

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 3 October 2014 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors A Batey, C Hampson, I Jewell and T Nearney

Gateshead Council:

Councillors M Ord, M Charlton, P Ronan and J Lee

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors K Dodds, D Davidson and L Green (Gateshead Council)

Councillors K Dearden and B Stephens (Durham County Council)

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 June 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman with the inclusion of Councillor M Ord's apologies.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report:

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar which provided an update on performance and operational matters (for copy see file of minutes).

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that there were 285 cremations undertaken during 1 June 2014 to 31 August 2014, compared to 286 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 1. The total number of cremations undertaken during the period 1 April – 31 August 2014 was 495, compared to 501 in the comparable period during 2013, representing a decrease of 6 cremations (1.2%)

It was noted that in discussions with funeral directors they had indicated that were also been experiencing reductions in business and that this was further mirrored in the national picture as detailed in Appendix 2. With regard to the 2014/15 income budget it was noted

that despite the reduction in numbers the Crematorium were still expected to exceed the budgeted position.

With regard to the sale of memorials it was noted that there had been an increase of 4 (£1,407.00) over the two periods compared to the same periods last year.

Moving on to operational matters it was reported that the Crematorium had been successful in obtaining/retaining the Green Flag for the third year in row.

With regards to staffing it was reported that the Business Administration Apprentice position had been filled, however due to unforeseen circumstances, the Crematorium Assistant (appointed in June 2014) was no longer working at the Crematorium and the position was currently being advertised.

It was reported that the recycling of metals scheme had once again produced a significant sum nationally and Councillor Dodds had requested that the next donation be given to the Child Funeral Charity who assisted those families who were unable to pay for children's funeral costs. Members agreed that the above named charity should be the next beneficiary of any donation made.

The Bereavement Services Manager provided members with a copy of the recently published Crematorium Brochure and welcomed the Committee's feedback.

Details were also provided regarding the Service Asset Management plan, which had been updated and attached at appendix 3. Urgent essential works identified for 2014/15 had been included within the budget and were estimated to the sum of £81,500.

Desirable works which had not been included within the improvement works had been estimated to the sum of £90,775 and desirable works for 2016/17 estimated to the sum of £42,950. Details of the planned works were contained within the report.

Councillor Jewell asked what capacity the crematorium was currently operated at. In response the Bereavement Services Manager advised that they were currently operating at around 60%, however it was interesting to note that Funeral Directors from outside the area were now wishing to promote the use of Mountsett because of its good reputation.

Councillor Jewell further queried whether there were any plans for improving parking facilities as he was concerned that due to high volumes attending funerals the car park may be inadequate to meet demand. It was reported that work to improve the car parks was programmed to take place this year with additional spaces being provided by the removal of some green areas and pinch points at the access and exit. Following completion of these works the situation would be carefully monitored and if necessary further proposals brought forward for consideration by members.

Councillor Temple commented that he was also happy to see that shower facilities were to be provided for staff in the list of crematorium improvement works and welcomed the increased investment in improving the overall facility, using the financial strength we now had.

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

5 Financial Management System (FMS) - Transfer to SAGE Accounting Software.

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which sought agreement for the transfer of the Financial Management Information from the current FMS – Oracle to a standalone SAGE system following a review of Mountsett Crematorium by Internal Audit (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that financial package was offered at a relatively low cost and lent itself well too small to medium enterprises. It had successfully been implemented at the Durham Crematorium and was working very well. In addition to the implementation of the system the crematorium would be required to set up a separate bank account as detailed within the report with a view to the system being in place and operation by the new financial year. The Finance Team had experience from implementing the system at Durham and the policies and procedures implemented there could be migrated to Mountsett.

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained in the report be agreed.

6 External Audit Report - Issues Arising Report for the Year Ended 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 presented the External Auditors (BDO LLP) Issues Arising Report for the year ended 31 March 2014 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the External Auditor had raised one point regarding the initialling and signing of minutes, however upon further inspection this had been found to be an error and with such, the Auditor had issued an email to disregard the issue and therefore there was no material weaknesses identified / issues arising to bring to the attention of the committee in terms of the system of internal control and the conclusion of the external audit was that the Small Bodies return was a true and fair view of the financial position at 31 March 2014.

Councillor Temple commented that this was as good as it gets and asked the Head of Finance (Financial Services) to pass on a thanks you to all staff involved.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted and the appropriate notices published at County hall; Gateshead Civic Centre and at the Crematorium.

7 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/08/14, with Projected Outturn to 31/03/15:

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 the income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2014 to 31 August 2014, together with the provisional outturn position for 2014/15, and highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level.

The report also included details of the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2014 and forecast outturn position at 31 March 2015, taking into account the provisional financial outturn (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the projected outturn was showing a surplus of £295,183 against a budgeted surplus of £276,695 (£18,488) more than the budgeted position. The report provided detailed analysis of those significant variances across the agreed budget.

Moving on the Head of Finance advised that due to the surplus, a projected contribution of to the Cremator Reserve of £115,293 had been made. In addition a transfer of £10,200 from the Cremator Reserve to the general Reserve had been undertaken in line with the Reserves Policy. It was therefore reported that the retained reserves of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee at 31 March 2014 were forecast to be £768,198, representing a £130,293 (20%) increase over the opening position at 1 April 2014.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.