

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At the **Annual Meeting** of the **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Committee Room 1B - County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 26 June 2019** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, J Blakey, D Brown, J Chaplow, K Corrigan, A Hopgood, P Jopling, B Kellett, S Quinn, A Simpson and J Stephenson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors N Foster, B McAloon and C Sproat

1 Membership of the Joint Committee

The Clerk to the Joint Committee, S Grigor asked the Committee to note five changes from the previous year, with Councillor A Hopgood returning to the Joint Committee and Councillor A Simpson a new Member, both representatives from Durham County Council.

It was explained that the three representatives for Spennymoor Town Council were Councillors N Foster, B McAloon and C Sproat, and it was noted Councillor N Foster returned to the Joint Committee having previously been a Member representing the County Council.

The Membership for the Joint Committee was confirmed as:

Durham County Council: D Bell, J Blakey, D Brown, J Chaplow, K Corrigan, A Hopgood, P Jopling, B Kellett, H Liddle, S Quinn, A Simpson and J Stephenson

Spennymoor Town Council: N Foster, B McAloon and C Sproat

Resolved:

That the change in the Membership of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee be noted.

2 Appointment of Chair for the ensuing year

The Clerk to the Joint Committee asked for nominations for Chair to the Joint Committee for the ensuing year noting that, wherever possible, the Chair and Vice-Chair alternated between the two constituent Authorities.

Accordingly, Councillor N Foster was proposed for the position of Chair to the Joint Committee for the ensuing year. No further proposals were made.

Resolved:

That by unanimous agreement, Councillor N Foster be appointed Chair for the ensuing year.

COUNCILLOR N Foster in the Chair

3 Appointment of Vice-Chair for the ensuing year

The Chair thanked Members for their support and asked for nominations for Vice-Chair to the Joint Committee for the ensuing year noting that this should be a Member from Durham County Council. Councillor J Chaplow was proposed for the position of Vice-Chair to the Joint Committee for the ensuing year. No further proposals were made.

Resolved:

That by unanimous agreement, Councillor J Chaplow be appointed Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

4 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from H Liddle.

5 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chair.

6 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

7 Changes to Constitution/Terms of Reference

The Clerk to the Joint Committee referred Members to the report within the agenda papers outlining the Terms of Reference for the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

Members were reminded that following audit reviews it was recommended that the Joint Committee undertake an annual review of the Terms of Reference and update as necessary. It was explained that, following a meeting of the Joint Committee being cancelled in January 2019 as it was inquorate, provision for Substitute Members was proposed, with an updated Constitution for the Joint Committee set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

Resolved:

That the Members of the Joint Committee note the Review of the Terms of Reference and approve the updated Constitution as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

8 2018/19 Annual Governance Statement

The Joint Committee considered a Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which provided details of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year April 2018 to March 2019 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services, Paul Darby reminded Members that the AGS was prepared in line with CIPFA and SOLACE guidance and formed part of the Joint Committees Return for the financial year April 2018 to March 2019. Councillors were reminded that the AGS set out the governance framework for the Joint Committee and was informed by the views of Internal Audit, which had been set out in the report to the Joint Committee in April, noting “substantial assurance”. There were no significant governance issues or matters worthy of disclosing in the AGS.

It was added that the AGS looked to answer seven assertions relevant to the Joint Committee, as set out within the report and the AGS at Appendix 2, providing evidence of how the Joint Committee and Crematorium satisfied those assertions.

The Chair noted the report and AGS were very good documents and well presented.

Resolved:

That the Annual Governance Statement be approved for consideration as part of the Joint Committee's Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2019 and that the Chair and Treasurer be authorised to sign the Statement.

9 Revenue Outturn and Joint Committees Annual Return for the Financial Year Ended 31 March 2019

The Joint Committee considered a Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which sought approval of the Joint Committees Return, with the report also including details of the financial outturn position against approved budgets for 2018/19 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services referred Members to the financial outturn position for 2018/19, advising that the final outturn position was broadly in line with the provisional outturn position, with only minor changes across a number of budget levels at the final outturn. Details of significant variances were contained within the report and duly noted. Members were reminded that in terms of capital works, some works had carried over into the next financial year, as set out at paragraph 16 of the report. The report also included details of the updated position in terms of reserves and balances held and it was added that the Major Capital Works reserve was maintained in line with agreed policy.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that he would prepare a Strategy Paper for the Committee meeting in September, looking at options for the future in terms of reserves, medium term financial plan, capital investment and surplus distributions to the two Authorities.

Councillor B Kellett asked as regards the transfer to the Major Capital Works reserves, noting the £297,532 was a considerable amount. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services explained that as there had been an overachievement of surplus and, as previously agreed, this was added to the Major Capital Works reserves. He added that the budget had been a prudent estimate and there had been a larger surplus.

Resolved:

- (i) That the revenue outturn position as at 31 March 2019, including the year-end position with regards reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.
- (ii) That Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2018/19 of the Joint Committees Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2019 be approved.
- (iii) That Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2018/19 of the Joint Committees Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2019 be approved.
- (iv) That the Chair, Clerk and Treasurer sign the Joint Committees Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2019.

10 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report:

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 April 2019 to 31 May 2019 and the comparison to the same period for 2018, highlighting that there was a net decrease of 64 cremations year on year. It was noted there was a total of 380 for the three-month period with the April to May profile breakdown showing 106 from Durham, 22 from Spennymoor and 252 from outside of the area. Members were reminded that for the same period last year the Office of National Statistics data had also shown an increase in the death rate nationally and the current financial year numbers were broadly in line with what had been experienced in previous years. The Bereavement Services Manager noted there was nothing to suggest a down turn in overall use of the crematorium.

Members were asked to note that the number of memorials sold was fewer when comparing to the same period the previous year, however those sales represented an increase of income, being £2,195 greater than the comparable period last year.

The Joint Committee were reminded that it had been agreed at the April meeting to advertise for a relief Crematorium Attendant posts. The Bereavement Services Management noted that the posts would be advertised shortly, internally at Durham County Council and Spennymoor Town Council, and also externally.

Members were asked to recall from September 2019 that within the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) an estimated cost for works to make improvements to office accommodation had been presented.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted that a feasibility study had now been completed and final estimated costs, including an increase due to additional works associated with drainage, were set out within the report for the Committee to consider.

The Joint Committee noted that the usual arrangements as regards attendance at the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Learning Convention and Exhibition, to be held 23 to 25 September 2019 at the Chesford Grange Hotel, near Kenilworth, had been made for the Bereavement Services Manager and the Chair to attend on behalf of the Joint Committee.

Councillors noted that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had generated a sum of £7,000 for the Great North Air Ambulance and that a cheque had been presented to the charity. It was noted a further cheque in the sum of £8,000 had been presented to Cancer Research North East and that additional funds from collections in 2018 resulted in an extra round of nominations, with "If u Care Share Foundation" had been nominated.

In relation to document retention, Members were asked to recall at the January meeting that it had been agreed for secure storage for historic records and to scan records going forward. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that due to scanning quality issues another company would be required to undertake this element, with the costs as set out within the report.

Councillor C Sproat noted the staffing item, with the advertisement being internal at Durham County Council and Spennymoor Town Council and asked when it would be circulated externally. The Bereavement Services Manager noted it would be advertised on the North East Jobs Portal initially, then externally and with JobCentre Plus after that.

Councillor A Hopgood noted large financial increases with two of the items mentioned within the report, she asked had they been through the usual procurement process. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that they had gone through procurement and explained the costs in terms of office accommodation works may yet reduce. Councillor A Hopgood explained she had experience of contracts and felt that Members should have sight of final figures before being asked to make a decision. The Bereavement Services Manager noted there was a large contingency within the proposed figures and there were still discussions in terms of the works. Councillor A Hopgood noted that less than half of the costs appeared to be actual physical works. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services explained that the report sought a maximum spend with a large contingency as experience at the site, from the cremator replacement works, had shown there was the potential for issues once works began.

He added that the costs as shown were all of the individual elements broken down and explained that when looking at the SAMP at a future meeting Members would be able to compare to budget estimates. Councillor A Hopgood asked if the contingency was not used whether it was returned to the budget. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted this was the case, giving an example of the canopies installed at the Crematorium, these being underbudget and the remainder returned to the Major Capital Works Reserve. Councillor J Chaplow noted the work on the canopies had been completed to a high standard and commended the staff as the work had not impacted upon services.

Councillor P Jopling noted that as there were such differences between figures, she would hope that there would be very stringent controls to keep to the estimated costs and not to overspend further. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that the Treasury Green Book approach was taken with this recommending an ample contingency in terms of potential unknowns, such as additional groundworks, and changes in costs.

Councillor A Hopgood emphasised she had not questioned the quality of the work to be undertaken or the standards of the Council's Direct Services staff. She commended their standards and reiterated that her issue was with the 20 percent increase in cost from the initial estimate.

Councillor B Kellett referred to his finance background and highlighted that the usual approach would be to overbudget up front and therefore he would support the proposals. The Chair asked for Members if they agreed to the recommendations.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the advertising for relief Crematorium Attendants be noted.
- (iii) That the increased costs with regards to office improvements be agreed.
- (iv) That the attendance of the Chair and the Bereavement Services Manager at the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Learning Convention and Exhibition 2019 be noted.
- (v) That the distribution of recycling income to the respective charities and subsequent charity nomination be noted.
- (vi) That the current situation with regards to document retention be noted.

11 Forward Plan 2019/20

The Joint Committee considered a Report of the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out proposals in respect of the Forward Plan of meetings of the Joint Committee for the municipal year 2019/20.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services advised that the list of business to be conducted by the Joint Committee was not exhaustive and further items of business may be considered throughout the course of the year. He reiterated he would look to bring a Strategy Paper forward to the September meeting for Members' consideration.

The Committee Services Officer noted the Appendix 2 highlighted that the September meeting had been moved from the original diary date to accommodate the attendance of the Chair and Bereavement Services Manager at the ICCM Conference. He added that the date, time and venue were Friday, 27 September 2019, 14.00 in Committee Room 2, County Hall.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that it may be of interest to Members to have the January meeting at the Crematorium if the office works were complete, offering the opportunity to see the office first hand, and for new Members to see the rest of the facility if they were not familiar with the Crematorium.

Resolved:

That the proposed schedule of meetings as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved.

12 Collection of old decorations

The Chair noted Councillor J Blakey wished to raise an issue and asked her to speak.

Councillor J Blakey thanked the Chair and noted a number of bows, ribbons and other decorations left after funeral services and that some had been blown by the wind into the nearby fields and asked what we did in terms of collecting these. She noted that the grounds of the Crematorium itself were very tidy, the issue being in locations adjacent to the facility itself. The Bereavement Services Manager noted he would look into the matter, including land ownership. Councillor A Hopgood asked as regards the Joint Committee's remit and whether it included South Road Cemetery. The Bereavement Services Manager noted the Joint Committee had oversight for Durham Crematorium only.