

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 31 January 2022 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor

Durham County Council

Councillors V Andrews, B Bainbridge, A Batey, J Charlton, C Hampson, A Hanson, P Heaviside, K Rooney and M Walton

Gateshead Council:

Councillors D Bradford (Vice-Chair), Burnett, L Green, S Green and M Ord

1 Apologies for absence, if any

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Dodds (Gateshead Council).

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitutes

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 September 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Performance and Operational Report

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar which provided a quarterly update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change provided a summary of the report including information on the number of cremations undertaken during the period, noting that there had been a decrease of 7 on the comparable period the

previous year. Information was also provided regarding the sale of memorial Plaques, noting a decrease of 4 plaques were sold during the comparable period the previous year.

An update was also provided in respect of staffing and a note of personal thanks from the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar for the crematorium's staff for their continued efforts during this difficult time.

Further details were reported in respect of the Green Flag application and the recycling of metals scheme.

Moving on to discuss the Cleaning SLA, the Finance Manager explained that the joint committee were asked to consider and approve a revised SLA for the period April 2022 to March 2024, costing £8,164 per year (a 3.6% increase on the recharges levied in 2021/22), which included all labour and materials required to carry out the cleaning activities.

In conclusion the Finance Manager provided an update on the cremator replacement programme noting that the 2 new cremators were up and running, with emission testing of cremator number 2 being undertaken earlier in the month.

Councillor Burnett asked whether consideration could be given to dividing future cheques between more than one organisation as the total value was significant and could provide valuable contribution to more than one charity. She felt that £15,000 could be divided between three charities.

The Chair noted that this has been discussed at the previous meeting and the Neighbourhood Protection Manager had agreed to look into this further. For the Joint Committee's reference Appendix 3 to the report listed the current charities which had been nominated. Any further additions to this would be welcomed.

Councillor Bainbridge asked whether there was any scrap value in the cremators which were to be removed. The Finance Manager advised that the contract for the replacement cremators included a disposal fee.

Resolved: That the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee

- (a) Note the current performance of the crematorium.
- (b) Note the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award.
- (c) Note the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme.
- (d) Consider and approve the SLA with regards to the cleaning of the crematorium.
- (e) Note the update with regards to cremator replacement.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/21, with Projected Outturn at 31/03/22

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which provided members with details of the provisional outturn position for 2021/22 and the projected level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Walton asked for further information regarding the overspend on purchasing of webcasts and the Finance Manager explained that the figure stated within the report was offset by the increased income.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee note the April to December 2021 financial monitoring report and associated provisional outturn position at 31 March 2022, including the projected year position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee.

7 Provision of Support Services 2022/23

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Climate Change and Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which outlined the proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2022 to March 2023 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained that the proposed SLA considered the proportion of time spent by key staff undertaking the requirements of the Joint Committee. The proposed charge for 2022/23 was therefore £23,750, a 3% increase on the recharges levied in 2021/22. The applicable fee took into consideration the impact of pay and price inflation.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee consider and approve the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 (including relevant schedule) for the year 2022/23.

8 Fees and Charges 2022/23

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of the proposed fees and charges for the Mountsett Crematorium for 2022/23 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained that the report sought to increase the fees and charges as shown at Appendix 2 of the report by £25 (3.4%) per cremation from £740 to £765. Further small changes to fees were detailed within paragraphs 12 and 13 of the report, however, advised that the majority of fees would remain at the same levels as 2021/22.

Councillor Charlton added that she struggled with the proposed increase noting funeral charges were already so high and with additional added costs such as webcasting this added to increased burden on families. Councillor Bainbridge echoed those comments.

The Chair pointed out that members should be mindful of the charges being imposed in other authority areas, noting that even with the proposed increase Mountsett was a cheaper option, the Crematorium was a business and needed to remain competitive in the market. In addition, fees and charges were harmonised with the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee note and approve the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2022, which seeks to increase cremation charges by £25 (3.4%) per cremation from £740 to £765. And that that the proposed fees and charges are incorporated into the 2022/23 budget.

9 External Audit Arrangements 2022/23 to 2024/25

Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which presented proposals for the continued delivery of the external audit by Mazars for the three financial years 2022/23 to 2024/25 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change explained that the quotation provided by Mazars for 2022/23 of £1,700 was £270 higher than the previous three years (which was a fixed price) and would be increased in line with CPI for the two years thereafter. However, the increase was in line with public sector audit cost inflation that is being experienced throughout the audit industry. Mazar had met all deadlines for competition of the audits and have always proven very accessible.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee appoint Mazars to undertake the external audit arrangements for the 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

10 2022/23 Revenue Budget - Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change which set out for consideration, proposals with regards to the 2022/23 revenue budgets for Mountsett Crematorium (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager Neighbourhoods and Climate Change advised that the budget had been developed with the Bereavement Services Manager, taking into account the proposed Fees and Charges set out in the previous report, the 2021/22 forecast outturn position and known expenditure pressures in the coming year.

Details of the proposed budget and main changes from the 2021/22 budget were detailed in the report at paragraphs 4 to 12. The report further provided details of the surplus redistribution and earmarked reserves.

Resolved:

That Members of the Joint Committee note and approve the budget proposals contained within the report (as set out at Appendix 2) and that members note the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2023 (also set out at Appendix 2).

11 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

12 Restructure Report

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Neighbourhood Protection Manager which provided details of proposals relating to changes within the Crematorium staffing structure (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained in the report be agreed.