

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Saltwell Room, Civic Suite, Gateshead Council on **Friday 4 October 2013 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors K Dearden, C Hampson, I Jewell and T Nearney

Gateshead Council:

Councillors M Ord, M Charlton, P Ronan, D Davidson, P Mole and J Lee

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Dodds (Gateshead Council)

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 June 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

4 External Audit Report

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) informed Members that the External Audit was now complete (for copy of letter from BDO LLP see file of Minutes). He advised Members that there were no matters arising from the audit.

Resolved:

That the Small Bodies in England Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2013 be approved.

5 Quarterly Report of the Bereavement Services Manager

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Bereavement Services Manager which provided an update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Bereavement Services Manager reported upon the number of cremations which had been undertaken during the period 1 June 2013 to 31 August 2013, noting that there had been a decrease of 46 on the comparable period last year. He advised that the figures were offset against the high performance in April/ May and that there was no cause for concern at present. He added that the sale of memorial plaques in this period was 3 compared to 4 from the same period last year.

Members were advised of operational matters as follows:-

- Green Flag Application – Mountsett had been successful in obtaining this nationwide award that was a good testimony to the staff of the Crematorium.
- Staffing – two members of staff have expressed an interest to enrol on the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management Diploma Course. The post of Business Administration Apprentice would be re-advertised as the two candidates it had been offered to previously had turned the post down. Two people had been interviewed for the post of Superintendent and Registrar's position, however, were unsuitable for the position. Members would discuss the options for this post under a separate agenda item. A new advert for the posts of Relief Crematorium Attendant has been drafted.
- Recycling of Metals Scheme – a cheque would be presented to the chosen charity, Age Concern, in due course.

Members received a presentation from the Senior Projects Manager, Neighbourhood Services regarding the replacement of Cremators and Installation of Mercury Abatement Plant (details of which can be found in the report). He advised Members that there were three Options available and provided detailed plans of the proposals for consideration.

Option 1 – would involve applying the lessons learnt from Durham Crematorium with the existing cremators continuing to run until mid 2016 and the new cremators up and running by this time, with the work broken into phases. Members were informed that the procurement process could start November 2013 with a successful contractor appointed by April 2014 and completion by mid 2016. This option would cause the minimum amount of disruption to services and out of hours working had been included in the budget. Once existing cremators had been removed a new control room would be installed. Staff facilities would also be improved. Members were advised that Durham are using a heat recovery system, using the surplus heat for the hot water and heating requirements. This system could also be developed to generate electricity.

Option 1A – As above but without the electric generation.

Option 2 – would include the power generation costs but would reduce the size of the building.

Members discussed the options in detail and agreed that the proposal to re-use power for the Crematorium would be environmentally friendly and cost effective in the long run, provided it was managed carefully. The Head of Finance (Financial Services) informed Members that the generation of electricity would be explored as part of a feasibility study.

Members agreed that Option 1 would be supported in principle as the logical way forward would be to run the existing cremators and generate more space.

The Bereavement Services Manager then reported the amended Service Asset Management Plan. In the report was an item of grass cutting Machinery which requires replacement. The Head of Finance (Financial Services) informed Members that this could be met from using reserves.

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained in the report be noted and approved.

6 Financial Monitoring Report 2013/14: Spend to 31/08/13 and Projected Outturn to 31/03/14

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services, Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2013 to 31 August 2013, together with the provisional outturn position for 2013/14, and highlighted areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level.

The report further set out details of the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2013 and forecast outturn position at 31 March 2014, taking into account the provisional financial outturn.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) reported that the projected outturn was showing a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surplus to the partner authorities) of £255,293 against a budgeted surplus of £254,526, (£767) less than the budgeted position. An explanation of those significant variances which contributed to the position was reported.

Details were then provided in respect of earmarked reserves and it was reported that contributions from the revenue surplus towards the reserves was forecast to be £767.

The retained reserves of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee at 31 March 2014 were forecast to be £677,005, representing a £90,403 (15%) increase over the opening position at 1 April 2013.

Resolved:

That the April to August 2013 revenue spend financial monitoring report, associated provisional outturn position and the forecast Crematorium earmarked reserve balances at 31 March 2014 be noted.

7 Risk Register Update 2013/14

The Joint Committee received a report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director, Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which provided

an update on the current position with regards to the Risk Register of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee.

A risk assessment report had been presented to members at the January meeting which included a comprehensive risk register that identified all known risks of a Service and Operational nature, with all risks scored using the Durham County Council methodology approach to Risk Management. It was subsequently agreed at that meeting to regularly monitor and report on both strategic and operational risks.

In line with the previous report, two risk registers had been prepared and reviewed identifying Service and Operational risks. It was reported that sickness absence had been removed and that loss of knowledge would remain, until a permanent arrangement was in place.

Resolved: that

- (i) the content of the report and updated position be noted.
- (ii) the risk registers shall be kept up to date and reviewed by the Joint Committee on a half yearly basis.

8 Fees and Charges Strategy Options 2014/15

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director: Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of the proposed Fees and Charges for Mountsett Crematorium for 2014/15 (for copy see file of minutes).

Details of the proposed charges were detailed within the report alongside comparable charges imposed by Crematorium's within the North east area.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) informed Members that the fees and charges for Durham and Mountsett were low compared to the regional benchmark, and Coundon had recently put their costs up to £630. Durham had also agreed at their last meeting to increase their costs to £620, the neighbouring average.

Members agreed that the best option for Mountsett would be to increase the fees in line with the regional cluster average, of £620. Members also discussed the additional budget that would be generated of £88,125 and the options for the redistribution of income. The opinion of the Committee was to transfer the additional income into the Cremator Reserve, which would help to build reserves.

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) suggested that a further option would be to keep the same charge for certain times of the day, i.e. 9 – 10 a.m. and introduce the new fees from 10 a.m. onwards. He advised that final proposals would be brought back for Committee's consideration.

Resolved:

- (i) That Mountsett Crematorium increase the fees and charges to £620, with an option to introduce discretionary costs at certain times of the day.
- (ii) That the additional budget is transferred to the Cremator Reserve.

9 Any Other Business

The Chairman informed members that the Bereavement Services Manager would be preparing a feedback report , following their attendance at the recent ICCM Learning Convention and Exhibition 2013.

10 Exclusion of 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 paragraph 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 Registrars Post and the outline for future options (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:-

That the recommendations contained within the report be approved.