

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Chapel - Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton on **Monday 25 April 2022 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor D Bradford (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Durham County Council

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

Gateshead Council:

Councillors D Bradford (Vice-Chair) and M Ord

1 Apologies for absence, if any

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Batey (Durham) and Councillors D Burnett, K Dodds, L Green and S Green (Gateshead Council).

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitutes.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 January 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2022 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 Bereavement Services Manager provided a summary of performance for the period 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022. He advised that 416 cremations had been

undertaken during the period, compared to 487 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 71. The total number of cremations in 2021/22 was 1,463 compared with 1,758 in 2020/21, a decrease of 295, mainly due to the COVID pandemic peak in 2020/21.

The actual number of cremations undertaken was therefore 163 more than the budget position, resulting in an over achievement of cremation fee income of £96,080 in year.

Moving on to the sale of memorials the number and value of memorials sold of 39 / £5,597 compares to 24 / £5,701 in the same period last year, an increase of 5.

The Bereavement Services Manager further provided details of the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain which was to be held in June 2022. He asked that any member who wished to attend contact him for the necessary arrangements to be made.

Details were then reported regarding the recycling of metals scheme and it was noted the ICCM Board had opened a new round of nominations. One nomination per scheme was requested and the charity was to be bereavement related or linked to life limiting conditions, survivors and their families.

In conclusion the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar provided an update on the cremator replacement works, noting that the two new cremators were now full operational and an independent inspection had been carried out on Cremator 1 which had fully passed the tests. With regard to the temporary cremator that was purchased during COVID-19 it was noted that an options report on future requirements would be brought back to the committee later in the year.

Councillor Walton asked whether the Great North-East Air Ambulance was an eligible charity for ICCM nomination and she asked that where possible a local charity should be chosen. In response the Bereavement Services Manager advised that the GNEAA had previously been nominated. He agreed that a local charity should always be selected where possible and asked that any nominations be emailed to him before the closing date in July.

Councillor Charlton asked for some further clarification on the intended course of action to be taken in relation to the temporary cremator. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that an options report would be brought back to a future meeting.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee

- a. Note the current performance of the crematorium.

- b. Note the date of the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain and inform the Bereavement Services Manager of any representation from the Joint Committee.
- c. Note the latest round of recycling of metals.
- d. Note the update with regards to the cremator replacement project.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2022

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 details of the provisional outturn position for 2021/22 and the projected level if reserves and balances as at 31 March 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Finance Manager (Neighbourhoods and Climate Change) explained that the projected outturn is a surplus (Before transfers to reserves and a distribution of surpluses to the partner authorities) of £373,591 against a budgeted surplus of £24,662, £348,929 more than the budgeted position.

Contributions to the earmarked reserves were also forecasted to be £348,929 more than originally budgeted and in line with the MCJC Reserve Policy to maintain a General Reserve of 30% of the income budget, a transfer to the General Reserve of £10,358 was required.

The total reserves and balances position was forecast to be £931,277 at the year-end comprising of a retained reserve of £622,591 and a general reserve of £308,686.

Councillor Walton raised a query regarding significant variances and the Finance Manager (Neighbourhoods and Climate Change) advised that this was mainly due to the cremator replacement works overlapping financial years into 2022/23, which would be adjusted in the reserves budget next year.

The Chair commented that the reserves were reaching a sizeable amount and asked if there were any predictions on how this would fair of the coming few years. The Finance Manager (Neighbourhoods and Climate Change) advised that the reserves were constantly reviewed, however the current level of reserves whilst appearing to be high were justified and this had been demonstrated through the recent emergencies which the crematorium had faced.

Councillor Charlton raised a query regarding the increase in gas and electric charges and whilst noting that solar panels did provide some of the energy used at the crematorium, she queried whether the budgeted amount was still adequate given the anticipated increases. The Finance Manager (Neighbourhoods and

Climate Change) advised that the crematorium had followed DCC's methodology in setting the budget in relation to gas and electric and felt that the budget provided adequate resources to meet the increasing costs, based upon the information available. The Bereavement Services Manager added that in addition to the solar panels used at the crematorium, heat exchange from the cremators also heated the building.

The Chair asked whether any consideration had been given to water cremations and or other methods of cremation which reduce the crematoriums carbon footprint. The Bereavement Services Manager advised this was being considered and would be brought forward to the joint committee as a future report.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 Risk Register Update 2021/22 Review 2

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and Corporate Director of Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which provided details of the outcome of the half-yearly risk review in March 2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee note the content of the report and the updated position.

8 Annual Internal Audit Report 2021/22

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which presented the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2021/22 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Audit Manager explained that the Annual Internal Audit Report provided an Opinion which makes conclusions on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Committee's Framework of Governance, Risk Management and Control. The report provided a Substantial overall assurance opinion and identified that there was a sound system of control.

Councillor Walton asked what other assurance opinions could be provided. The Audit Manager explained that Substantial was the highest rating, followed by moderate and limited.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.