



Report of Graham Harrison, Bereavement Services Manager & Registrar

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

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

Executive summary

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

Recommendation(s)

- 3 It is recommended that Members of the Central Durham Joint Committee:
 - a. Note the current performance of the crematorium;
 - b. Note the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme.
 - c. Note the updated position with regards to the Green Flag scheme.
 - d. Note the updated position with regards to the Durham Heritage Open Weekend.
 - e. Note the comparison of fees, the discounted fees available to help funeral poverty and the investments made at the crematorium in consideration of the question from a member of the public

- f. Note and agree the content of the Service Asset Management Plan attached at Appendix 3, which will be factored into budget planning in 2022/23 and beyond.

Background

- 4 This report provides Members of the Central Durham 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 June 2021 to 31 August 2021 inclusive, with comparative data in the same period last year:

	2019/20 (Pre Covid)	2020/21	2021/22	Change from 20/21
June	164	232 + 0*	161 + 1*	- 71 + 1*
July	186	193 + 0*	180 + 2*	- 13 + 2*
August	166	170 + 0*	171 + 0*	+1 + 0*
TOTAL	516	595 + 0*	512 + 3*	- 83 + 3*

* = Non-Viable Foetus (NVF) ** = Stillborns (STs) *** = Body parts

- 6 The full profile of where families came from can be seen in Appendix 2. In summary 160 came from Durham, 18 came from Spennymoor and 334 from other areas. There have been 3 NVF cremations undertaken for the period covered by this report compared to none in the comparable period last year. There were 83 less cremations undertaken in the period June to August 2021 compared to the same period last year.

Memorials

- 7 The table below outlines the number and value of the memorials sold in the period June to August 2021 compared to the same period the previous year.

	Jun-Aug 2020/21	Jun-Aug 2021/22
	Number £	Number £
Vase Blocks	8 5,176	2 1,294
Large Plaques	15 6,330	17 7,152
Small Plaques	5 1,305	4 1,059
Niche	3 3,707	2 2,543
Renewal	28 2,233	61 12,151
Memorial leaves	0 0	8 800
Total	59 18,751	94 24,999

- 8 The number and value of memorials sold 94 / £24,999 compares to 59 / £18,751 in the same period last year, which is an increase of 35 memorials sold and an increase of £6,248 year on year.

Operational Matters

Recycling of Metals Scheme

- 9 Members may recall from the last meeting that extra funds from collections in 2020 had resulted in a second round of nominations being made available, therefore we nominated the Little Angels Garden of Remembrance and a bank transfer was made to them in June 2021 for £10,000. A second round of nominations has now also been released. We have therefore nominated Chyrelle Addams Breast Cancer Trust and await a response.

Green Flag Application

- 10 The Green Flag Award recognises good quality parks and green spaces and is a sign to visitors that sites are well maintained and well managed with excellent facilities. Once again, this year Central Durham Crematorium was successful in obtaining a Green Flag Award for the tenth year running, which is a great achievement.
- 11 This award is testimony to the dedication of the staff working at the Crematorium and comes on top of the award of Gold Star Status in the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management Accreditation.

Heritage Open Weekend

- 12 Members will be aware that the Durham Heritage Open Weekend has been running for several years and Durham Crematorium has been part of this event.
- 13 We were asked to participate in the September 2021 event, however due to risks associated with Covid 19 it was decided not to take part this year.

Question from the Public

- 14 A written question from a member of the public relating to Durham Crematorium was raised at the Durham County Council meeting held on 14 July 2021. The question, along with the response from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods & Climate Change is shown as follows:

15 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.

Further Information for Members

- 16 Members will be aware that the fees and charges for the Joint Committee are reviewed on an annual basis at the January committee meeting.
- 17 The table below shows up to date benchmarking of adult cremation fees across the region, which indicates an average cremation fee of £830 (inclusive of medical referees fees and environmental surcharge where appropriate).

Adult Cremation Fee	Cost £
Durham	740
Mountsett	740

Adult Cremation Fee	Cost £
Gateshead	761
Hartlepool	761
Stockton on Tees	765
North Tyneside	789
Middlesbrough	810
South Tyneside	816
Northumberland	820
Sunderland	865
Newcastle	872
Coundon	884
Redcar & Cleveland	890
Darlington	930
Average	830

- 18 Modest increases in the last few years have resulted in the Central Durham and Mountsett Crematoria charges remaining the lowest in comparison with all other neighbouring facilities in the region.
- 19 The cremation fee levied for the Central Durham Crematorium in 2021/22 (inclusive of medical referee fees) is £740, which is £90 below the average charges currently levied across the region.
- 20 In addition to the standard adult cremation fee, the Joint Committee also offers the following discounted fees for off-peak services (commenced April 2014) and direct cremations (commenced April 2019) to help tackle funeral poverty within the area:
- Off Peak service (9.00am until 10.00am) £660
 - Direct Cremation – Attended (no service) £660
 - Direct Cremation – Unattended (no service) £520
- 21 Since Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2009 there has been significant investment in the Central Durham Crematorium totalling £4.1 million, with future improvement works of £0.9 million identified in the Service Asset Management Plan below.

Service Asset Management Plan

- 16 The Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) was presented to Members on 1 October 2020 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 3 and will need to be refined in line with any future decisions taken by Members.
- 17 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 2022/23 have been estimated to the sum of £164,647. These will need to be considered as part of the budget setting process for next year. These works include:

- Carry out installation of charging points
- Carry out replacement of pedestrian sweeper
- Carry out repairs to boundary wall
- Carry out improvements to cremator charging operations
- Carry out improvements to shrub beds
- Carry out feasibility into excess heat regeneration.
- Carry out Re-lining of 1 hearth
- Carry out enlargement of cremator no 2

Priority 2 works, which will need to feature in 2023/24 budget plans have been estimated to the sum of £24,000 and the works are set out below:

- Carry out Re-lining of 1 hearth
- Re-Decoration Works

Priority 3 works, which would fall beyond the next two years, have been estimated to the sum of £71,000 and the works are set out below:

- Carry out Re-lining of 1 cremator
- Carry out Re-lining of 1 hearth

Longer term works have been costed to the sum of £606,000 and some of the works include:

- Re-Decoration Works x 9 times (every 2 years)
- Carry out Re-lining of cremators x 2 times (every 8 years)
- Carry out Re-lining of hearths x 9 times (every 2 years)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report

Finance

As identified in the report with regards to the position of the Income.

Consultation

Officers of Spennymoor Town Council were consulted on the contents of this report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

There are no Equality and Diversity implications associated with this report.

Human Rights

There are no Human Rights implications associated with this report.

Crime and Disorder

There are no Crime and Disorder implications associated with this report.

Staffing

As identified in the report.

Accommodation

There are no accommodation implications associated with this report.

Risk

As identified in the report.

Procurement

There are no procurement issues associated with this report.

Climate Change

There are no climate change issues associated with this report.

Appendix 2: Breakdown of Figures

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total Jun-Aug
DURHAM	53	59	48	160
BILLINGHAM	1			1
BISHOP AUCKLAND	2	4	6	12
BLACKHALL	3	2	2	7
BIRTLEY		1		1
CHESTER LE STREET	12	15	11	38
CHILTON	2	2		4
CONSETT	1	2		3
CROOK	7	3	4	14
DARLINGTON	1			1
EASINGTON	2	4	4	10
ESH		1		1
ESH WINNING	1	1		2
FERRYHILL	2	6	8	16
FISHBURN	1	1	2	4
GATESHEAD	1	4	2	7
GREAT LUMLEY		2	5	7
HARTLEPOOL	1		1	2
HASWELL	1			1
HETTON LE HOLE	1	4	7	12
HORDEN	2	4	4	10
HOUGHTON	3	3	7	13
LANCHESTER	2	1	1	4
LANGLEY PARK	1	5	2	8
MORPETH			1	1
MURTON	7	5	1	13
NEW BRANCEPETH	1			1
NEWCASTLE	1	1	2	4
NEWTON AYCLIFFE	2	4	1	7
NORTHALLERTON	1			1
PELTON	1		1	2
PETERLEE	8	8	10	26
SACRISTON	4	3	2	9
SEAHAM	8	5	12	25
SEDFIELD		1	1	2
SHILDON	1		1	2
SHOTTON	2	2	2	6
SOUTH HETTON		1	1	2
SPENNYMOOR	6	7	5	18
STANLEY	1	1	3	5
STATION TOWN	1		1	2
STOCKTON	2	1		3
SUNDERLAND		2	2	4
SOUTHERN ENGLAND		1		1
THORNLEY	2	1	2	5
TOW LAW			1	1
TRIMDON	6	2	2	10
WASHINGTON		2		2
WEST CORNFORTH	2	1		3
WHEATLEY HILL	1	3	1	5
WILLINGTON	2	2	2	6
WINGATE	1	1	2	4
WOLSINGHAM	1			1
YORKSHIRE		2	1	3
Total	161	180	171	512