

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 29 September 2022** at **3.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor N Foster (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors J Chaplow (Vice-Chair), J Blakey, D Brown, J Cosslett, K Fantarrow, S Quinn, K Robson, C Varty and M Wilson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillor D Ranyard

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Simpson, M Stead and Town Councillor C Maddison.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 External Audit Annual Review of the Return for the year ended 31 March 2022

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee that presented the External Auditors

(Mazars LLP) Annual Review of the Joint Committees Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager advised that the audit had now been completed and there had been no material weaknesses highlighted around the Joint Committee's system of internal controls.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committees Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2022 including the External Report 2021/22 Certificate (attached at Appendix 2) be approved.

6 Performance and Operational Report

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

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that there were 596 cremations undertaken during the period 1 June 2022 to 31 August 2022, compared to 512 in the comparable period last year, an increase of 84 cremations for the period. It was noted that 177 families were from Durham, 26 from Spennymoor and 393 families were from other areas. The number and value of memorial plaques sold were 76 / £21,284 compared to 94 / £24,999 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 18 memorials and £3,715 in income.

It was confirmed that the staff restructure process had been completed and appointments had been made, however, a Crematorium Attendant position had recently become vacant and was in the process of being advertised.

Referring to the Recycling of Metals Scheme, it was reported that extra funds from collections in 2021 had resulted in a second round of nominations being made available. The Chair presented Daft as A Brush Cancer Patient Care with a cheque for £12,000 on 23 August 2022.

It was noted that Durham Crematorium was successful in obtaining the Green Flag Award for the eleventh year running, which was a great achievement and testimony to the dedication of the staff, as well as the award of Gold Star Status in the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management Accreditation.

The Heritage Open Weekend that was held from 15 to 18 September 2022 had been very successful and positive feedback had been received. It was confirmed that the new crematorium gates had now been fitted and Members were invited to call in and have a look around.

Referring to electricity generation, installation quotations from specialist contractors indicated an expected cost of between £400,000 to £500,000 for Durham Crematorium. The estimated payback period would be in excess of 40 years, therefore, the Construction Consultancy services section would not recommend this type of system. Further consultation would be ongoing with regards to options. It was noted that recommendations had been made to install fans and heat recovery systems to some areas around the building to help reduce internal air temperatures and provide adequate mechanical ventilation at a cost of £83,874, which would be incorporated within the 2023/24 capital budget.

The Service Asset Management Plan was split into four priorities of maintenance needs and included all the completed and planned crematorium improvement works. Priority 1 essential works, had been estimated at £93,049 which would be considered as part of the budget setting process for 2023/24. Priority 2 works, would feature in 2024/25 budget plans had been estimated at £1,614,730. Priority 3 works, would fall beyond the next two years had been estimated at £96,000, with longer term works costed at £544,000.

The Chair attended the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Conference and noted that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had contributed over £15 million to charities. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar added that the ICCM were looking at the request to review the value of money awarded to allow more charities to benefit from the scheme. Councillor S Quinn praised the scheme which makes an amazing difference to charitable organisations in the community.

Responding to a query from Councillor D Brown regarding the Heritage Weekend, the Crematorium Site Manager advised that the turnout was not as good as previous years, however the feedback received was excellent and the tours were well received by the community.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That the current position with regards to electric generation be noted and funding for ventilation works be agreed;
- (iii) That the content of the Service Asset Management Plan attached at Appendix 5 be agreed and factored into budget planning for 2023/24 and beyond.

7 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/08/22, with Projected Revenue and Capital Outturn at 31/03/23

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee that provided details of the provisional outturn position for 2022/23 and the projected level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

Responding to a query from the Chair regarding the energy price increase, the Finance Manager advised that Government had announced a package for businesses which also applies to Councils for a six-month period. The Joint Committee would be provided with updates at future meetings.

Resolved:

That the April to August 2022 financial monitoring report and associated provisional revenue and capital outturn positions at 31 March 2023, including the projected year position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

8 Risk Register Update 2022/23 Review 1

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

Resolved:

That the content of the report and updated position be noted.

9 Internal Audit Charter

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which sought agreement on the Internal Audit Charter to be applied to reviews undertaken as part of the Internal Audit plan for 2022/23 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the Internal Audit Charter set out at Appendix 2 of the report be approved.

10 Annual Review of the System of Internal Audit

The Joint Committee received a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee that provided details of a review of the

effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service, which was carried out by the County Council's Audit Committee in July 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

It was reported that the review examined Internal Audit's self-assessment, and the final report from CIPFA provided the opinion that 'Durham County Council's Internal Audit Service's self-assessment is accurate and as such we conclude that they FULLY CONFORM to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA Local Government Application Note'. Within the assessment report, some minor improvement opportunities had been identified and an action plan had been developed for those to be addressed which had now been implemented.

Resolved:

That the information demonstrating the efficiency and effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service be noted.

11 Provision of Internal Audit and Risk Management Services 2023-2026

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which presented proposals for the continued delivery of Internal Audit and Risk Management Services by Durham County Council to cover the period April 2023 to March 2026 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

- (i) That the proposed Internal Audit and Risk Management Services SLA with Durham County Council covering the next 3 financial years as set out at Appendix 2 of the report be approved;
- (ii) That the proposed annual audit plan and fee as set out in Schedule B of the SLA be approved.

12 Budget Strategy Report

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and the Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which outlined a range of issues that would be considered as part of medium-term financial planning for the Central Durham Crematorium. The report set out proposals to increase the fees and charges from 2023/24 together with details of the budget planning assumptions over the coming three years (for copy see file of minutes).

The Finance Manager reported that there had been significant capital investment of over £4.1 million at Central Durham Crematorium since Local Government Reorganisation in 2009, with further investments of nearly £2.5 million planned for the coming years in line with the Service Asset Management Plan.

The Finance Manager highlighted the proposals within the report and noted the importance of maintaining sufficient reserves levels to facilitate the planned investment to ensure high performance. On balancing the increase costs for the crematoriums and the cost of living crisis, it was proposed that an increase in fees and charges of £30 in 2023/24 to £795 would be a fair level to protect the capital investment without causing undue strain on the general public. It was noted that Central Durham and Mountsett Crematorium would continue to remain the lowest in comparison with all neighbouring facilities and well below the average costs.

Referring to the national energy inflation increases, the Finance Manager advised that Central Durham Crematorium budget assumptions were in line with Durham County Council's MTFP model, with energy prices expected to rise further in 2023/24. Assumptions had been built into the medium term budget forecasts at this stage. Following Government announcements to tackle the energy crisis, updates and revised forecasts would be reported to future meetings of the Joint Committee.

Councillor S Quinn acknowledged the need to remain competitive and agreed with the recommendations, adding that various funeral options were available for families who have financial difficulties.

Responding to a query from Councillor K Fantarrow regarding financial help for families who are unable to afford cremations, the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that circumstance would have to qualify under the Public Health Act for the crematorium to step in, following instructions from the coroner.

Councillor D Ranyard acknowledged the need to be prudent during the current financial climate and the investment that would be required going forward, however queried if there was scope to increase the surplus distribution by a small percentage. He added that Spennymoor Town Council were under increasing financial pressures and any additional funds from the surplus distribution would help alleviate some pressures. The Finance Manager advised that during the current financial pressures it would be sensibly for distributions to remain the same, however it would be considered further during the budget setting process.

Resolved:

- (i) That the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) That the proposed increase in the fees and charges as identified in the report be approved;
- (iii) That the budget strategy be reviewed in September 2023 in preparation for the 2024/25 budget setting year.

13 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.

14 Letter Regarding Potential Sale

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Neighbourhood Protection Manager which provided information regarding a speculative letter asking for discussions regarding a potential sale of the crematoria (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendations within the report be agreed.