

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Durham Crematorium, South Road, Durham on **Wednesday 25 April 2012 at 5.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Marr (Chair)

Durham County Council:

Councillors M Plews (Vice-Chair), J Chaplow, N Foster, D Stoker and G Holland

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors JL Wood and JV Graham

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from A Hopgood

Also Present:

Councillor Kevin Thompson

A1 Minutes of the meeting held 25 January 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 January 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chair.

A2 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no Declarations of Interest.

A3 Report of the Superintendent and Registrar

The Superintendent and Registrar, Alan José asked Members to note the performance figures from January to March 2012 and the comparison to the same period for 2011, highlighting that there was a net increase of 32 cremations, though the overall figure for 2011/12 was down approximately 3.6% on last year's figure. Members were reminded that the overall of 2,200 was still more than the budgeted figure of 2,040, this amount being a prudent projection factoring in the possible disruption to the Crematorium while the major capital works were being undertaken. Councillors noted that the death rate had been the lowest recorded and that the approximate 4% reduction matched that of the reduction in the number of cremations.

Members also noted that the number of memorials sold had increased by 35% in comparison to the previous year, accepting that 33% were renewals of those memorials purchased in 2001.

The Superintendent and Registrar noted that as previously agreed, arrangements for the Councillor J Marr and the Superintendent and Registrar to and the Chair of the Joint Committee had been made to attend the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and The Cremation Society of Great Britain being held 2-4 July 2012 at Gateshead.

The Joint Committee learned that the vacancy for the Cremator Operator post had been filled with the applicant being the third choice candidate, the first and second choice candidates being unable to take up the post after it being offered. The Superintendent and Registrar noted that just prior to the meeting, the HR section had explained that a start date was being arranged for the successful applicant, it being around 7 May.

Members noted the work of Mr Stephen Robson in respect of gardening maintenance, on a voluntary basis thorough a government scheme. The Joint Committee was informed that Mr Robson had been responsible for the building of the Life and Soul Garden.

The Superintendent and Registrar explained that Mr Stephen Tinkler was approaching 25 years in service at the Crematorium and asked whether the Joint Committee would wish to write to him recognising that service. The Chair agreed that this would be an appropriate gesture and that perhaps a small gift could be provided. Councillor N Foster noted that Officers at DCC had been provided with small gifts in the past for long service and that perhaps a small gift and letter could be arranged, at the discretion of the Chair and the Superintendent and Registrar.

Members were reminded of the request from the Agenda 21 Action Partnership in relation to use of the Crematorium Chapel for Interment Services and added that Durham County Council had agreed in principal for Agenda 21 Action Partnership to develop and run a woodland burial site within the South Road Cemetery, which in turn could result in a request to continue to use the Crematorium Chapel in line with previously agreed arrangements.

The Superintendent and Registrar noted that the update regarding the Cremator Replacement and Crematoria Redevelopment Project had been circulated to the Joint Committee and was also attached to the agenda papers. Members were informed that the first of the new cremators was operational and had been in use today, 25 April 2012 and that the second and third cremators should be on-line by the end of the week and the end of the following week respectively. Councillors learned that the old cremators should be removed by Friday, 27 April 2012, with the total decommissioning to be complete by 7 May 2012. The Superintendent and Registrar reminded Members that the works were on budget, as would be confirmed by the budget report to follow and that there was only a slight delay of one week as flue arrangements were more complex than originally anticipated and this required further fabrication.

The Superintendent and Registrar added that the Pre-Payment Bond issues regarding registration documentation for the Financial Services Authority (FSA) were being drawn together by a Durham County Council Solicitor, Sarah Grigor and a further updated would be given at the next meeting.

Councillors noted that as agreed by the Joint Committee previously, a Feasibility Study would be undertaken as regards Green Energy and Members learned that preparatory work was ongoing and a further update would be given at the next meeting.

Councillor J Graham asked whether the cremation figures for Spennymoor, as set out in Appendix 2 to the Superintendent and Registrar's report, had been omitted. The Superintendent and Registrar explained that the figures were included within the "Durham" figure, the figure for the area covered by the County Council boundary, those "out of the area" being then broken down further by area.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee:

- (i) Note the update report in relation to current performance of the Crematorium.
- (ii) Note the progress with regards to the vacant post.
- (iii) Note the current situation with regards the Green Burial Site.
- (iv) Note the progress with regards to the Cremator Replacement and Crematoria Redevelopment Project.
- (v) Note the current situation with regards the Pre-Payment Bond Scheme.
- (vi) Note the current position with regards the Green Energy Proposal.
- (vii) That the Superintendent and Registrar, in liaison with the Chair, select a small gift and write to Mr Tinker recognising his 25 years service.

A4 Financial Monitoring Report 2011/12: Provisional Outturn - Revenue and Capital

The Principal Accountant, Jo McMahon noted that this was the usual quarterly update report regarding the financial position for the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee, setting out the funds and reserves at 1 April 2011 and the projected position at 31 March 2012, taking into account the provisional financial outturn of income and expenditure in the year.

Members noted a net under spend in the income of £141,834 and that as agreed previously by the Joint Committee, the balance was transferred to the Major Capital Works reserve. The Joint Committee learned that there were under spends within the following areas: employees, agency (small body return), premises (NNDR) and savings associated with cremator testing and maintenance not being required as the new cremators had were tested as part of the installation process. It was added that, as previously reported, additional costs associated with the required drainage works had balanced against savings made, including the budget for path and roadway repairs.

The Principal Accountant reminded Members that the budget as set for 2011/12 had been prudent, taking into account projections for fewer cremations as a result of the major capital works and while the works did not affect the number of cremations, as previously explained by the Superintendent and Registrar, the death rate was the lowest recorded, with the 4% reduction mirroring the reduced numbers of cremations.

The Joint Committee noted the Cremator Replacement and Redevelopment Project budget was still on track at approximately £2.4 Million with a slight movement in the capital against fees, however, the bottom line remained consistent.

The Chair noted the saving against the Pandemic Operator training and the Superintendent and Registrar reminded Members that the replacement Cremator Operator had been recruited and that training was in place as regards pandemic operation.

The Chair also asked if all the reserves were required for capital works and the Principal Account noted that at the Annual General Meeting, Members would receive the annual Statement of Accounts report and may wish to discuss issues around the reserves accordingly.

Resolved:

- (i) That Members note the April 2011 to March 2012 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated provisional outturn position 2011/12.
- (ii) That Members note the April 2011 to March 2012 capital spend and projected outturn for the redevelopment project.

A5 Annual Internal Audit Report 2011/12

The Manager of Internal Audit and Risk, Avril Wallage referred Members to the Annual Internal Audit Report 2011/12 (for copy see file of minutes) and reiterated that the main points of the report were:

- Work carried out the Internal Audit section in line with the Service Level Agreement.
- Assurance, reviewing risks and operational controls.
- Work supporting risk management.
- Reviewing the corporate governance arrangements.
- Work to ensure the capital project was on track.

Members noted that the position was favourable, with a substantial overall assurance opinion, some minor control issues having been addressed by management.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

A6 Response to the 2011/12 Internal Audit Report

The Principal Accountant referred the Joint Committee to the response to the Internal Audit Report (for copy see file of minutes) and reiterated that the report had stated substantial assurance regarding internal control.

The Joint Committee noted that there were some minor points, 3 being a low classification, 1 issue being an advisory classification. Members noted that an action plan was drawn up to address the issues with the 3 low classification issues being:

- SAGE Accounting System – Finance was inputting information on behalf of Crematorium staff until training was completed, now information inputted by Crematorium staff.
- Signatures for collection of ashes – a checklist prepared setting out the procedure for ashes collection.
- Level of Sundry Debtors – Manual sales ledger moved to SAGE, Finance staff initially inputted for Crematorium staff, now undertaken by Crematorium staff.

The advisory classification referred to the reduction of petty cash levels and procurement of stamps through Durham County Council's ordering process, and Members noted that the Superintendent and Registrar had implemented this and the level of petty cash would be monitored over the next 12 months.

The Chair noted that he would have expected that there were strict procedures in place for the collection of ashes and also asked whether the Superintendent and Registrar had been able to get the stamps prior to the price increase. The Superintendent and Registrar explained that the collection of ashes was carefully controlled and on some of the records the signature of the person collecting the ashes was not the most legible. Members noted that therefore a printed name together with other information would be collected. The Joint Committee noted that there was a limit of 500 stamps per customer imposed by the Post Office for the purchase of stamps at the old price.

Resolved:

That the Members of the Joint Committee note the Internal Control requirements and the action plan contents (both implemented and required) with regards to addressing the Internal Audit recommendations.