

**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 1A** at **COUNTY HALL** on **26 JANUARY 2011** at **5.30 pm**.

PRESENT

COUNCILLOR M Plews in the Chair

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Chaplow, N Foster, J Graham, G Holland, A Hopgood, J Marr and J Wood

Officers Present:

Catherine Banks	Audit Manager, Audit Commission
Paul Darby	Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, Durham County Council (DCC)
Kit Dixon	Officer, Audit Commission
Graham Harrison	Bereavement Services Manager, DCC
Ian Hoult	Streetscene Area Manager North, DCC
Alan José	Superintendent and Registrar, Durham Crematorium
Sharon Spence	Clerk to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee
Pauline Waterson	Clerk to Spennymoor Town Council

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Blakey, D Stoker and M Williams.

A1 Minutes of the meetings held 29 September 2010, 11 October 2010 and 21 December 2010

The minutes of the meetings held 29 September 2010, 11 October 2010 and 21 December 2010 were confirmed by the Joint Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Councillor J Marr explained that at the meeting held 29 September 2010, the Joint Committee had been informed that the vacant post relating to Grounds Maintenance / Cremator Operator was to be advertised internally at the two constituent Authorities in the first instance, and then externally should there be no internal applicants.

Councillor J Marr noted that he had learned that the post was not going to be filled and asked under what authority this decision had been made. The Streetscene Area Manager North, Ian Hoult explained that the scale of the budget cuts as a result of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) was greater than anticipated and, in the light of potential redundancies from the constituent Authorities, there may be scope for internal appointment albeit with a slight delay in order to synchronise with budget setting and the processes of Early Retirements and Voluntary Redundancies. The Streetscene Area Manager North noted that it was intended to update Members of the Joint Committee at a future meeting as regards this matter and apologised if Members felt they had not been kept up-to-date. Councillor J Marr accepted the explanation noting that, in future, issues should be brought to the attention of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Joint Committee in the first instance and to the Joint Committee as appropriate.

A2 Audit Commission Annual Audit Letter 2009/2010

The Joint Committee welcomed Catherine Banks, Audit Manager and Kit Dixon, Officers from the Audit Commission who were in attendance to give an overview of the Annual Audit Letter 2009/2010 for the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee (for copy, see file of minutes).

The Audit Manager explained that the Annual Audit Letter was positive overall and contained several key messages. It was noted that the Audit Opinion for the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee was unqualified and the quality of the accounts and supporting papers was much higher than the previous year. Members heard that in respect of Value for Money, the approach to financial reporting and internal control had improved over the last 12 months and the Audit Commission had concluded there were proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. The Audit Manager informed Councillors that issues that may impact upon the Joint Committee included the Government's CSR and the requirement for the Crematorium to fit mercury abatement equipment. Members noted that for the 2010/11 the accounts for the Joint Committee would need to be in compliance with the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and that reasonable progress had been made in this regard.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support, Neighbourhood Services, Paul Darby explained that the IFRS requires the financial position from the previous year end be "recast" in the proscribed format and that the relevant staff had received training in the IFRS and would liaise with Audit Commission Officers. Members also noted that the additional work and training had been factored into the ongoing Work Plan for the accounts and the Annual Audit Report should be presented to Members at the April 2011 meeting, with a draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and the recast 2009/10 Accounts, showing Members how the reporting format changes moving to IFRS compliance.

The Audit Manager informed Councillors that another key point raised within the Annual Audit Letter was that of Members' Declarations of Interest and the Code of Conduct for Members should be signed for the Joint Committee specifically, in addition to any already signed for Durham County Council or Spennymoor Town Council.

The Joint Committee were asked to note that on page 6 of the Annual Audit Letter contained a table which was incorrectly labelled, with the correct table being:

Criteria	Adequate Arrangements?	
	2009/10	2008/09
Managing Finances		
Understanding costs and achieving efficiencies	Yes	Yes
Financial Reporting	Yes	No
Governing the Business		
Good Governance	Yes	Yes
Risk Management and Internal Control	Yes	No

Resolved:

That the Annual Audit Letter, subject to the amendment to the table on page 6 of the Letter, be noted.

A3 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services: External Audit 2009/2010 – Annual Governance Report and Annual Audit Letter, Progress Update

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support referred Members to the report setting out the updated position relating to the Annual Governance Report and the Annual Audit Letter (for copy, see file of minutes).

Members were informed that, as noted in the previous item, there had been improvements to the governance arrangements for the Joint Committee and that there was the requirement to move to IFRS accounting. Councillors also learned that in response to recommendations made previously by the Joint Committee, there had been additional improvements made and suggestions to mitigate concerns raised in the previous Audit included:

- An alternative method of maintaining books and records, to either use the DCC Financial Management System (ORACLE) under a separate company, solely use for the Joint Committee or to procure a “stand-alone” Financial Management System for the Joint Committee (SAGE).

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that in conversation with Spennymoor Town Council, who use SAGE for their accounts, it had been noted that SAGE could be more efficient for use by the Joint Committee than the ORACLE system. It was noted that further discussions with the Treasurer, Superintendent and Registrar and the DCC IT Section had led to the conclusion that the most cost and time effective solution, in order to ensure good internal control and sound financial management for the Joint Committee, would be to procure the SAGE system and train the requisite staff accordingly. Members were asked for their approval or otherwise in this regard, noting that there was scope within the budget for the proposals.

- A written agreement regarding Treasury Management. Members recalled that this was approved at the meeting of the Joint Committee held 29 September 2010 and Members noted that this was subsequently signed and was now in effect.
- Formal agreement of the Account Balance between DCC and the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that further discussions with the Audit Manager had noted that a formal agreement was not necessary, rather a year-end reconciliation would need to be presented to the Joint Committee as part of the 2010/2011 Final Outturn Report.
- As highlighted by External Audit, there was a suggestion that the Joint Committee formally adopt the lead Authority Code of Conduct and that Members sign this together with completing a separate Declaration of Interest form for the Joint Committee. Members were asked to note that copies were attached to the agenda papers.
- IFRS Financial Reporting would be required. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that as previously noted the 2009/10 Accounts would need to be recast and Audit Commission and CIPFA workshops would be attended in order to realise the full impact of IFRS.

Councillor J Marr queried a specific issue relating to the Declaration of Interest, the Clerk to the Joint Committee, Sharon Spence noted that she would be happy to advise Members as regards any queries in this matter.

Councillor J Graham asked whether there was a Code of Conduct for Officers, similar to the Code of Conduct for Members. Councillor N Foster noted that there was and it was a public document with the Head of Finance, HR and Business Support adding that it should be available on the DCC website and that a recent meeting of the DCC Extended Management Team had reinforced issues regarding the Code of Conduct for DCC Officers.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support referred Members to the recommendations as set out in the Report.

Resolved:

- (a) That the Members of the Joint Committee note the progress made with regards to addressing the External Audit recommendations arising from the Annual Governance Report and Annual Audit Letter 2009/10.
- (b) That the Members of the Joint Committee note the contents of the Lead Authority Member Code of Conduct, formally adopt these and agree to sign the written undertaking.
- (c) That the Members of the Joint Committee complete and sign the Declaration of Personal Interest.

A4 Report of the Superintendent and Registrar

The Superintendent and Registrar, Alan José, presented a Report noting the following matters associated with the Crematorium (for copy, see file of minutes).

Cremations

The Superintendent and Registrar reported the number of cremations for the periods 1 July 2010 to 30 September 2010 (Quarter 2) and 1 October and 31 December 2010 (Quarter 3) inclusive. Members noted that for Quarter 2 there were 527 (+9 NVF), an increase of 27 (+2 NVF) on the same period in the previous year and for Quarter 3 there were 563 (+4 NVF), an increase of 32 (-2 NVF) on the same period in the previous year. The total for Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 included 658 from outside the area, with the remaining total being 432 for the area.

Memorial Gardens

The Superintendent and Registrar reported that for Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 2010/11, the following Vase Blocks and Memorial Plaques had been sold:

	Quarter 2 2010/11 July to September		Quarter 3 2010/11 October to December	
	Number	£	Number	£
Vase Blocks	13	£5,946.55	10	£5,481.00
Large Plaques	36	£11,568.13	23	£8,182.00
Small Plaques	4	£828.92	2	£436.00
Columbaria	0	-	4	£4,239.90
Total	53	£18,343.60	39	£18,338.90

Contaminated Bodies

The Superintendent and Registrar explained that the Audit Action Plan had highlighted that there were no documented guidelines in place as regards the disposal of a contaminated body. Members were informed that the Superintendent and Registrar had sought guidance from the Consultant in Communicable Disease at the Health Protection Agency (HPA). It was noted that the Superintendent and Registrar would contact the HPA in cases where the Crematorium had received notification that a contaminated body was to be cremated and the HPA would provide advice on a case by case basis. The Joint Committee noted that an additional action would be added to the Operational Risk Register, namely: "*Such directions as may be given by the Health Protection Agency will be adhered to.*"

Staffing Issues

The Superintendent and Registrar explained that, as previous mentioned, the vacancy relating to Grounds Maintenance / Cremator Operator had not yet been filled and in the interim the temporary member of staff that had been trained in preparation for a Pandemic was continuing to operate without any difficulties. Members were made aware of the intention, subject to Members' agreement, to continue to operate with the temporary arrangement until there was a clearer picture as regards the impact of the CSR on staffing at the constituent Authorities, with any recruitment to still be pursued internally from the two Authorities in the first instance.

Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and Cremation Society of Great Britain

The Joint Committee were advised that the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and Cremation Society of Great Britain would be held in Bristol, 4-6 July 2011 and that in line with previous arrangements, two places had been reserved at the Conference in respect of the Chair of the Joint Committee and the Superintendent and Registrar.

Members were referred to the Statistical and Annual Return that was a requirement of membership to the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities as set out at Appendix 3 to the report.

Cremator Replacement and Crematoria Redevelopment Project – Update

The Superintendent and Registrar updated Members as regards the Cremator Replacement and Crematoria Redevelopment noting that, as agreed by the Joint Committee at its Special Meeting held 21 December 2010, the planning application for the works had been submitted and colleagues from the Planning Section had indicated that consideration of the application would be expected within the next 8 weeks. The Joint Committee noted that an Ecological Report had also been submitted.

The Chair noted that she was the Vice-Chair of the DCC Central and East Area Planning Committee the Committee that would likely consider the application. The Clerk to the Joint Committee advised that at any such meeting of the Planning Committee, the Chair would need to declare an interest and could feed into any debate on the matter; however, she would not be eligible to vote on the application.

Councillors learned that the Superintendent and Registrar, together with the Project's Lead Officers, had met to discuss the scheduling of works and practicalities in terms of ensuring that Members were kept up-to-date regarding financial information and the progress of the works. Accordingly, it was proposed that, if Members were in agreement, once works had commenced a monthly e-mail communication could be distributed to Members of the Joint Committee. Members were also advised that any appropriate site visits or Special Meetings of the Joint Committee could be arranged to coincide with completion of key milestones in the construction phase.

The Superintendent and Registrar informed the Joint Committee that, at the request of the Chair and Vice-Chair, he had spoken to Bretby Crematorium as regards a site visit to an IFZW cremator installation, IFZW being the firm agreed to provide and install the new cremators for Durham. Councillors noted that the Bretby Crematorium was in Staffordshire and was approximately 3 hours away by car.

Councillor J Marr noted that it may be appropriate for some of the Project Officers attending a site visit to Bretby in addition to Members. Councillor A Hopgood believed that, as the decision to go with IFZW for the equipment and installation had already been made, there was no need for a visit to Bretby. The Chair noted that it could prove to be an opportunity to ask questions regarding any potential pitfalls as Bretby had been operating the IFZW equipment since last year. The Superintendent and Registrar added that he, together with the DCC Design Team had visited Bretby last year, in order to get a better idea as regards the scale of the plant and the building required for housing the equipment. Councillor N Foster suggested that it may be preferable to write to Members of the Joint Committee in order to ascertain the level of interest in attending Bretby. Councillor A Hopgood agreed, noting that Members should be made aware that the Design Team and the Superintendent and Registrar had already attended the facility. The Superintendent and Registrar noted that a Crematorium at Newcastle was currently installing IFZW equipment and that their installation would be completed in late Summer 2011. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support asked whether the project at Newcastle was similar to that being undertaken at Durham and whether they may be in a position to offer any advice to the Superintendent and Registrar and Design Team. The Superintendent and Registrar explained that Newcastle would be constructing an extension to house filtration equipment; however, they would be having a reduced number of cremations. It was noted that the Superintendent and Registrar had spoken to Newcastle as regards the possibility of a visit after completion and accordingly, this could be another option Members may wish to look at.

Councillors agreed that a letter asking Members of the Joint Committee regarding their views on site visits should be sent out by the Clerk to the Joint Committee.

Councillor A Hopgood asked whether the severe winter weather had affected operations at the Durham Crematorium. The Superintendent and Registrar noted that some services had experienced a slight delay, however, no services were cancelled and that there had been a report via BBC Newcastle highlighting that Durham Crematorium had coped well. Councillor A Hopgood stated that the hard work of the staff at Durham Crematorium should be noted and that the Superintendent and Registrar should pass on the thanks of the Joint Committee to staff. The Members of the Joint Committee agreed.

Resolved:

- (a) That the content of the Report with regards to current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (b) That the comments regarding the Internal Audit Action Plan and action taken regarding amendments made to the Operational Risk Register and Operational Procedures to accommodate this recommendation.
- (c) That the vacant post continues to be filled temporarily until the wider picture is clearer, at which time a recruitment exercise will be undertaken, with the post advertised internally and simultaneously with the two Partner Authorities.
- (d) That the Chair to the Joint Committee and Superintendent and Registrar attend the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and Cremation Society of Great Britain.
- (e) That the progress with regards to Cremator Replacement and the Crematoria Redevelopment Project be noted.
- (f) That a letter be sent to Members of the Joint Committee to ascertain whether Members would wish to have site visits to the Crematoria at Bretby in Staffordshire and Newcastle, or otherwise.
- (g) That the Superintendent and Registrar and the staff of the Durham Crematorium be thanked for their hard work maintaining the excellent level of service at the Durham Crematorium during the period of severe winter weather.

A5 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services: Financial Monitoring Report – Position at 31 December 2010, with Forecast Outturn at 31 March 2011

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support asked Members to note the regular update report on the financial position. Members noted that the report included the actual spend to date and also included information relating to the spending commitments for the remainder of the financial year to give an indication of the potential impact on the outturn figures.

The Committee noted that the outturn position as set out predicted an underspend of approximately £27,000 in gross expenditure together with a projected increase in income that would give a total variance of approximately £81,000. Members noted the variances as set out within the report and associated explanations. It was explained that this underspend would be transferred to the earmarked reserves for capital works as usual.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support noted that as agreed at the December meeting of the Joint Committee, the sum of £600,000 was transferred from earmarked reserves into a cremator replacement fund and that the predicted balance at 31 March 2011 for the total reserves was £1,379,969.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee note the April to December 2010 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated provisional outturn position 2010/2011.

A6 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services: Risk Register Update 2010/2011

The Superintendent and Registrar presented a Report updating Members on the current position of the Risk Register 2010/2011 for the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee (for copy, see file of minutes).

Members were reminded that the purpose of the Risk Register was to identify risks to the Crematorium at both a strategic level and an operational level and the Committee had received a report at the September meeting setting out those risks. The Joint Committee noted that there had been improvements and a subsequent rescoring made since September, developed by the Risk Officer for Neighbourhood Services and the Superintendent and Registrar. Councillors were pleased to note there were no outstanding actions on the Risk Register, however, Members were aware of the risks associated with the cremator replacement works and it was explained that a separate Risk Register would be prepared as regards these major works.

The Superintendent and Registrar noted that whilst to date there had been no adverse impact from the Wear Valley Crematorium at Coundon, such impact may yet materialise and Members were given assurance that the situation regarding the numbers of cremations was being monitored. Members were reminded that the excellent reputation of Durham Crematorium was a major factor in maintaining the levels of business and that it would be very important to keep the high standards of service throughout the completion of the major works.

Resolved:

- (a) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note the content of this report and the updated position following the January Review.
- (b) That the Risk Registers are kept up-to-date and continue to be reviewed by the Joint Committee on a half-yearly basis.

A7 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services: Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Audit

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support noted that it was a requirement for the body that reviews the accounts to also have a review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit. Members heard that guidance and a checklist from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) were used in carrying out the review. Councillors noted that in the past, prior to the Unitary Authority for County Durham coming into effect, the responsibility was for the former Lead Authority's Audit Committee.

The Joint Committee noted that, in addition to the internal review, External Audit had also looked at the effectiveness of the system of internal audit as part of the 2009/10 accounts audit process. Members learned that the External Auditor had made some suggestions as regards how the service could be improved, primarily being improvements to the accountability of the Audit Service to the Joint Committee and for a need for the Joint Committee to review its own terms of reference to ensure they reflected the expected role and responsibilities of an "Audit Committee".

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that Appendix 2 to the report set out the scope of Internal Audit and noted the improvements made in order to be compliant with the CIPFA guidance. Members were informed that there would be a further update as part of the AGS and that the Governance Statement would be drawn from this review of the effectiveness of the system of Internal Audit, from the Risk Management reports and through work of all staff involved with the Crematorium.

Resolved:

- (a) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note their satisfaction with the report setting out the effectiveness of the system of Internal Audit.
- (b) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note that the review against the CIPFA checklist will be refreshed and updated, with the resultant outcomes reported in the Annual Report of the Head of Internal Audit in April.

A8 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – Provision of Support Services 2011 – 2012

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support referred Members to the report setting out the proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee (for copy, see file of minutes).

Members were asked to recall that at the September meeting the Joint Committee the Head of Internal Audit had produced a SLA for the provision of the Internal Audit function, which was subsequently agreed. Councillors were noted that a similar SLA had been produced further to Members request and related to the provision of:

- Management Services
- Financial Services
- Administration Services
- Payroll Services
- Creditor Services
- Human Resources Services

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support noted that the format of the SLA mirrored that of the Internal Audit SLA and the breakdown of services provided and costs were set out within the report. Councillors heard that the SLA would be reviewed and updated annually.

The Clerk to Spennymoor Town Council, Pauline Waterson noted that the provision of legal advice to the Joint Committee had not been specifically set out within the SLA. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support noted that legal advice would be provided as part of the role of the Clerk to the Joint Committee and the SLA and report had been verified by the Clerk to the Joint Committee and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

Resolved:

That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee approve the Service Level Agreement for the provision of Support Services to the Joint Committee for the year 2011/12.

A9 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – Fees and Charges 2011/12

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support referred Members to the report setting out the proposed Fees and Charges 2011/12 for the Central Durham Crematorium (for copy, see file of minutes).

Councillors noted that the Head of Finance, HR and Business Support had worked in conjunction with the Superintendent and Registrar in producing the proposed fees and charges, and that the VAT increase had been applied to those fees that did not fall outside of the scope of VAT. An example given to Members of an area that did incorporate an increase to cover the rise in VAT was that of the costs for memorials. Members learned that, whilst a small increase had been proposed for the cost of adult cremations, there was no increase in the under 16 year old cost, and the fees charged by Durham Crematorium were still the lowest within the area.

Councillor A Hopgood asked if the fees charged were sufficiently lower than other nearby facilities, should there be an increase to be more in line with nearby facilities and yield a higher profit. The Superintendent and Registrar explained that whilst the fee for cremation incorporated the £50 environmental surcharge and £70 for the medical fee it was still important to offer a value for money service and an increase in fees whilst major works were being carried out may not be appropriate. Councillor G Holland suggested that the Durham Crematorium could advertise itself as “high quality, low cost”. The Superintendent and Registrar noted that there were resources that could be used to advertise if competition pressure from the Wear Valley Crematorium materialised. The Chair noted that the healthy level of reserves showed that the Durham Crematorium was able to offer a high quality, value for money service whilst still maintaining a profit. Councillor N Foster believed that the value for money service provided was excellent and that it may be appropriate to look again at the fees and charges after the cremator replacement and major works had been completed, in order to reflect the quality of the new facilities.

Resolved:

- (a) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note and approve the proposed Fees and Charges effective from the 1 April 2011.

- (b) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee approve the increase in pricing for memorials and insert to the Book of Remembrance in line with the VAT increase and that this is implemented with effect from 1 February 2011.
- (c) That all approved Fees and Charges are incorporated into the 2011/12 Budget.

A10 Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee / Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services – 2011/12 Revenue Budget

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support referred Members to the report setting out the proposed 2011/12 Budget for the Central Durham Crematorium (for copy, see file of minutes).

Members were reminded that the Budget as set out in the report was based on the Fees and Charges as agreed at the previous item and was developed in conjunction with the Superintendent and Registrar. It was noted that factors taken into account included the major works to be carried out at the Crematorium, the potential impact of the Wear Valley Crematorium and an increase in the number of cremations coming from the east of the County, including Hartlepool and Sunderland.

Councillors learned that there were reductions in the Employees budget after taking into account the Coalition Government's decision to freeze the pay award for Local Government staff and reductions in the general and pandemic operator training budget.

Members also noted that the Premises budget would increase by approximately the same amount as the reduction of the Employee budget and this was to take into account an estimated increase in the National Non-Domestic Rate (NNDR) charges, a provision for footpath and road repairs and costs associated with the burglar / fire alarm.

The Joint Committee were informed that the budget for Supplies and Services had been reduced with a number of "one-off" costs from the previous year having been removed including replacement of the organ and the 50 Years Anniversary Celebrations. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that the Public Book of Remembrance Visual Reference System and replacement computer budget was removed due to delays, though it may be included in the budget the following year if required. Councillors noted that also expenditure on Medical Referees; Masterplan and vase blocks were budgeted to be less than the current year, due to the anticipated lower number of cremations for 2011/12. Members were reminded that as a response to the 2009/10 External Audit recommendation relating to inefficiencies in the maintenance of the accounts an amount had been set aside for the procurement, set up and training for a dedicated Financial Management System – SAGE.

The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support explained that, in relation to Agency and Contracted Services, there would be an overall reduction in comparison to the previous year with reductions in brochure printing, delays to the implementation of an on-line reference system and removal of the amount set aside for feasibility studies associated with the major works. Members noted that there was an increase in the External Audit fees, in line with the projected outturn for 2010/11. The Joint Committee learned that the amount relating to the loan repayments for the capital scheme of cremator replacement works was included in the 2011/12 budget, as approved at the Special Meeting of the Joint Committee held in December.

Councillors were reminded that the budget was prudent, and that if the level of cremations was maintained, the 2011/12 revenue would be very good. The Head of Finance, HR and Business Support noted that even including the contribution to the major works from the reserves; the Crematorium had reserves of approximately £785,000 which was very good for an organisation of the size of the Durham Crematorium.

The Clerk to Spennymoor Town Council asked whether the replacement organ had been purchased and the Superintendent and Registrar confirmed that this was the case.

Resolved:

- (a) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note and approve the budget proposals contained within the report.
- (b) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2012.

A11 Report of the Clerk to the Joint Committee – Start Times of the Meetings

The Clerk to the Joint Committee referred to the report and noted that, at the December meeting, Members agreed for the start time for the meetings of the Joint Committee to be discussed at the next ordinary meeting of the Joint Committee (for copy, see file of minutes).

Members noted that it was recommended to continue with the agreed schedule up until the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June and that at this meeting the usual report containing the Forward Plan of meetings would reflect any change in the start of the meeting times if required by Members. The Clerk noted that she would check the Constitution of the Joint Committee, to confirm whether there was a specific start time for the meetings.

Councillor N Foster agreed that the AGM in June was the appropriate meeting to discuss and agree any changes to the start times for the Joint Committee meetings, however, it was suggested that Members were canvassed for their views prior to this and that a report setting out these views be drafted accordingly. Councillors agreed, and Councillor J Marr reminded the Joint Committee that many Members of both Authorities had meetings at 10.00am and 2.00pm and that the existing start time of 5.30pm avoided any potential clashes.

Resolved:

- (a) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee are contacted to ascertain their views regarding the start times for the meetings of the Joint Committee.
- (b) That subsequent to Members' views having been received, the Clerk produce a report setting out those views for consideration by the Joint Committee.