

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 29 January 2020** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor N Foster (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors J Blakey, D Brown, J Chaplow (Vice-Chair), A Hopgood, P Jopling, B Kellett, H Liddle, S Quinn, A Simpson and J Stephenson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillor C Sproat

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors D Bell, K Corrigan and B McAloon.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of Substitute Members had been received.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

5 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 September 2019 to 31 December 2019 and the comparison to the same period for 2018, highlighting that there was a net increase of 41 cremations year on year. It was noted there was a total of 797 for the three-month period with the September to December profile breakdown showing 250 from Durham, 46 from Spennymoor and 501 from outside of the area.

The Joint Committee were informed that in respect of the new lower cost direct cremation option, for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 December 2019 the Crematorium had carried out nine unattended direct cremations and there had been no attended direct cremations.

Members were asked to note that the number of memorials sold had decreased slightly in comparison to the same period the previous year, with sales being £3,579 less than the comparable period last year.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar asked Members to recall that at the September meeting of the Joint Committee it had been agreed to advertise for relief Crematorium Assistant posts. He explained that four applicants were shortlisted and following interviews on 19 December 2019, with two relief Crematorium Assistants employed. The Joint Committee were asked to note that the Business Administration Apprentice was due to complete the apprenticeship on 31 August 2020 and Members were asked to note two options in this regard: to delete the current Business Administration Apprentice post and create a full-time Technical Assistant post; or replace the Business Administration Apprentice post when the current post holder completes their apprenticeship in September 2020.

Councillors were reminded that it had been noted at the September meeting that for the eighth year running the Crematorium had achieved the Green Flag Award and that an application for the 2020 award had been submitted and progress would be reported back to a future meeting.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar informed Members that the Crematorium had been asked to take part in the Durham "Heritage Open Weekend" in September 2020 and noted that in previous years it had been a popular event with around 80 - 100 attendees over those weekends.

In respect of the Recycling of Metals Scheme, it was noted there had been a second round of surplus nationally in 2019 and a cheque in the sum of £8,000 had been received from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management for the If U care Share Foundation.

It was added that arrangements had been made for the Chair to present the cheque and a photograph of the presentation and a letter of thanks were included in the report at Appendix 3. It was explained that a new nomination for Members to consider was for the Woodland Burial Site, put forward by the Friends of the Woodland Burial Site.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted that for the ninth year running St. Cuthbert's Hospice had provided a Christmas tree and baubles at the Crematorium, a facility to allow visitors to leave a personal message and place it on to the tree. A request had been received from St. Cuthbert's Hospice to continue to provide a tree in 2020 and it was noted no other requests from other organisations had been received.

Members were asked to recall the 2019/20 Capital Programme included work to alter the existing roadway to allow two-way traffic to enter and exit the Crematorium safely and to alleviate the current pinch point. It was explained that the works would hopefully be completed by the end of March 2020.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted that some Members may have been aware of an electrical disruption at the Crematorium due to a cable being severed during housing development opposite the Crematorium. It was explained that the electricity was down for several hours, with a back-up generator delivered by the electricity company being used until the regular supply was restored. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted two options for Members to consider in respect of mitigating the risk of further disruption in the future.

The Chair thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar and asked for comments and questions.

Councillor H Liddle asked who would carry out the work if the Business Apprentice Post was not refilled or no Technical Assistant post was created. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar said if there was no replacement in terms of apprentice or creation of a Technical Assistant post then the remaining staff would need to pick up the work, but this wasn't a long term practical solution as the Business Administration Apprentice role had become an invaluable member of the team. The Vice-Chair, Councillor J Chaplow, noted that if we had the right person for the job, or there was a need for another apprentice then she believed the Crematorium should take them on. Councillor A Hopgood added she felt that if an apprentice had been taken on for two years, had completed their training and proved themselves then they deserved an opportunity for a job. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services, Paul Darby noted that the proposal was that the Technical Assistant post would be advertised, with the opportunity to apply to the specialist post being open for internal applications.

It was anticipated that should the current Business Administration Apprentice apply then they would be a strong candidate for the role.

Councillor A Hopgood noted at the last meeting she had made note of a flooding issue.

She noted that the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar and his team had quickly met as regards the issue and had resolved the issue within a week, a fantastic response and wanted to thank the team.

Councillor D Brown asked for further information following a recent article in the Northern Echo which quoted the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, with reference to technology linked to reducing Nitrogen Oxide emissions. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted that the technology would be something to look at, however, this would be at the cremator replacement stage with the current cremators having many years left. He reminded Members that the priority had been to provide mercury abatement as a consequence of the changes in European environmental regulations.

Councillor P Jopling returned to the issue of the apprentice position and added that she felt if the time and resources had been used to help train the current apprentice, then they should be given the opportunity to apply for any Technical Assistant post that may be created.

Councillor J Blakey thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar and the work of his team in restoring power to the Crematorium as quickly as possible. She noted that she was aware of some noise disruption due to an air hammer during a service recently, however, she wished her thanks to be passed on to those workers involved in resolving the matter. She asked as regards a £30 charge in relation to non-viable foetuses, adding she had believed this was something the Crematorium had not charged for. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted the facility did not charge, however, the £30 was a medical reference fee, not a fee set by the Crematorium or Joint Committee. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted that the proposed fees and charges were set out within a report on the agenda and reminded Members of the harmonisation after Local Government Reorganisation with the Council's other facility at Mountsett. He added that the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee had agreed the proposed fees and charges at their meeting held the previous day.

Councillor A Hopgood asked if issues at the Woodland Burial site had been resolved, the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted they had, with the issue now being dealt with by the County Council.

Councillor A Hopgood suggested that in relation to options to mitigate electrical disruption in the future it would be beneficial for figures for both options to be calculated and a further report to come back for Members to consider in due course.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the current situation with regards to the relief crematorium attendant's position.
- (iii) That a full time Technical Assistant post be created and advertised internally be agreed.
- (iv) That the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award be noted.
- (v) That the situation with regards to Heritage open Weekend be noted.
- (vi) That the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme be noted.
- (vii) That the friends of the Woodland Burial site being nominated in the next round of recycling of metals scheme be agreed.
- (viii) That St Cuthbert's Hospice providing a Christmas tree again in 2020 be agreed.
- (ix) That the current situation with regards to the improvements to the roadway be noted.
- (x) That further information as regards costs of options relating to mitigating electricity disruption be brought back to the Joint Committee for consideration.

6 Financial Monitoring Report 2019/20: Position at 31/12/19 with Projected Outturn to 31/03/20

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim 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 2019 to 31 December 2019, together with the forecast outturn position for 2019/20, highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level.

The report also detailed the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2019 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 explained that the updated projected outturn showed a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to the partner authorities) of £785,208 against a budgeted surplus of £7523,729, £31,439 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 11 onwards, by subjective analysis area.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services went on to advise that in terms of the retained reserves at 31 March 2020, they were forecast to be £1,237,803 along with a General Reserve of £487,670 giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £1,735,473 at the year end.

It was noted this represented a very strong position going forward, with a health level of reserves.

Resolved:

That the April to December 2019 revenue spend financial monitoring report and associated provisional outturn position at 31 March 2020, including the projected year end position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

7 Provision of Support Services 2020/21

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which outlined the propose Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2020 to March 2021 (for copy see file of Minutes).

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

Resolved:

That the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 (including relevant schedule) for the year 2020/21 be approved.

8 Fees and Charges 2020/21

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim 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 2020/21 (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 is increased by £20 (2.9 percent) to £720 inclusive of medical referee, and environmental surcharge fees where appropriate in 2020/21. This increase had been factored into the draft budgets pending member approval.

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 28 January 2020 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.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the proposed increases to a weekend service of £35 and the Wesley Music System for visual display, webcasts and other additional services, which were as a result of increased costs that had been imposed by the suppliers. He added that even with the proposed increases, the fees proposed would be less than the current fees of other facilities in the region, with those facilities yet to set their fees and charges for 2020/21.

The Chair thanked the Head of Finance and Transactional Services and asked for comments and questions.

Councillor A Hopgood noted the explanation of the additional charges for the Wesley Music System, however she asked for clarification as regards a charge listed of £10 for an urn-box, she felt this was something that should be included within the main fee. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted that fee was for an additional urn-box, one box was provided as part of the cremation fee.

Resolved:

- (i) That Members of the Joint Committee note and approve the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2020, which seeks to increase the cremation by £20 (2.9%) per crematorium from £700 to £720.
- (ii) The proposed fees and charges are incorporated into the 2020/21 budget.

9 External Audit Arrangements 2019/20 to 2021/22

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee relating to proposals for the continued delivery of external audit by Mazars LLP for the three financial years 2019/20 to 2021/22 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services, Paul Darby advised that Mazars LLP were also Durham County Council's auditor and that there was a good working relationship, Mazars were based in Durham, and they were familiar with the systems and reporting of the Council.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee appoint Mazars to undertake the external audit arrangements for the 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years.

10 2020/21 Revenue and Capital Budgets

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director of Resources which set out proposals with regards to the 2020/21 Revenue and Capital 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 added that, as stated previously, there would be scope for increase distribution of surplus in future years following the completion of the loan for redevelopment works.

Councillor B Kellett asked as regards the purchase and installation of memorial trees and the costs. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the trees were in fact metal sculptures, enabling inscriptions to be placed on the trees in memory of people who had passed.

Councillor J Chaplow showed an example of a silver leaf which would be inscribed and placed on the memorial tree. Councillor B Kellet asked as regards the cost per leaf and capacity of the tree. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted the costs was £30, with a capacity of 150 per tree. Councillor B Kellett noted he felt interest would be high and that there may be a requirement to increase the number of trees. The Chair noted that if there was a requirement to increase capacity, he was sure this was something that officer would bring back to the Joint Committee.

Councillor J Blakey asked if there was any information as regards the new liner for the fountain, with such liners usually having a 30-year guarantee. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar noted there had been a rip which had caused a link and therefore a replacement was required. It was not known what had caused the rip in the liner.

The Finance Manager, Spennymoor Town Council, Tracey Woodhead asked if the increase in distribution of surplus for 2021 onward was a one-off increase for that year alone or would be for that year and subsequent years.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the increase in the distribution of surpluses in 2020/21 would be a recurring item thereafter, with the prospect of a further increase once the loan was fully repaid. Any further changes would be for agreement by the Joint Committee in future budget setting rounds.

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 2021 be noted.