Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that there was a proposed "direct cremation", both attended and unattended, with no service which was to be charged at a reduced fee, £590 and £450 respectively. Councillors noted that in cases where a longer service was required, it was proposed for a charge of £50 where the allotted time was exceeded by 10 minutes or more. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services added there had been no cancellation fee within the fees and charges previously and it was proposed there was a fee of £250, although it was noted that it was rare that a service would be cancelled.

Members were reminded that following Local Government Review in 2009 the fees and charges at the Central Durham Crematorium were harmonised with the charges at Mountsett Crematorium and that Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee had met on 31 January 2019 and agreed their fees and charges.

A full schedule of the proposed fees and charges for Durham Crematorium was shown in Appendix 2 of the report, alongside benchmarking comparison data shown in Appendix 3.

Councillor K Thompson noted the report set out a balance in terms of fees and charges, and asked that in the future, given the healthy position in terms of reserves, if there would be an opportunity to look at the distribution of surplus.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that this would be the case once the loan payback was complete. He added that this would be similar to previous strategy papers, looking at cremation numbers, any issues raised within the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) and would include a range of options which could include a reduction of fees or increased surplus distribution. He added that this would likely be after 2020/21. Councillor K Thompson asked if there could be an option in terms of partner Authorities receiving a lump sum. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted options, including any potential dividend would be set out within a strategy paper.

Councillor D Brown asked if many services overran and was there time for people to enter and exit the facility. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that there was some scope to accommodate, with the proposed fee being for an overrun of 10 minutes or more than the allocated slot.

Councillor H Liddle noted the charge for the use of the chapel only was considerable greater than those listed for other facilities and asked if there was a demand for its use. The Bereavement Services Manager noted there was an increasing demand, however, as this would take up a cremation and service slot the fee was to reflect any loss of cremation fee. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that the benchmarking figures were the current fees and charges of the other facilities and that they too would be undergoing reviews of their fees and charges for the upcoming year.

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor I Machin asked if there had been any further information as regards a potential crematorium at Castle Eden. The Bereavement Services Manager noted he had no additional information at this time.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the prudent forecast in terms of cremation numbers and the issues and risks that would be factored into future forecasts accordingly.

Resolved:

- (i) That Members of the Joint Committee note and approve the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2019, which seeks to increase the cremation by £20 (2.9%) per crematorium from £680 to £700.
- (ii) The proposed fees and charges are incorporated into the 2019/20 budget.

9 2019/20 Revenue and Capital Budgets

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources which set out proposals with regards to the 2019/20 revenue budgets for Durham Crematorium (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the report incorporated the information from the previous items, the support services SLA, fees and charges and issues in relation to the SAMP. He explained that, as previously stated, there would be scope for a budget strategy paper following the completion of the loan for redevelopment works.

Councillor K Thompson noted the strong position of the crematorium and asked if there were any opportunities for economies of scale working with Mountsett Crematorium. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that there were already joint procurement exercises, for example in terms of the Book of Remembrance, document storage. It was added that the Bereavement Services Manager managed both Durham and Mountsett Crematoria, in the past each having a separate Superintendent and Registrar. He added that there was the potential for mutual aid should any issues arise.

Resolved:

- (i) That the revenue and capital budget proposals contained within the report and appendices be noted and approved.
- (ii) That the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2020 be noted.

10 Membership and Terms of Reference

The Legal Manager (Litigation) noted the Members may be aware that Councillor M McGaun had resigned as a County Councillor and replacement Member for the Joint Committee would be put forward from the relevant group in due course.

The Legal Manager (Litigation) explained that following the requirement to rearrange the meeting of the Joint Committee, as the meeting would have been inquorate, the Clerk would look at the terms of reference for the Joint Committee, including in relation to a substitution rule. It was noted that a review of the terms of reference was brought to the Annual General Meeting each year and this would provide an opportunity to review the terms of reference.

Members noted the issue in respect of substitute members, with Councillor K Thompson asking whether he would be able substitute as a Spennymoor Town Council Member as he was Councillor for both Authorities. The Legal Manager (Litigation) noted that this would not be possible as Councillors were representatives appointed by each Authority, with Councillor K Thompson having been put forward by his group in relation to a County Council seat on the Joint Committee. It was reiterated that it would be for each of the partner Authorities to put forward their representatives to serve on the Joint Committee.

Resolved:

That a report in relation to the terms of reference for the Joint Committee be considered at the Joint Committee Annual General Meeting.