

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CENTRAL DURHAM CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 22 April 2015** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor JV Graham
(Vice-Chairman, in the Chair – Spennymoor Town Council)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, J Chaplow, K Corrigan, B Moir, D Stoker and K Thompson

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Conway, N Foster, M Plews, M Simmons and Town Councillor I Harrington.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 21 January 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed and initialled by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from January 2015 to March 2015 and the comparison to the same period for 2014, highlighting that there was a net increase of 99 cremations. It was noted there was a total of 683 for the three month period with the January to March 2015 profile breakdown showing 203 from Durham, 33 from Spennymoor and 447 from outside of the area. Councillors were asked to note that the figure for the total number of cremations to 31 March 2015 was 2,287, compared to a prudent budget assumption of 2,200 cremations, representing an over-achievement in cremation fee income of £44,810.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted the performance over the previous four financial years and reminded Members a Crematorium Brochure had been produced to promote the services available at the Crematorium and to help retain market share. It was added that the increase in cremation numbers indicated that the Crematorium had maintained a good reputation and good service provision while improvement works were being undertaken.

Members were asked to note the number of memorials sold in comparison to the same period the previous year, with sales being £4,846 less. It was explained that, as reported previously, a backlog exercise undertaken by Crematorium staff in relation to renewals last year had contributed to an increased amount of memorial sales in 2013/14.

The Joint Committee noted an issue in respect of long term sickness and arrangements put in place for Durham County Council to assist until such time as the employee returned to work.

Councillors noted the usual arrangements had been made for the Bereavement Services Manager and the Chairman of the Joint Committee to attend the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and Cremation Society of Great Britain, to be held at Stratford-upon-Avon from Monday 6 to Wednesday 8 July 2015. It was noted on this occasion the Bereavement Services Manager would be accompanied by Councillor M Plews.

The Bereavement Services Manager informed Members that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had generated a sum of £4,487 for Macmillan Cancer Support. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that the cheque was presented to St. Cuthbert's Hospice by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee on 1 April 2015.

The Bereavement Services Manager referred Members to report setting out the update on Crematorium Improvement Works. It was added that the Phase 2 works had commenced on 15 November 2014 and had completed ahead of schedule on 16 March 2015. Members noted that Phase 3 works had commenced the weekend of 11 April 2015 and that the majority of works would be undertaken each weekend for approximately five months. It was explained that the Crematorium would remain closed on Mondays in order to have the facility prepared for services and it was noted there was sufficient capacity to accommodate the approximately 150 services displaced from the Mondays. The Bereavement Services Manager reassured Members that Funeral Directors had been consulted regarding the arrangements and all were happy to work alongside the Crematorium during the period of works.

Councillor D Bell asked if services held on Saturdays were charged at a higher cost to those held during the week. The Bereavement Services Manager noted they were charged at a higher rate, though this had not detracted from the popularity of such services. Councillor K Thompson asked whether the Phase 2 works had been completed on budget. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that the Phase 2 works had been completed on budget.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium and monitoring against budget be noted.
- (ii) That the long term sickness absence be noted.
- (iii) That the attendance at the Burial and Cremation Conference be noted.
- (iv) That the distribution of recycling income to the respective charity be noted.
- (v) That the completion of Phase 2 works be noted.
- (vi) That the start date of the Phase 3 works be noted.

5 Financial Monitoring Report - Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2015

The Principal Accountant, Ed Thompson referred Members to the Financial Monitoring Report, with the provisional outturn as at 31 March 2015 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that the income and expenditure were broadly in line with the base budget and the major variances were set out within the report. It was noted that Phase 2 works had been brought forward, however this had been offset by the increase in income. Members noted that a new unbudgeted annual cremation abatement payment from the CAMEO scheme had resulted in additional income of £42,779 relating to 2013/14 and also it was anticipated for a 2014/15 payment of £52,220 resulting in a total of £94,999 CAMEO abatement income in year.

It was explained that the provisional outturn position showed a net income of £46,589 above the base budget to be included in the major capital works reserves as previously agreed by Members. Members noted a projected Reserve of approximately £1.46 Million at the year-end, giving a strong financial position.

Resolved:

That the April 2014 to March 2015 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated Provision Outturn position at 31 March 2015 be noted.

6 Risk Register Update 2014/15

The Principal Accountant asked Members to note the Risk Register Update 2014/15 report, the Joint Committee considering updates on a 6 monthly basis. Members recalled that the report set out Strategic Risks and Operational Risks with risks regularly reviewed by the DCC Risk Management Team and the Bereavement Services Manager.

It was noted that the risk identified 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 had been closed September 2014. It was added that Risk 3 in relation to "Impact on staff morale due to uncertainty over job evaluation and single status" would be removed, as single status had now been implemented.

It was explained that of the main risks that remained, such as “ICT and Power Failure”, plans were in place to best mitigate any problems that could arise. Members learned that the operational risk that had an outstanding action, in relation to “limited space in the office area” 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 September 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 September 2015.

7 Internal Audit Charter

The Chairman introduced the Audit and Fraud Manager, Stephen Carter who was in attendance to speak to Members as regards an update to the Internal Audit Charter (for copy see file of minutes).

The Audit and Fraud Manager reminded the Joint Committee that the Internal Audit Charter had last been updated in January 2014 to reflect the changes in Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and working standards. Subsequent to further guidance updating proper practices underpinning the Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2011, Members were asked to note changes reflected in the Internal Audit Charter as attached to the report. It was explained that the main differences were the removal of “Full Assurance” and “No Assurance” from the Assurance Ratings, the remaining ratings being: “Substantial”; “Moderate” and “Limited” and changes to priority ratings to now be set out as: “High”, “Medium” and “Best Practice”.

Resolved:

That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee approve the revised Internal Audit Charter.

8 Annual Internal Audit Report 2014/15

The Audit and Fraud Manager, referred Members to the Annual Internal Audit Report 2014/15 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Audit and Fraud Manager thanked Members for the opportunity to present the report on behalf of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager and reminded the Joint Committee that the Annual Internal Audit Report fulfilled the requirements of Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and CIPFA Local Government Application note for the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager to deliver an annual audit opinion.

Members were informed that the report looked at the Joint Committee's systems of governance, risk management and internal control and that, from the work undertaken, the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager was able to provide a "Substantial" overall assurance opinion of the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control operating across the Joint Committee in 2014/15. Members were reminded that "Substantial" was now the highest level of assurance rating.

The Audit and Fraud Manager noted that the appendices to the report set out the work undertaken by Internal Audit and highlighted strengths and weaknesses, setting out a few minor issues which were being addressed by the Bereavement Services Manager.

Councillor B Moir asked how the Committee could take assurance in the work carried out by Internal Audit. The Audit and Fraud Manager noted that not only did Internal Audit adhere to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, a review by a "Peer Authority" was due to be undertaken next February. It was added that the Council's Internal Audit section carried out regular self-assessments and was also subject to scrutiny by the County Council's Audit Committee as well as the Joint Committee itself.

Resolved:

That the content of the Annual Internal Audit Report and the overall "Substantial" opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Joint Committee's control environment for 2014/15 be noted.

9 Meetings of the Joint Committee

The Chairman noted that the next meeting of the Joint Committee would be the Annual General Meeting, to be held on 24 June 2015 at 2.00pm, at County Hall, Durham. Councillors noted that the meeting scheduled for 30 September 2015 would be arranged to be held at Durham Crematorium, South Road to enable Members to view completed crematorium improvement works.