

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Saltwell Room, Civic Suite, Gateshead Council on **Thursday 24 April 2014 at 10.00 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor O Temple (Chairman)**

### **Members of the Committee:**

#### **Durham County Council**

Councillors A Batey, I Jewell and T Nearney

#### **Gateshead Council:**

Councillors K Dodds (Vice-Chairman), M Charlton, P Ronan, D Davidson and J Lee

### **1 Apologies for absence.**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors M Ord, P Mole (Gateshead Council) and Councillors C Hampson (Durham County Council).

### **2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2014.**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2014 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 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report.**

The Committee considered a report of the Bereavement Services Manager which provided an update relating to performance and other operational matters for the period 1 January to 31 March 2014 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Bereavement Services Manager reported that during the period 325 cremations were undertaken which was a decrease of 64 on the comparable period last year. The total number of cremations to 31 March 2014 was 1191 compared with 1404 in the previous year a decrease of 213. It was however noted that 2012/13 had been an exceptional year with a long winter and high mortality rates compared against 2013/14.

The reduction in numbers had also been seen at Durham Crematorium and figures would continue to be monitored. It was also noted that as the actual number of cremations was less than the budgeted position, this had been reflected in the budgetary control report.

Moving on the Bereavement Services Manager provided an update on sales of memorial plaques, noting an increase of 3 for the period.

With regard to operational matters updates were provided in respect of staffing, the recycling of metals scheme and the service asset management plan.

Councillor Nearney raised a query with regard to the issue raised within the report regarding the publication of a brochure and inclusion of information relating to the recycling of metals scheme, and asked why this information was not permitted to be published. In response the Bereavement Services Manager advised that Corporate Communications had advised that this information could be seen as direct advertising which was against council policy.

Further discussion and debate took place regarding this issue and it was agreed that the Corporate Communications team and Councillor B Stephens should be contacted directly on behalf of the Committee and to obtain some clarification over this issue as members felt strongly that the information should be publicised as it was considered to be good publicity.

#### **Resolved:**

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

#### **5 Financial Monitoring Report- Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2014**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and 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 March 2014, together with the provisional outturn position for 2013/14, highlighting areas of over / under spend 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 the provisional position as at the year ended 31 March 2014 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Accountant went on to report that the outturn was showing a provisional year end surplus of £205,843 at the year end against a budgeted surplus of £254,526, £48,683 less than the budgeted position. Details of the significant variances by subjective analysis area were detailed within the report.

Further information was also presented in respect of capital expenditure and earmarked reserves.

In relation to the cremator reserves Councillor Dodds asked whether the reduction in income would create problems in the future for the cremator replacement scheme. In response the Principal Accountant advised that the reserves would be built up at a lower rate than previously forecasted if the trend remained the same. The joint committee were however still netting a profit at year end with surpluses being transferred to reserves therefore the reserves would continue to increase.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations contained in the report be noted.

**6 Internal Audit Report 2013/14.**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which presented the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2013/14 (for copy see file of minutes).

It was reported by the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager that a Substantial overall assurance opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control operating across the Joint Committee in 2013/14. Furthermore the opinion ranking provided assurance that there was a good system of control in operation and that there were no significant weaknesses that warranted inclusion in the 2013/14 Annual Governance Statement.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.

**7 Response to the Internal Audit Report.**

Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and the Corporate Director of Resources / Treasurer to the Joint Committee which presented the response to the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee Internal Audit Report for 2013-14 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Accountant advised that the Internal Audit had provided Substantial Assurance on joint committee's system of internal control with only minor weakness classified as low risk however an action plan had been put in place to fully address the issues identified in the Internal Audit Report. Further detail regarding to the two recommendations and associated actions were contained within the report.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.