

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held at **Durham Crematorium, South Road** on **Wednesday 25 September 2013** at **5.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor J Marr (Chairman)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, J Chaplow, K Corrigan, N Foster, B Moir, M Plews (Vice-Chairman), M Simmons and K Thompson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors JV Graham and GD O'Hehir

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from A Bonner, J Buckham, P Conway and D Stoker.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 June 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Start Times for Joint Committee Meetings

The Clerk to the Joint Committee, Sharon Spence referred Members to the Report as set out in the agenda pack, reminding the Joint Committee that Councillors had been canvassed (Minute 7, 26 June 2013 refers) as regards the start times of the meetings of the Joint Committee. The Clerk to the Joint Committee explained that the majority of Members had expressed their preference as 2.00pm and added that the Annual General Meetings would alternate between County Hall, Durham and Spennymoor Town Hall, with any meetings to be arranged at the Crematorium itself if appropriate.

Resolved:

- (i) That future meetings of the Joint Committee are held at 2.00pm.
- (ii) That the Annual General Meetings of the Joint Committee be held alternately at County Hall, Durham and Spennymoor Town Hall.

5 Report of the Bereavement Services Manager

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from June 2013 to August 2013 and the comparison to the same period for 2012, highlighting that there was a net decrease of 16 cremations, with a total of 393, with 168 from Durham, 36 from Spennymoor and 314 from outside of the area. Councillors noted the decrease in this period offset the increase from the previous period, with figures being in line with budget forecasts.

Members were also asked to note that the number of memorials sold had decreased in comparison to the same period the previous year, with sales being £1,540.62 less than the comparable period last year. It was explained that families were being contacted as regards renewals of memorial plaques and the assumption was that the renewal figures would increase in the coming periods.

The Joint Committee noted that Durham Crematorium, in a joint bid with the South Road Cemetery, had retained its Green Flag Award making 3 years with the Award.

The Bereavement Services Manager reminded Members that at the meeting held 24 April 2013, the Committee had agreed for a Business Administration apprentice to be employed. Councillors noted that interviews took place 5 September 2013, with an appointment was made shortly after, and it was added that the apprentice was fitting in very well. Members noted a further report as regards the Superintendent and Registrar position was set out later on the agenda.

Councillors were reminded of the Recycling of Metals Scheme and noted the nomination of the Tees Valley and Durham Branch of Cruse for the next round of distribution of funds. It was added that to date, £8,333 had been distributed to local charities since joining the scheme.

The Bereavement Services Manager asked the Senior Projects Manager, Neighbourhood Services, Richard Fenwick to speak to the Joint Committee as regards potential further Crematorium Improvement Works aimed at increasing capacity within the chapel.

The Senior Projects Manager thanked the Joint Committee for the opportunity to speak and reminded Members of the cremator replacement works that had been carried out very successfully. Councillors recalled that it was agreed at the meeting of the Joint Committee held 26 June 2013 to progress a feasibility study to look at how the public areas of the Crematorium could also be further improved. Members noted the first stage of a feasibility study had been undertaken and the relevant drawings setting out 3 options were attached to the agenda papers (for copy see file of minutes).

Option A

The Joint Committee noted that Option A incorporated works to increase the size of the main chapel, relocating 3 of the 8 columns within the Chapel to create an extra 50% capacity, increasing from 60 to 90 seats. It was explained this in turn would have a knock on effect requiring additional toilet facilities, one extra gents and one extra ladies facilities at the existing location. Members noted that there would be removal and relocation of the Chapel of Remembrance to an external plot, creating a larger circulation area to the rear of the chapel.

Councillors learned that the Office would have a dividing wall removed, providing space for an additional 2 people and the Waiting Room would be relocated to the newly proposed extension. It was added that the Vestry would be moved from the rear of the building to the front allowing a clear view of people arriving for services, the current Vestry being unused.

The Senior Projects Manager explained that all options for works would involve disruption to the Chapel and for Health and Safety reasons there would need to be relocation to a temporary Chapel.

Option B

The Joint Committee noted that the second option would retain the structure of the existing Chapel and gain 20 additional seats through reconfiguration, and gain 10 through extension into the existing Chapel of Remembrance area. It was noted that as per Option A, additional capacity would necessitate additional toilet provision, through extending the building out onto the existing flower bed. The Chapel of Remembrance would be relocated to an external location and similar Office works as Option A would be undertaken. Councillors noted the additional works to the Waiting Area; creation of a single entrance; relocation of the Vestry; additional windows and exterior canopies.

Option C

The Senior Projects Manager explained that Option C was very similar to Option B, however, with some slight differences in respect of no entrance beside the new Vestry and further improvements to the Office to allow for a more welcoming second public entrance.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager, Ian Hault noted that the three proposals had been developed in response to feedback from users, notably the larger capacity for the Chapel and the creation of canopies to shield from inclement weather.

Councillors asked questions in relation to: whether the Chapel would need to close in respect of all options; whether structural engineers had given indications that the proposals in Option A were feasible, what the capacity of the Chapel would be under Options B and C; use of the Vestry; what form a temporary Chapel would take; how the coffin would be moved from the temporary Chapel as it would not be alongside the existing catafalque; and the timescales for each of the options.

The Joint Committee were informed that for Option A there would be a need to close the Chapel for a period but that it was possible for continued operation of the Chapel under Options B and C, however, there would need to be great care and close working between the contractor and the Crematorium Staff and the timing of work would need to be carried out around service times. It was added that works would be completed in a shorter amount of time if the Chapel was closed and temporary Chapel was used.

The Senior Projects Manager explained that a structural engineer had been consulted on the issues regarding the columns within the Chapel and that with the use of an 800mm ring-beam and flying buttresses the alterations would be feasible.

Members noted that the capacity within the Chapel for all options would increase to 90, however for Options B and C, this would be through the addition of chairs rather than additional pews. It was added that all options also included an additional amount of standing room and some multimedia screens to allow mourners at the rear of the Chapel to follow the service. Councillors noted that in all options, the Vestry would be relocated and improved and the Book of Remembrance would be relocated to a new Chapel of Remembrance, outside of the existing main Crematorium building.

The Joint Committee noted that the were options as regards the form a temporary Chapel could take, however, a wooden structure would be the likely solution with similar types have been used by churches and Durham University previously. The Senior Projects Manager added that as a coffin moved through the curtains at the temporary Chapel, it would be then transported via a small vehicle, likely electric, to the Crematorium main building. It was noted that the Crematorium at Newcastle operated a system with twin chapels and they used electric vehicles which were very quiet and worked well.

The Head of Finance - Financial Services, Paul Darby explained that the issues as identified within the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) did not replicate issues within the improvement project and were for areas other than set out within the 3 options. It was added that the costs associated with each option were indicative at this stage and that more detailed costings and timings would be produced on the options that members wished to consider more and brought back to the Joint Committee accordingly.

It was also highlighted that the financing of the works could be a combination of use of balances and prudential borrowing and that there was a report later on the Agenda with regards to Fees and Charges that could help provide increased financial capacity to accommodate these costs.

The Senior Projects Manager explained that if all works were to begin in say April 2014, then Option A would take until November 2014, with Options B and C slightly less time being completed in October 2014. It was added that this was an indicative timescale, was very optimistic and assumed the use of a temporary Chapel to maximise the amount of work being able to be carried out on the existing Chapel.

It was added that a more prudent estimate would be for some works to be completed by the end of 2014, with the whole scheme for any of the Options to be completed by March 2015.

While Members agreed that there was a need to enlarge the capacity of the Chapel, however, there were concerns as regards any works to the columns within the Chapel. Councillors felt that Option A should not be pursued in respect of any risk to the columns and character of the Chapel, rather Options B and C should be looked at in further detail.

Members noted that for delivery of the desirable improvement works there were a number of options for how this could be delivered, including competitive tender and in-house delivery. Councillors noted the success of the cremator replacement works, being on time and under-budget and that the internal team (main contractor) had done an excellent job. It was also highlighted that VFM was secured through sub-contracting arrangements. The Joint Committee were reminded that while the main contractor was not tendered for and was taken on in-house as regards the cremator replacement works, the cremator replacement itself had been through the OJEU tender process, and the specialist roofing contract having also been subject to tender. Several Members noted that they felt that tendering would be more competitive and expressed a desire for the works to be tendered this time.

Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP)

The Bereavement Services Manager reminded Members that the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) had now been update and redrafted, attached at Appendix 6 to the report. It was added that the SAMP would be refined in line with the works in relation to the Chapel. The Joint Committee noted that there were 4 aspects to the SAMP: urgent essential works; desirable works that would be within the main Crematorium improvement works that included the Chapel; other desirable works outside of the main improvement works; and longer term works.

The Head of Finance - Financial Services explained that there was £93,319 within the current budget, which was for urgent essential works that included: building maintenance; roof repairs; outside lighting; road repairs; and updates to the cremator software amongst other issues.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the current situation with regards to the sale of Memorials be noted.
- (iii) That the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Accreditation be noted.
- (iv) That the current round of money available with regards to the recycling of metals be noted.
- (v) That the progress with the Feasibility Study be noted, with Options B and C from the Feasibility Study taken forward and further information brought back to the Joint Committee, including an indicative project plan and an appraisal of the tendering options.

- (vi) That the content of the Draft Service Asset Management Plan be noted.
- (vii) That the current 2013/14 budget be utilised to fund the urgent essential works as set out within the report.

6 External Audit Report

The Head of Finance - Financial Services reminded Members that as the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee was now classified as a "Smaller Relevant Body" for audit purposes and that the Audit Commission had appointed BDO LLP as its External Auditor. Councillors noted that in June 2013, the Small Bodies in England Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2013 had been submitted to BDO LLP for audit under the limited assurance audit regime.

The Joint Committee noted the summary and report attached at Item 5 was the response from BDO LLP and that it noted no material weaknesses, though BDO had asked for additional information in relation to fixed assets following the redevelopment works and this was provided to the Auditors.

Councillor K Thompson asked whether the value of £3.318 million for the assets within the report would depreciate over time, as the new cremator equipment aged. The Head of Finance - Financial Services noted that it would, the value as set out within the report being the gross value.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Joint Committee note External Auditor's Issues Arising Report for the year ended 31 March 2013.
- (ii) That the Joint Committee note the further information provided by the Treasurer to the Joint Committee with regards to the External Auditor's Issues Arising Report.

7 Financial Monitoring Report - Spend to 31/08/13 and Projected Outturn to 31/03/14

The Head of Finance - Financial Services referred Members to Financial Monitoring Report, as set out in the usual format, for the period to 31 August 2013 and with projected outturn to 31 March 2014 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that the income and expenditure were broadly in line with the budget and variances were such that projections were for an additional surplus of £41,454 to be included in the major capital works reserves as previously agreed by Members. Members noted a projected Reserve of approximately £1.25 million at the year-end, giving a strong financial position.

Councillors asked questions as regards any surplus that would be made from the retirement of the Superintendent and Registrar.

The Head of Finance - Financial Services noted that any savings would be reflected in the 2014/15 budget and that the bungalow at the Crematorium site was part of Durham County Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and did not form part of the Joint Committee's budget.

Resolved:

That the April to August 2013 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated Provision Outturn position at 31 March 2014 be noted.

8 Risk Register Update 2013/14

The Head of Finance - Financial Services asked Members to note the Risk Register Update 2013/14 report, the Joint Committee considering updates on a 6 monthly basis. Members recalled that the report set out Strategic Risks and Operational Risks and risks were regularly reviewed by the DCC Risk Management Team.

It was noted that a new risk identified was set out as risk 19, "Loss of Knowledge and ability to cover existing workload through staff loss", a consequence of the retirement of the Superintendent and Registrar. It was noted that the appointment of an apprentice and the staffing proposals later in the agenda would address this issue. Councillors noted that the risk regarding the pre-payment bond had been removed from the register after Members had agreed for this matter not to be pursued. It was added that one operational risk had an outstanding action, in relation to "limited space in the office area" and this was set out within the appendix to the report.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note the content of the report and the updated position following the January review.
- (ii) That the Risk Registers are kept up-to-date and continue to be reviewed by the Joint Committee on a half yearly basis, the next one to be completed in January 2013.

9 Fees and Charges Strategy Options 2014/15

The Head of Finance - Financial Services referred Members to Fees and Charges Strategy Options 2014/15 report (for copy see file of minutes). It was noted that the purpose of the report was to seek Members' opinions on options in advance of the 2014/15 budget setting process.

Members recalled Durham County Council was the major partner in two Crematoria, Durham and Mountsett and that following Local Government Reorganisation in 2009 a harmonisation of fees and charges was undertaken. It was noted that the fees and charges level these crematoria were the second lowest in respect of neighbouring crematoria.

It was explained that accordingly, several options had been drafted for Members' consideration and were set out as Appendix 3 to the report.

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor M Plews noted that if there was to be works carried out at the Crematorium, an increase of fees to the highest level would not be justifiable, however this could be reviewed again in the future.

Councillors noted that there could be criticism if there was a large increase and the Head of Finance - Financial Services noted that any increase could be stepped over several years and Members may also wish to consider what any increased income could be used for.

Members added that there had been investment in new equipment and there were proposals for further investment in public facing areas, this was noted as adding value to the Crematorium and the quality of the service being provided. Councillors noted that any changes should be considered in terms of service users, for example Funeral Directors. Members noted that in many cases the cost is not the determining factor for Funeral Directors, issues such as capacity, accessibility and frequency of services were important.

The Joint Committee noted that fee increases at other facilities would mean that an increase to the average charge would still be less expensive than other neighbouring crematoria, around £10 less expensive than the nearest competitor's current fee.

The Accountant, Spennymoor Town Council, Derek Shingleton noted that the use of any extra income could be to help as changes in the Local Council Tax Support Scheme meant that there was a shortfall in that respect for Spennymoor Town Council. The Head of Finance - Financial Services added that any additional income, or a proportion of any additional income, could be split between the constituent Authorities or be used to assist in respect of additional borrowing or a combination of both, but that this would need to be determined at budget setting.

Resolved:

That the option of increasing fees and charges to that of the average charge, together with proposals as regards redistribution of surplus to the constituent Authorities be brought forward to the Joint Committee in time for the budget setting process for 2014/15.

10 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

11 Options for Filling the Superintendent and Registrar's Post

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Neighbourhood Protection Manager that provided an update on recruitment of the Superintendent and Registrar's Post and the outline for future options (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendation contained within the report be approved.