

# Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee

7 October 2020

## Performance and Operational Report



### Report of Graham Harrison, Bereavement Services Manager & Registrar

#### Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee with an update relating to performance and other operational matters.

#### Executive summary

- 2 This report provides Members of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee with an update of performance and operational matters at the crematorium.

#### Recommendation(s)

- 3 It is recommended that Members of the Mountsett Joint Committee:
  - (a) Note the current performance of the crematorium;
  - (b) Note the updated position with regards to the Technical Assistant post;
  - (c) Note the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme;
  - (d) Note the options available for the cremation fee and approve Option 2 – reinstatement of the full 2020/21 fee from 1 November 2020;
  - (e) Note the options available for the provision of webcasts and approve Option 2 – recommencement of the fees from 1 November 2020; and
  - (f) Note and agree the content of the Service Asset Management Plan attached at Appendix 2, which will be factored into budget planning in 2021/22 and beyond.

## Background

- 4 This report provides Members of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee with an update of performance and operational matters at the crematorium since the last meeting of the Joint Committee.

## Performance Update - Number of Cremations

- 5 The table below provides details of the number of cremations for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 August 2020 inclusive, with comparative data in the same period last year:

	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>Change</b>
January	132	133	+ 1
February	112	128	+ 16
March	105	103	- 2
April	101	189	+ 88
May	135	239	+ 104
June	111	136	+ 25
July	109	123	+ 14
August	106	99	- 7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>1,150</b>	<b>+ 239</b>

- 6 In summary there were 1,150 cremations undertaken during the period 1 January 2020 to 31 August 2020, compared to 911 in the comparable period last year. There were 239 more cremations undertaken in the period January to August 2020 compared to the same period last year with significant year on year variances experienced in April, May and June due to Covid-19.

The profile of where families came from can be seen below:

Gateshead	294
Durham	644
Outside Area	212
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,050</b>

## Memorials

- 7 The table below outlines the number and value of the memorials sold in period January to August 2020 compared to the same period the previous year.

	<b>Jan – Aug</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>Jan – Aug</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>£</b>
Large Plaques	8	3,270	11	4,620
Small Plaques	30	7,995	34	9,384
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>11,265</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>14,004</b>

- 8 The number and value of memorials sold 45 / £14,004 compares to 38 / £11,265 in the same period last year, which is an increase of 7 memorials sold and £2,739 year on year.

## **Staffing**

- 9 Members agreed at the January 2020 meeting to advertise a full time Technical Assistant post.
- 10 Recruitment to this post was delayed due to Covid-19 but recommenced in July. There were 4 applicants shortlisted and following interviews on 23 July 2020 the Admin Apprentice was successful and commenced her new role on the 3 August 2020.
- 11 As Members will be aware, the Covid 19 pandemic placed the crematorium under immense pressure due to the increase in death rates.
- 12 Unfortunately one of our permanent members of staff had to go into self isolation as he was classed as vulnerable, which in turn placed the remaining staff in a difficult situation.
- 13 To accommodate the additional workload extra staff were brought in from other Durham County Council services to cope with the demand. This meant that existing staff were having to carry out their normal duties whilst training other staff in the roles, ensuring that we could then have a bank of trained staff in order to operate a shift system and be able to operate 7 days a week. This shift system was in place for 2 months with staff working 10-hour days 4 days on and 4 days off, which also included myself and the staff working bank holidays to cope with the demand.
- 14 The seating within the chapel had to be removed and replaced with 15 individual seats which allowed us to sanitise between each service ensuring that a safe distance of 2 metres can be maintained at all times.
- 15 The staff continue to cope with the demands and are an asset to the Crematorium and I would like to personally thank them for their assistance during this difficult time.

## **Highway Signage to Crematorium**

- 16 Members may recall that a question was raised at a previous meeting regarding directional signage to the crematorium. Members may be aware there is currently signage from the Brooms and Pickering nook pointing towards Mountsett crematorium.

- 17 After contacting the relevant traffic and streetworks team they have provided the following response. *“We have looked at the signing in the past for Mountsett Crematorium and it is currently signed in alignment with our signing policy and other crematoriums in the area (eg Coundon). The sign requirement is only for immediate direction signs off the A692, of which there are two existing signs, one opposite the entrance which is double sided and one on the approach to the entrance from the Consett direction. For this type of location we sign from the main roads as its usual for visitors to the area to use the main ‘A’ roads, also satellite navigation systems take you directly to the crematorium entrance. Anyone travelling from the Flinthill area is assumed to be local and therefore know where the crematorium is located.”*

## **Recycling of Metals Scheme**

- 18 Members may recall from the last meeting that extra funds from collections in 2019 had resulted in a second round of nominations being made available, therefore we nominated Willowburn Hospice. Due to Covid 19 restrictions a cheque for £10,000 was handed to Willowburn Hospice by myself on 20 July, without involving the Chair or the Vice Chair of the Joint Committee.

## **Cremation Fee**

- 19 Members agreed at the January 2020 meeting to increase the cremation fee on 1 April 2020 from £700 to £720, however due to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, a decision was taken to freeze the price at £700 during this time. This is in line with actions taken by other Councils at that time.
- 20 During the period 1 April to 31 August there were 786 cremations where the £20 price increase was not applied, equating to £15,720 in reduced revenues.
- 21 Discussions with neighbouring authorities have found that whilst they too had either frozen their prices or offered a discount initially, all had now reverted back to the planned 2020/21 cremation fee. In light of this, two options are put forward for consideration:
- Option 1. Continue to freeze the cremation prices at £700.
- Option 2. Implement the previously agreed budgeted cremation price of £720 from 1 November 2020.

## **Recommended Option**

Due to the reduction in cremation numbers back to normal levels and the approach taken by neighbouring authorities it is recommended that Members approve Option 2 and charge the budgeted £720 per cremation from 1 November 2020. This proposal has been factored into the financial outturn report.

## **Webcasts**

- 22 Members agreed at the January 2020 meeting to increase the Webcast charges on 1 April 2020 from £36 to £48. However, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, it was agreed to provide the service free of charge due to the reduced numbers of only 15 mourners allowed in the chapel during a service. Each webcast currently costs £30 and they are currently being made available for all services.
- 23 During the period 1 April to 31 August there were 132 webcasts requested and provided free of charge at a cost of £3,960 and lost revenue of £6,336 (assuming all 132 webcasts were charged at £48).
- 24 Discussions with neighbouring authorities have found that whilst they also provided the Webcasts free or offered a discount initially, all have now started charging the fee again. In light of this, two options are put forward for consideration:

Option 1. Continue to provide the Webcasts free of charge.

Option 2. Re-commence the Webcast fee of £48 from 1 November 2020.

## **Recommended Option**

Due to the reduction in cremation numbers back to normal levels and the approach taken by neighbouring authorities it is recommended that Members approve Option 2 and re-commence the budgeted £48 per webcast from 1 November 2020. This has been factored into the financial outturn report.

## **Service Asset Management Plan**

- 25 The Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) was presented to Members on 24 September 2019 and has been reviewed and updated to provide further direction and highlight future budget pressures for the Joint Committee. The SAMP is attached at Appendix 2 and will need to be refined in line with any future decisions taken by Members.

26 The Service Asset Management Plan is split into four priorities of maintenance need and includes all of the completed and planned crematorium improvement works.

**Priority 1 essential works** for 2021/22 have been estimated to the sum of £29,000. These will need to be considered as part of the budget setting process for next year. These works include:

- Re-Decoration Works
- Replacement of pathway
- Replacement of decorative shale to shrub beds
- Replacement of curtain track

**Priority 2 works**, which will need to feature in 2022/23 budget plans have been estimated to the sum of £50,000 and the works are set out below:

- Carry out energy improvement works

**Priority 3 works**, which would fall beyond the next two years, have been estimated to the sum of £29,000 and the works are set out below:

- Re-Decoration Works
- Carry out Re-lining of 2 hearths

Longer term works have been costed to the sum of £627,000 and some of the works include:

- Re-Decoration Works
- Carry out Re-lining of 2 cremators
- Carry out Re-lining of 2 hearths

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

As outlined in the report.

### **Finance**

As identified in the report.

### **Consultation**

None, however, Officers of Gateshead Council were provided with a copy of the report and given opportunity to comment/raise any detailed questions on the content of the report in advance of circulation to members of the Mountsett Crematorium.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

There are no implications

### **Human Rights**

There are no implications

### **Climate Change**

There are no implications

### **Crime and Disorder**

There are no implications

### **Staffing**

As identified in the report.

### **Accommodation**

There are no implications

### **Risk**

There are no implications

### **Procurement**

There are no implications

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## **Appendix 2: Service Asset Management Plan**

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