

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton on **Tuesday 24 September 2019 at 9.30 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor O Temple in the Chair

Durham County Council

Councillors A Bainbridge, J Carr, J Charlton and C Hampson

Gateshead Council:

Councillors D Burnett, J Lee, M Ord and Burnett

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors A Batey, S Robinson, B Stephens (Durham County Council) and D Bradford, K Dodds, L Green and S Green (Gateshead Council).

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitutes.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair requested that part B minutes should be circulated at each meeting in order to keep a trail of works ongoing. He apologised at not requesting this item for this meeting.

Councillor O Temple welcomed Councillor D Burnett to the meeting. Councillor Burnett had replaced Councillor M Charlton as a representative from Gateshead Council.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 External Audit Annual Review of the Return for the year ended 31 March 2019

The Joint Committee noted a joint report of Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which presented the external Auditors Annual Review of the Joint Committee return for the year ended 31 March 2019 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services informed the Joint Committee that the Annual Governance and Accountability return for the year ended 31 March 2019 had recently been received and a copy of the 2018/19 certificate had been circulated to the Joint Committee as a supplementary report previous to the meeting (for copy see file of minutes).

It was pleasing to note that no material weaknesses had been identified and there were no matters to bring to the attention of the Joint Committee.

Councillor O Temple thanked all staff involved for their hard work and diligence in producing a set of well-presented accounts.

6 Mountsett Crematorium Performance and Operational Report

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager provided the Committee with a quarterly update on performance and operations on behalf of the Bereavement Services Manager who was attending the Institute of Cemetery and Cremation Management Learning Convention and Exhibition (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that the number of cremations had increased by 12 from the previous year. The increase was linked to families utilising the service from outside the Gateshead and Durham areas, given that Mountsett Crematorium was one of the cheapest crematoriums in the region. The increase could also be attributed to direct cremations, whereby families could choose to have no service and just a cremation alone, which made it cheaper. It was clear that funeral poverty remained an issue. Direct cremations were a growing trend nationally and demonstrated that there was demand for this type of cremation.

There was a designated area within the grounds of Mountsett Crematorium where families could now place a plaque in memory of their loved ones and scatter ashes. This had increased the number and value of memorials sold from the previous year.

Mountsett Crematorium had achieved the Green Flag Award for the eighth year running. This was down to all the hard work achieved by staff working at the Crematorium.

The Joint Committee agreed to advertise for two Relief Crematorium Attendant posts. One post was successfully filled with the other post being re-advertised in the hope of finding a suitable candidate.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager informed the Joint Committee that work would soon be underway to explore a new greener alternative to cremation and burial involving water. The process called 'resomation' was more environmentally friendly and would provide customers with more choice. A further report would be brought back to the Joint Committee in due course.

The Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) had been updated to include budget pressures and divisions of works into different priorities and how the work was planned.

There was a proposal that a non-living metal memorial tree could be included in the types of memorials that Mountsett Crematorium could offer. The tree would allow families to purchase an inscribed leaf and attached to the tree. The tree would then grow over time with all the leaves being placed on it. This would expand the types of memorials offered and provide customers more choice and provide a return.

Councillor Burnett wished to know how Mountsett Crematorium was determined to be the cheapest and was this based on a national costing. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager explained that the Joint Committee had considered its pricing approach previously by comparing the costs of other local crematoria and by taking into account the poverty agenda against investments made.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services further explained that there were no national regulations on setting prices for cremations. Each Council or privately-owned crematorium set their own charges for the services provided on an annual basis as part of the budget setting process. Charges for Mountsett Crematorium were harmonised with Durham Crematorium. Generally, each facility was different dependent on the aged of cremator and types of service offered.

Councillor A Bainbridge noted that all staff should be commended for all their hard work for the green flag award. Councillor O Temple followed by stating that the commendations should also include all staff who worked on producing a clean audit report.

Resolved:

- I. That the report be noted; and
- II. That the success with regards to the Green Flag Award be noted; and
- III. That the updated position with regards to the Relief Crematorium Attendants be noted; and

- IV. That a report on Resomation Cremations be scheduled for a future meeting; and
- V. That the contents of the Service Asset Management Plan be noted and approved to be factored in to the budget planning in 2020/21 and beyond.

7 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/08/19, with Projected Revenue and Capital Outturn at 31/03/20

The Joint Committee noted a Joint report of Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of the provisional outturn position for 2019/20 and the projected level of reserves and balances as at 31 March 2020 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted the work undertaken around the latest forecasting to the end of the financial year in relation to over and underspends.

At present there was a project underspend of revenue of £29,000 and an over achievement of £29,000 making a net surplus of £59,000. Reference was made to external revenue which had increased from £623,554 to £839,103 by the end of the financial year.

The Joint Committee would receive an update at its next meeting of outturn based on actual income and expenditure up to the end of August 2019.

8 Risk Register Update 2019/20

The Joint Committee noted a joint report of Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee regarding the risk register update for 2019/20. The register was reviewed continuously throughout the year with the Head of Internal Audit and Risk (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Internal Audit and Risk explained that the register included the inclusion of a new risk, “risk of a suspension notice under Regulation 37, Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016, leading to a partial cessation of operations at Mountsett Crematorium” which replaced the former ‘Failure of Cremators’ risk.

Risk 7, relating to “Data Breach” had been reduced as the Crematorium had moved towards holding electronic data whereby more historic data had been moved off-site and stored securely with Boxit.

Seventy percent of transactions were now being made by BACS which had helped reduced risk 8 relating to “loss of income/money”.

9 Internal Audit Charter

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager presented a revised Internal Audit Charter for 2019/20 (of copy see file of minutes).

The Charter set out how audit was carried out in accordance with the relevant codes and guidance and established Internal Audit's position within the organisation, including the nature of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager's functional reporting relationship with the Joint Committee; authorises access to records, personnel and physical properties relevant to the performance of engagements; and defined the scope of internal audit activities. The Charter was subject to annual review by the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager.

Resolved

That the Internal Audit Charter attached at Appendix 2 of the report be approved.

10 Annual Review of the System of Internal Audit

The Joint Committee noted a review of the effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service, which was carried out by the County Council's Audit Committee in June 2019. (for copy see file of minutes).

The information provided within the report demonstrated the efficiency and effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service, which the Joint Committee duly noted.

11 Provision of Internal Audit and Risk Management Services 2020-2023

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager presented the Joint Committee with proposals for the continued delivery of the Internal Audit and Risk Management Services by Durham County Council to cover the period April 2020 to March 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

- I. That the Internal Audit and Risk Management Services SLA with Durham County Council covering the next three financial years attached at appendix 2 be approved.
- II. That the annual audit and plan and fee set out in section 2 of the report be approved.

12 Exclusion of the public

That under Section 100 A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act.

13 Update Report on Cremator Replacement and Contingency Planning

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and the Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee regarding an update on the Cremator replacement and the Contingency Planning (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved

That the recommendations contained in the report be agreed.