

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 24 April 2019** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Chaplow (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, D Brown, P Jopling, B Kellett, H Liddle, S Quinn and J Stephenson

Spennymoor Town Council:

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

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Blakey.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and were 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 asked Members to note the performance figures from January 2019 to March 2019 and the comparison to the same period for 2018, highlighting that there was a net decrease of 21 cremations. It was noted there was a total of 650 for the three-month period with the January to March 2019 profile breakdown showing 198 from Durham, 26 from Spennymoor and 426 from outside of the area.

Councillors were asked to note that the figure for the total number of cremations to 31 March 2019 was 2,392, compared to a prudent budget assumption of 2,200 cremations, representing an over-achievement in cremation fee income of £117,750. Members noted comparative figures for the previous nine financial years, noting a nine-year average of 2,293 cremations.

The Bereavement Services Manager asked Members to note the number of memorials sold in comparison to the same period the previous year, an increase of £11,096 in value terms.

The Joint Committee were asked to recall that at the February meeting it had been agreed to recruit to the vacant Crematorium Attendant post. The Bereavement Services Manager noted there was one applicant, a current Relief Operative and they were appointed to the position. Accordingly, the Bereavement Services Manager noted that in order to ensure business continuity it was proposed to advertise for additional Relief Cremator Operators who could work between both Durham and Mountsett Crematoria.

Councillors were asked to note that in respect of Wi-Fi connectivity being provided at the Crematorium, the equipment had now been installed successfully.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained the necessary arrangements would be made as regards representation at the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain, to be held at the Hilton Ageas Bowl, Southampton from Monday 1 to Wednesday 3 July 2019.

The Bereavement Services Manager informed Members that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had generated a sum of £7,000 for the Great North Air Ambulance and that arrangements had been made in respect of the cheque being presented to the charity. Members were informed that additional funds from the scheme in 2018 had resulted in the first scheduled round of nominations commencing immediately to distribute those funds.

The Joint Committee noted that following an Internal Audit recommendation, a procurement exercise had been undertaken as regards entries into the Book of Remembrance. It was explained that the exercise had been completed with the original company being successful, through providing the work at a slightly lower price.

The Chairman asked if there were any questions on the report, Members noted their thanks to the Bereavement Services Manager.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the current situation with regards the Crematorium Attendant's post be noted.
- (iii) That the advertising for Relief Cremator Operators be agreed.
- (iv) That the installation of Wi-Fi at the Crematorium be noted.
- (v) That the attendance at the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities be noted.
- (vi) That the distribution of recycling income to the respective charity be noted.
- (vii) That the continuation of the current supplier with regards the Book of Remembrance be noted.

5 Financial Monitoring Report 2018/19 - Provisional Outturn as at 31/03/2019

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services, Paul Darby referred Members to the Financial Monitoring Report, with the provisional outturn as at 31 March 2019 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that the updated projected revenue outturn was showing a surplus, of £888,024 against a budgeted surplus of £752,693. 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 £64,356 under budget, with the underspends being set out within the report. It was noted outstanding items would be carried forward into the 2019/20 Capital Budget.

Members noted a projected total reserve of £1,889,684 at the year-end, giving a strong financial position.

Councillor P Jopling noted the strong financial position of the Crematorium and congratulated Officers for their work. She asked if the numbers fluctuated over time and had there been any impact from other facilities. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that there was a general trend of more cremations, and while Durham Crematorium did face competition, the number of cremations forecast was prudent. He added Members were aware from previous meetings as regards the levels of fees and charges and noted he felt this help ensure Durham was well placed in terms of affordability. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services reminded Members of the planning permission that had been granted regards a crematorium at Castle Eden, though no development had taken place as yet.

He reassured Members that those issues were noted, that Officers were mindful of the risks and referred back to the previous report which set out the last nine years statistics in relation to numbers of cremations.

Councillor P Jopling noted that the extras, such as memorials and plaques were also useful in helping to generate income and asked how these products and services were marketed. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the Bereavement Services Manager engaged with Funeral Directors and there had been investment in the Crematorium website. The Bereavement Services Manager reminded Members of the recent inclusion of direct cremations and noted that the Crematorium had seen a number of people take up this option.

Resolved:

That the April 2018 to March 2019 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated Provision Outturn position at 31 March 2019 be noted.

6 Risk Register 2018/19

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services asked Members to note the Risk Register Update 2018/19 update 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 there had been no new major risks identified, and that the risk in relation to changes to certification services had now been removed as there was not an impact on the Crematorium from those changes. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that all risks were within the tolerable or managed levels.

The Chairman noted the risk relating to tree branches and commented that the work undertaken in relation to trees and hedgerows at the Crematorium had been carried out to a very high standard. Councillor P Jopling agreed, adding that at the last meeting held at the Crematorium the quality of the work spoke to the level of craftsmanship involved. The Chairman added that she felt the results were beautiful and enhanced the setting of the Crematorium and asked the Bereavement Services Manager to pass on thanks to those involved.

Resolved:

That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note the content of the report and the updated position.

7 Annual Internal Audit Report 2018/19

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager, Paul Bradley referred Members to the Annual Internal Audit Report 2018/19 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager 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 in order 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 2018/19. Members were reminded that "Substantial" was the highest level of assurance rating.

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager noted that two medium and two best practice recommendations had been made and that the Crematorium had taken actions in relation to those.

The Chairman noted it was an excellent report and thanked the Officers for their hard work in once again obtaining a substantial assurance.

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 2018/19 be noted.

8 Terms of Reference

The Clerk to the Joint Committee, Sarah Grigor reminded Members that as the January meeting of the Joint Committee would not have been quorum, it had been rescheduled for February.

She noted that accordingly the Joint Committee, at its meeting in February, had asked for an update to its Terms of Reference to include a clause relating to Substitute Members to avoid a similar situation in future.

The Clerk to the Joint Committee explained the process required for amended Terms of Reference to be considered, noting she had consulted with the Clerk to Spennymoor Town Council as regards the proposed substitution clause.

She explained that following the process as described and the matter being considered at a meeting of Durham County Council's Full Council, the amended Terms of Reference would be reported back to the Joint Committee at its Annual General Meeting in June.

Resolved:

That the update in relation to the ongoing work in respect of Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee be noted.