
Report of Graham Harrison, Bereavement Services Manager

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee with the quarterly update relating to performance and other operational matters.

Executive Summary

2. This report provides Members of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee with a quarterly update of performance and operational matters at the crematorium.

Recommendation(s)

3. It is recommended that Members of the Mountsett Joint Committee:
 - a. Note the current performance of the crematorium.
 - b. Note the attendance at the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain.
 - c. Note the distribution of recycling income to the respective charities.
 - d. Consider the increase in costs of the energy improvement works.
 - e. Consider options for the temporary cremator and agree which one to proceed with.

Background

- This report provides Members of the Mountsett 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

- The table below provides details of the number of cremations for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023 inclusive, with comparative data in the same periods last year:

	2021/22	2022/23	Change
January	154	145	- 9
February	136	133	- 3
March	126	132	+ 6
TOTAL	416	410	- 6

- There were 410 cremations undertaken during the period 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023, compared to 416 in the same period last year, a decrease of 6. The profile of where families came from can be seen below:

Gateshead	106
Durham	228
Outside Area	76
Total	410

- The total number of cremations in 2022/23 was 1,445 compared with 1,463 in 2021/22, a decrease of 18.
- The 2022/23 budget was set at a prudent assumption of 1,300 cremations during the year. The actual number of cremations undertaken was therefore 145 more than the budget position. This is reflected in an over achievement of cremation fee income of £90,985 in year, which is included in the budgetary control report.
- The table below shows the comparative figures for the previous ten financial years:

Year	Cremations
2013/14	1,191
2014/15	1,320
2015/16	1,296
2016/17	1,439
2017/18	1,396
2018/19	1,331
2019/20	1,399
2020/21	1,758

Year	Cremations
2021/22	1,463
2022/23	1,445
10 Year Average	1,404

10. For Members information, the table below provides details of the number of direct cremations, which are included in the totals above, for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, with comparative data for the same period last year:

	2021/22	2022/23	Change
Direct Cremation – Attended	0	0	0
Direct Cremation - Unattended	98	67	- 31
TOTAL	98	67	- 31

Memorials

11. The table below outlines the number and value of the memorials sold in the period January to March 2022 compared to the same period the previous year.

	Jan – March 2021/22		Jan – March 2022/23	
	Number	£	Number	£
Large Plaques	2	804	2	804
Small Plaques	13	3,393	10	2,610
Memorial leaves	14	1,400	5	500
Renewals	0	0	8	1,392
Total	29	5,597	25	5,306

12. In overall terms the number and value of memorials sold of 25 / £5,306 compares to 29 / £5,597 in the same period last year, a decrease of 4 memorials and a small decrease in income of £291.
13. The table below identifies the total number and value of memorials sold during 2022/23 compared to 2021/22:

	2021/22 Total		2022/23 Total	
	Number	£	Number	£
Large Plaques	14	5,808	6	2,466
Small Plaques	66	17,871	53	14,388
Memorial leaves	32	3,200	31	3,100
Renewals	0	0	13	2,262
Total	112	26,879	103	22,216

Operational Matters

Cremation & Burial Conference & Exhibition 2023

14. The Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial & Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain is to be held at the Hilton Ageas Bowl, Southampton from Monday 26 to Wednesday 28 June 2023. As in previous years, the necessary arrangements will be made for representation at the conference by the Bereavement Services Manager.

Recycling of Metals Scheme

15. Members were advised at the previous meeting that we had nominated Cancer Research UK and Red Sky Foundation and a payment of £6,000 was made to each charity in April.
16. For members information we are currently trialling out a new company with regards to collection of metals for recycling which could increase distribution for more charities in the future.

Energy Improvement Works

17. At the last meeting Members were advised that a sum of £75,000 was allocated in the 2022/23 budget to carry out remaining energy improvement works to the building. However an updated quotation of £110,000 was received for this work which excludes cavity wall insulation. This would require an additional £35,000 in order to complete works to replace the roof lights, remaining doors, cladding of pipework and electrical works.
18. Members asked the Bereavement Services Manager to speak to the project management team and see if this cost could be reduced or to go externally.
19. Discussion were held with our design services team, however they have informed me that we are unable to go out externally due to Health and Safety issues, also due to costs of material etc they are unable to reduce costs any further.
20. Members are therefore asked to consider the increase in costs and decide if they wish to go ahead with the works.

Temporary Cremator

21. Members will recall that a temporary cremator was purchased (not including container) during Covid 19 in order to assist with the pandemic and also to help ensure business continuity in the event of failure with the previous cremators, which were becoming unreliable at that time.
22. The two new cremators were fully installed and operational in 2021 and they have proved to be be very reliable. It is considered that they will

have the necessary capacity to cope with any future increased demand, without the need for the temporary cremator.

23. This temporary cremator was well used during this period, however more recently we have started to use it infrequently.
24. The monthly rental costs for the temporary cremator are £1,035 for renting the container and £385 to cover routine maintenance and servicing of the cremator, which is contracted to run until July 2023, when a further annual contract could be entered into. The agreement states that the rental period can be terminated early by giving three months notice.
25. The original agreement made during March 2020 included a fee of £33,450 to recover the empty container with the cremator being relocated elsewhere at Mountsett crematorium. Applying RPI to the March 2020 price as per the contract, gives a revised cost of £41,670 at today's price.
26. The cremator is unabated and we therefore have to pay an environmental surcharge to CAMEO of £59 per cremation from 1 January 2023 when using it.
27. It is now considered an appropriate time for Members to consider options for the temporary cremator, which are detailed below.

Option 1 ***Purchase the container that the cremator is currently housed in***

After speaking with the contractor, Facultatieve, they have informed us that they will not sell us the container. Therefore this option is discounted.

Option 2 ***Continue to rent the container***

The Joint Committee will continue to pay the rental and maintenance at a cost of £17,040 per year (subject to contract renewal).

Option 3 ***Contractor to remove the container and cremator***

Facultatieve would be willing to take back the container and the cremator into their possession, including dismantling and collection.

Facultatieve have made an offer for the return of our cremator to them on the suggested following terms:

- A used cremator normally has little residual value, as there isn't really a market for them.
- Terminate the contract immediately and they will waive the decommissioning and collection fee for the

container of £41,670 plus the 3 months rental and maintenance fee of £4,260.

- This potentially saves us £45,930, or we could consider it as being the residual sale value of the cremator, with our contract being terminated in full early. The contractor would then try to locate a potential buyer for the used cremator or remove any serviceable parts.

There are however associated remedial costs for the site when the container and cremator are removed. These include fencing works, gas / electrical works and reinstatement of the concrete pad and have been estimated at £20,000.

Option 4 ***Contractor removes the container and the cremator is moved into storage***

This option is to terminate the contract for the container and move the cremator into storage at Meadowfield depot.

The costs associated with this option are:

- £41,670 decommissioning and collection fee for the container
- £4,260 for 3 months rental for the contract termination period
- Unknown but significant cramage and haulage costs for moving the cremator to the depot.

The cremator would need to be stored carefully so that it is in a non-condensing environment to protect the electronics, and also frost free. It is considered by the contractor that the cremator would gradually deteriorate due to lack of use and corrosion.

28. It is recommended that due to the infrequent use of the temporary cremator and also the financial implications detailed above, Members approve Option 3.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

As outlined in the report.

Finance

As identified in the report.

Consultation

None, however, Officers of Gateshead Council were provided with a copy of the report and given opportunity to comment/raise any detailed questions on the content of the report in advance of circulation to members of the Mountsett Crematorium.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

There are no implications.

Climate Change

There are no implications.

Human Rights

There are no implications.

Crime and Disorder

There are no implications.

Staffing

As identified in the report.

Accommodation

There are no implications.

Risk

There is an ongoing risk with regards to the functioning of the new cremators.

Procurement

There are no implications.