

**DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
SPENNYMOOR TOWN COUNCIL**

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

AT A MEETING of the **CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE** held in **COMMITTEE ROOM 1B** at the **COUNTY HALL** on **27 JANUARY 2010** at **5.30 pm**.

PRESENT

COUNCILLOR J Marr in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Chaplow, N Foster, M Plews, R Rodgers, A Thomson and F Walker

Officers Present:

Paul Darby	Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, Durham County Council
Alan José	Superintendent and Registrar, Durham Crematorium
Joanne McMahon	Principal Account, Neighbourhood Services, DCC
Derek Shingleton	Accountant, Spennymoor Town Council
Sharon Spence	Clerk to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee
Graham Harrison	Bereavement Services Manager, Durham County Council

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Stoker and J Wood.

A1 Minutes of the meetings held on 15 July 2009

The minutes of the meetings held on 25 November 2009 and 14 December 2009 were confirmed by the Joint Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Report of the Superintendent and Registrar

The Superintendent and Registrar, Alan José, presented a Report relating to the following issues associated with the Crematorium.

Cremations

The Superintendent and Registrar reported the number of cremations for the period 1 October 2009 to 31 December 2009 inclusive.

These were 531 (+ 6 NVF), a decrease of 17 (+ 3 NVF) on the same period in the previous year. The total of 531 (+ 6 NVF) included 348 from outside the area, with the remaining total being 183 for the area.

Memorial Gardens

The Superintendent and Registrar reported that during the period 1 October 2009 to 31 December 2009, the following Vase Blocks and Memorial Plaques had been sold:

Vase Blocks	9
Large Plaques	20
Small Plaques	<u>6</u>
Total	35

Financial Information (Net of VAT)

Vase Blocks	4,468.18
Large Plaques	6,499.58
Small Plaques	<u>1,172.18</u>
Total	£12,139.94

Influenza Pandemic – Planning

The Superintendent and Registrar asked Members to note that the four additionally trained Cremator Operators were continuing to work to a regular rota and that the Superintendent and Registrar was in regular contact with the Civil Contingencies Unit, Regional Epidemiologist and Consultant in Communicable Diseases. For information, Members asked to note that three additional volunteers had been identified as Cremator Operators for Mounsett Crematorium.

50 Year Anniversary

The Joint Committee was informed that in addition to a booklet being prepared in conjunction with Professor Hillary Grainger, an expert in Crematoria Architecture, there would be a memorial service, with a marquee, possibly to be hired from Spennymoor Town Council. Members were asked to note that it was for Members to decide at what level the event should be pitched and that Members could choose a simple remembrance service, or aim to have an “open day” that incorporates a service in with several other events and activities that could include representation from other professionals from with the Funeral Services Industry.

Federation of Burial and Crematoria Authorities – Annual Return

The Superintendent and Registrar noted the Federation of Burial and Crematoria Authorities Annual Return of Statistics had been submitted, noting only 2 requests to inspect cremation forms having been received in the 2008/09 period. Members were informed that there had been 1 request in the current, 2009/10 period.

Recycling of Orthopaedic Implants and Non-Ferrous Metals

Members were made aware of the opportunity to join a recycling scheme for metal implants operated by OrthoMetals. The Joint Committee heard that the Institute of Crematory and Cremation Management had monitored the scheme in the UK and had reported positively on the company and the scheme. The Superintendent and Registrar noted that previously, the scheme generated money for charity, but could not be necessarily directed back into the local community but that now, this was possible with individual Crematoria being able to have a say in where money was used. The Superintendent and Registrar noted the scheme would cost nothing for Durham Crematorium to join, with OrthoMetals supplying the necessary storage bins and collecting the metal twice annually.

The Joint Committee heard that an additional bonus was that Durham Crematorium would no longer be required to bury such parts in unused parts of the Crematorium grounds, which were reaching saturation point in this regard.

Update on Staff

The Superintendent and Registrar asked Members to note that due to an a member of staff, Mr J Willis, having broken their leg, Mr R Goodson, a standby Operator training in case of an outbreak of pandemic flu, would be seconded to the Crematorium on a temporary basis to help during this busy period of the year.

Resolved:

- (a) That the Report be noted.
- (b) That the Superintendent and Registrar make the necessary arrangements for Durham Crematorium to enrol in the OrthoMetals recycling scheme.

A3 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – Budgetary Control Report, Quarter 3

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Paul Darby explained to Members that that the report was draw together in conjunction with the Superintendent and Registrar and outlined the financial position as at 31 December 2009 and set out the projected outturn figures up to 31 March 2010. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support concluded by asking the Joint Committee to note the variances as set out with the report and advised that whilst projections for the full-year were prudent, any additional income above initial estimates could be retained within the Crematorium accounts for use within the major capital works programme.

Resolved:

- (a) That Members note the April to December 2009 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated forecasts in terms of the outturn position 2009/10.
- (b) That quarterly reports continue to be submitted to Members for consideration, in line with the Forward Plan.

A4 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – Fees and Charges 2010/11

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support asked Members to note that within the DCC Policy Framework, a lot of work had been undertaken in order to harmonise fee and charges from the former District Authorities. Members heard that the two Crematoria that DCC was a major partner in, Durham and Mountsett also had differing fees and charges but as their budgets had already been set at their Joint Committees, a harmonisation exercise for the crematoria had been deferred until now. The Joint Committee were informed that a harmonisation exercise had now been undertaken (and all of DCC Bereavement Services) and this had led to an increase for the basic adult fee by 4.4% for Durham Crematorium. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support noted that this was still less than other crematoria allowing Durham to remain competitive. Members heard that in the context of the business case regarding cremator replacement, the increase in fees and charges were based on an assumed increase in gross income of 3% in the next year.

Councillor F Walker asked what the fees were for nearby facilities and whether Durham compared favourably. The Superintendent and Registrar replied that a nearby competitor charged approximately £120 more than Durham, though Members were asked to note that they operated a sliding scale of fees depending on the time of the service.

Resolved:

- (a) That Members of the Joint Committee note and approved the proposed Fees and Charges.
- (b) That the approved Fees and Charges are incorporated into the 2010/11 Budget.

A5 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – 2010/11 Revenue Budget

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support referred Members to the Options Appraisal Report as set out in the agenda papers.

Members were asked to note that the budget was based on outturn report and the fees and charges as set out in the previous items together with input from the Superintendent and Registrar as regards issues such as maintenance to footpaths, replacement organ, identity tokens, service booklets, the planned 50 Years Celebrations and preparatory work connected to the cremator replacement.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that the budget was prudent whilst taking into account work relating to the cremator replacement. The Joint Committee noted that the DCC Capital Programme would go to DCC Cabinet in February, but the Head of Finance, HR and Business Support noted that it was likely that the vast majority of the cremator replacement would be part of the 2011/12 budget.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support concluded by asking Members to note that the proposed surplus for Durham County Council and Spennymoor Town Council would remain the same as last year.

The Chair asked whether it was necessary for the additional identity tokens to be purchased as he believed they lasted up to 20 years. The Superintendent and Registrar replied stating that as each token carried through the cremation process as a means of identification, in fact one token was used up for each cremation.

Councillor N Foster asked whether the 50 Years Celebrations would be an opportunity to bring in companies from within funeral services and generate some additional revenue. The Superintendent and Registrar noted that if such companies were invited, it would be seen as being more of a public service rather than a profit making exercise, though it may be possible to have partner organisation provide sponsorship if this was deemed appropriate.

Resolved:

That the Members of the Joint Committee note and approve the budget proposals contained within the report.

A6 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – Risk Register Update

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that following an audit at Mounsett Crematorium issues had been raised as regards risk registers. Members learnt that whilst the Superintendent and Registrar did have risk management procedures in place for Durham Crematorium, the Head of Finance, HR and Business Support had sort to codify these into a formal Risk Register in order to help satisfy Audit Commission requirements.

The Joint Committee were informed that the preparation of the Risk Register was in line with Durham County Council risk management procedures; identifying risks, noting the gross outcome of such risks, understanding what procedures were currently in place to deal with the risks, establishing the level of the risk, deciding on whether action was required and then carrying out such actions.

Members' attention was drawn to a matrix containing the level and likelihood of risks and to a list setting out the 20 primary risks and methods of mitigation. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that there would be quarterly reviews of the risk register with the Superintendent and Registrar with reports back to the Joint Committee every 6 months highlighting any changes, additions, mitigation and progress in relation to actions taken to mitigate risks. Members were told that the initial exercise had allowed a baseline to be established by which future performance would be assessed, helping to further satisfy criteria set by the Audit Commission relating to governance.

Members asked whether the baseline position within the risk register had been moderated in order to provide challenge to the Superintendent and Registrar. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support confirmed that indeed the risk register had been moderated by an Officer within his Business Support section and that the risk register as presented to Members was a fair and accurate reflection.

Resolved:

- (a) That Members of the Joint Committee note the contents of this report and the updated position.
- (b) That the Risk Registers be kept up to date and reviewed by the Joint Committee on a half yearly basis.
- (c) That an Annual Report on the approach to risk management be prepared in April / May to inform the Annual Governance Statement.

A7 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – Internal Audit Plan and Audit Scope 2009/10 and 2010/11

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support asked Members to note the report setting out details of the Audit Plan and Scope for 2009/10 and the arrangements for 2010/11. The Joint Committee were reminded of comments made at a previous meeting as regards the timing of the last audit coinciding with the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for County Durham, and that whilst this factor had not been taken into account by the Audit Commission, it had caused additional complication.

Members were informed that in order to help tackle issues raised by Audit Commission within the Annual Governance Report 2008/09, this report had several sections outlining the approach. Members noted an introduction setting out the background to why there was a need for the audit process, how LGR had affected the audit and clarification as regards conflict relating to some records.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that the report also contained reference to recommendations set out within the Annual Governance Report 2008/09:

- “The Joint Committee should formalise arrangements with Durham County Council for the provision of internal audit through the development of a formal service level agreement”
- “The Joint Committee should strengthen existing internal audit arrangements through an agreement of an annual plan of work, ensuring that internal audit work covers all of the key financial systems for the year and production of an annual report to inform the Annual Governance Statement”.

In order to address those recommendations and to further strengthen governance and assurance, the Joint Committee were asked to consider the following proposals:

- That a system be developed to allow details of income to be processed directly into Durham County Council’s Financial Management System
- Annual reviews of the Crematorium be carried out in the last quarter of the financial year to ensure as much coverage as possible of the years’ transactions
- That an annual plan of work to be carried out by internal audit together with the audit days required be submitted to the Joint committee on an annual basis, to be drawn up in consultation with the appropriate Manager
- Any Terms of Reference must include relevant expenditure items specifically relating to the Crematorium’s operations during the year and budgetary control, financial reporting risk management and governance arrangements

- That an annual report on the outcome of internal audit activity be presented to the Joint Committee for consideration as part of the development of the Annual Governance Statement.

Resolved:

- (a) That Members agree to the provision of an Internal Audit Service to the Central Durham Crematorium and the Joint Committee through Durham County Council, in accordance with the approach, scope and plans set out in the report; and that the agreement to this report acts as a Service Level Agreement for the provision of Internal Audit Services for 2009/10.
- (b) That the outcome of Internal Audit Annual Reviews be reported to the Joint Committee to inform assurance on internal control and financial governance.

A8 Such Other Business

Several Members asked, through the Chair, questions as regarding the date of the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support asked Members to note that it would be best if the meetings of the Joint committee could be moved slightly in order that they would fall in line with Durham County Council financial reporting, ensuring that the Joint Committee were receiving the correct information at the correct times in order to maintain assurance on internal control and financial governance, as set out and agreed in the previous item. Members were informed as the next scheduled meeting for the Joint Committee was at the end of April, this would mean that whilst the financial year would have ended, it would be unlikely that Statement of Accounts and a draft Annual Governance Report would be completed in time to go to that meeting.

The Joint Committee noted that these items would need to be reported to Members prior to the end of June and that accordingly it was preferable from a governance perspective to have the next meeting of the Joint Committee in late May or early June.

Members agreed that it the dates for the Joint Committee meeting should allow for timely financial reporting and that the options regarding dates could be circulated to Members for information, but be agreed formally at the Annual Meeting in July.

The Chair asked whether the next meetings would be May, then July. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support confirmed that subject to Durham County Council and Spennymoor Town Council diary commitments, the 4 requisite ordinary meetings of the Joint Committee (including the Annual Meeting) could be May, July, September and January and so on.

Members were reminded that should any urgent business requiring the attention of the Joint Committee arise, a Special Meeting could be called subject to the Chair's agreement.

Resolved:

- (a) That the schedule for the meetings for the Joint Committee be amended in order to better align with financial reporting in order to strengthen assurance and financial governance.
- (b) That Members of the Joint Committee be informed of the amended schedule of meetings as soon as possible and that the new schedule is reported to the Joint Committee formally at the Annual Meeting.