

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in on **Friday 25 June 2010 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors A Bainbridge, O Johnson and J Nicholson

Gateshead Council:

Councillors P Ronan and D Davidson

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from

Durham County Council

Councillors J Docherty, M Hodgson, J Hunter, B Stephens and J Wilson

Gateshead Council

Councillors M Gannon, M Ord and J Hamilton

1 Membership of the Joint Committee

A question over the membership was raised whether Councillor J. Hunter should be a Member of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the membership be checked and Councillor Hunter advised accordingly.

2 Appointment of Chair for the Ensuing year.

Questions were raised whether the Chair of the Committee should alternate between the two authorities. It was highlighted that Durham County Council (DCC) was the lead authority and Officer support was with DCC Officers it was sensible that the Chair should be with DCC to enable ease of communications. To clarify the issue it was suggested that Officers check with the constitution / previous minutes regarding the alternation of the Chair, if this was not specified then the committee to follow custom and practice of Durham County Council holding the position of Chair.

The Democratic Services Officer asked for nominations for Chair.

Councillor O. Temple was nominated by Councillor J. Nicholson, seconded by Councillor K. M. Dodds.

RESOLVED:

1. That Officers check the constitution of the Committee regarding the voting of Chair.
2. That Councillor O. Temple be agreed as Chair for the ensuing year.

Councillor O. Temple took the Chair.

3 Appointment of Vice-Chair for the Ensuing year.

The Chair asked for nominations for Vice-Chair.

Councillor K. M. Dodds was nominated by Councillor P. Ronan, seconded by Councillor D. Davison.

RESOLVED: That Councillor K. M. Dodds be Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

4 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2010.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held 29th January 2010 be agreed as a correct record.

6 Report of the Superintendent & Registrar.

The Bereavement Services Manager presented the report which advised Members of the schedule of cremations with comparative figures for the previous year. He also commented that the appointment of a full-time in-house grounds maintenance employee had been an outstanding success as feedback from the public had been very complimentary. The Wesley Music System was now in operation had been received with enthusiasm by the funeral directors. A loop had also been installed which enabled mourners who were unable to gain access to the chapel to hear the service whilst standing outside.

Regarding repairs and maintenance he advised that the car park, boundary fence and steps outside the Chapel entrance were all in need of repair and estimates of the costs were attached as guidelines for Members information.

Councillors commented that the fence had been erected in 1967 and was now in need of repair, it was highlighted that it was the custom for mourners to place ashes, Fathers Day cards and other types of remembrances near the fence and therefore it was important to have the fence in good repair. It was also pointed out that elderly people sometimes have difficulty with the steps and it was suggested that a circular ramp be provided to allow easier access.

The Neighbourhood Services Head of Finance, HR and Business Support advised that the contribution to repairs and reserves had been increased in 2010/11 with the specific aim towards the replacement of crematoria in 2024/25 however, the reserves could also be used for the repairs described in the report.

In response to questions regarding the prices for the works, he advised that if the Committee agreed the work would be put out to tender and go through the usual procurement procedures of Durham County Council.

Resolved:

1. That the number of cremations undertaken in the period December 2009 – April 2010 be noted.
2. That the requisite remedial works as detailed in the report be agreed and the works be put out to tender and follow the procurement procedures of Durham County Council.

The Neighbourhood Services Head of Finance, HR and Business Support requested that Item 9 be taken before Item 8 as the Annual Governance Statement 2009/10 needed to be approved prior to the consideration of the Annual Return and Statement of Accounts..

7 2009/2010 Annual Governance Statement.

The Neighbourhood Services Head of Finance, HR and Business Support presented the report which provided the details of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year April 2009 to March 2010. The AGS needed to be formally approved by Members as part of the consideration of the Statement of Accounts and Small Bodies in England Annual Return 2009/2010, the return was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

The Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee had adopted and operated (via Durham County Council, its lead Authority) under a code of corporate governance which was consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework – ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’. The AGS explained how the Joint Committee complied with this code and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit regulations 2003 as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) regulations 2006 in relation to the publication of a Statement on Internal Control.

Members were advised that the Corporate Director, Resources had signed the document and if Members agreed the document could be signed by the Chairman.

Officers referred to page 7, Item 4. Review of Effectiveness, first bullet point and advised that the particular arrangements were not as yet in place and therefore requested a slight change to the wording.

Resolved: That the 2009/2010 Annual Governance Statement be approved and the Chair be authorised to sign the document provided the following amendment was made:

- page 7, Item 4, first bullet point – delete the word ‘Formalised’ and replace with ‘A process to formalise’.

8 Annual Return & Statement of Accounts 2009/10.

The Neighbourhood Services Head of Finance, HR and Business Support presented the report which sought approval of the Small Bodies in England Annual Return and Statement of Accounts (attached as Appendix 2 and 3 to the report) for Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee for the financial year ended 31st March 2010.

The Annual Return was to be subject to audit by external auditors with the audit due to commence 28th June 2010. On completion the auditor's report would be incorporated into a published Statement of Accounts document.

The Annual Return and Statement of Accounts had been prepared considering the requirements of the 2009 'Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in Great Britain' as updated and published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

Councillor K M Dodds referred to page 5 of the Statement of Accounts, page 5 regarding the Major Fixed Asset Acquisitions and disposal and whether the 60% DCC – 40% Gateshead split was correct, compared to the usual 65% - 35% split in other reports. Officers advised that they would check the constitution and update Members. Councillors confirmed they would be agreeable to the split as detailed in the constitution.

Resolved:

1. That the Joint Committee note the outturn position set out in the report.
2. That the Annual Return and Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2010 (as attached as Appendix 2 and 3 to the report) be approved.
3. That the Chair and Treasurer be authorised to sign the Statement of Accounts and Annual Return.

9 Financial Monitoring Report 2010/11, position at 31 May 2010, with Projected Outturn to 31/03/2011.

The Neighbourhood Services Head of Finance, HR and Business Support presented the report which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1st April to 31st May 2010, with a projection of the anticipated outturn to 31st March 2011, highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level.

The report also set out details of the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1st April 2010 and estimated position at 31st March 2011, taking into account the forecast financial outturn.

Officers referred to the estimated outturn of a 1% increase on employee expenditure and Members were asked to note that due to the recent budget by the Government this increase would not now take place.

Resolved:

1. That the April to May 2010 Revenue spend financial monitoring report and associated forecasts in terms of the outturn position 2010/11 be noted.
2. That quarterly reports continue to be submitted to Members for consideration, in line with the Forward Plan.

10 Treasurer to the Joint Committee.

The Neighbourhood Services Head of Finance, HR and Business Support presented the report which advised Members of revised arrangements with regards to the position of Treasurer to the Joint Committee.

The current Treasurer, Mr Stuart D Crowe was to retire in early July 2010. His position as Corporate Director: Resources at Durham County Council was currently subject to a recruitment process and whilst an appointment was expected, notice periods would dictate that alternative interim arrangements would need to be put in place with effect from 1st July 2010.

As an interim measure, it was suggested that Mr Jeff Garfoot – Head of Finance: Resources (Durham County Council's Deputy S151 Officer) take on the role of Interim Treasurer to the Joint Committee. This would extend through the forthcoming external audit process.

Resolved:

1. That Members note the retirement of Mr Stuart D Crowe and agree to the appointment of Mr Jeff Garfoot – Head of Finance: Resources (Durham County Council's Deputy S151 Officer) as Interim Treasurer to the Joint Committee, effective from 1st July 2010.
2. That thanks be recorded for the work of Mr Stuart D Crowe in acting as Treasurer to the Joint Committee.

11 Bus Services to Mountsett Crematorium - Verbal Presentation.

The Business Manager, Passenger Transport advised that he was in attendance due to an issue being raised at the meeting held 29th January regarding the bus services to Mountsett Crematorium (minute number A10 refers). A plan showing the Crematorium and the nearest bus stops were circulated to all Members. Bus services were described as follows:

- X70 bus (Burnopfield, Sunnyside, Gateshead, Newcastle – one per hour - 160m from bus stop to the entrance to the Crematorium.
- the V8 bus (Dipton, Leadgate, Consett, Castleside) – two per hour - 90m from bus stop to the entrance to the Crematorium.
- In addition, as of 1st June 2010 a new service Link2 was bookable for door-to-door travel where eligible.

Also there was a 43 & 44 service via Pickering Nook which was provided by a commercial operator. In view of the services provided Officers were not minded to put on another service.

Councillor Ord commented that he had received complaints from people that the journey from Newcastle / Gateshead areas to and from the Crematorium was not adequate. On the journey to the Crematorium the bus stop was at Flint Hill and most people expected to access the same bus for the return journey. However, for the return journey people had to

access a different bus stop on a different route and he did not consider we were providing a satisfactory service.

Further discussion ensued regarding suggestions to improve the situation such as possible alterations to existing bus routes / services however, as these were commercially operated services it would be up to the operators to agree to any changes.

Resolved: Councillor R Ord to provide specific proposals regarding bus services to and from the Crematorium for the next meeting of the Committee. These proposals be forwarded to the provider of the bus services and ask them to respond.

12 Internal Audit Report.

Peter Jackson, Audit Manager advised that the report reflected audit work carried out to agreed terms of reference during 2009-10. However, the intention was to expand the scope of the audit in future years and ensure consistency of practice for both Mountsett and Durham Crematorium. To this end it was proposed that a more robust service level agreement be developed for both Crematoria during 2010/11.

Sarah Bell, Auditor presented the report which advised Members that in accordance with the County Council's annual Internal Audit Plan a review had been carried out of Mountsett Crematorium. This involved a visit to the Crematorium during the week commenced 26th October 2009. The report included observations, risks and recommendation and the review highlighted 4 medium priority issues. An action plan for implementation was also attached to the report.

She further advised that based upon the number and potential impact of the observations made, the Audit Assurance Level was provided as Substantial Assurance. This level of assurance is one of five possible levels i) Full Assurance; ii) Substantial Assurance; iii) Moderate Assurance; iv) Limited Assurance; v) No Assurance.

The Chair asked questions whether the widening of the remit of internal audit would result in additional cost implications for the Committee. In response Officers advised that there were plans to calculate specific costs relating to support services so that the cost of each was more transparent.

Resolved: That the content of the audit report be noted.

13 Such other business as in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.