

County Council

14 July 2021

Questions from the Public

In June 2015, I asked the Council :- As the profit made by the Durham Crematorium operation came to a third of a million pounds, after all reserves were deducted; should the Council not advise the Crematorium Committee to slash the cost of cremations from £610.00 to a more justifiable figure? As usual from the last Labour-dominated Council, all I received in reply was a verbal brush-off, stating that whatever money was generated over and above the costs of running and maintaining the Crematoria plant and facilities would be spent on other activities.

I would therefore ask the new Joint Administration to look again, with the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee, at the truly enormous profits: profits, not reserves or whatever term is used to disguise the fact that the Council is making over £900,000 profit from cremating the dead, from profiting off the grief of County Durham residents; as they continue to run the Crematoria as a business, and not as a service?

Response (provided by Councillor M Wilkes, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change)

Thank you, Mr Cunningham, for this question, and it was good to speak with you before the meeting.

I know that you are aware that Durham Crematoria is owned and operated jointly with Spennymoor Town Council. Each year the joint committee reviews the fees and charges considering a range of factors including the future investment needed through to the prices of other crematoria in the region.

We know that the cost of a funerals can be difficult for families and considering this the prices have been consistently set as the lowest in the North East Region and well below local private crematoria.

In recognition of the challenge's families have, the committee have also introduced reduced prices for some services each day as well offering families a direct cremation at a reduced cost.

There has been ongoing investment at the Crematoria over several years which is now close to £4 million to improve the facilities and a need to develop reserves for future changes and improvements to be made.

There is a surplus that is created each year and distributed to the Town Council and County Council by the joint committee. For the County Council this helps protect services and supports the rest of Bereavement Services which covers cemeteries and closed churchyards.

I appreciate the question raised by Mr Cunningham and believe the charges at the Crematorium are fair, being that they are the lowest in the region, and a wider range of prices have been introduced to help families, with any surpluses going back into the community.

However, in light of your concerns, I will ensure that your question is raised at the next meeting of the Crematoria Committee for their further consideration as this is a decision for the Joint Committee, and I hope that they will take into account your views when looking at their pricing structure going forward, something I will also be monitoring.