

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 24 April 2015 at 11.00 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chairman)

Members of the Committee

Durham County Council

Councillors A Batey, K Dearden, C Hampson, I Jewell, O Milburn and T Nearney

Gateshead Council:

Councillors M Charlton, L Green, P Ronan and J Lee

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Davidson, K Dodds and M Ord (Gateshead Council).

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2015.

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2015 be confirmed as 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 Joint Committee received report of the Bereavement Services Manager which provided Members of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee with an update relating to performance and other operational matters (for copy see file of minutes).

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that during the period 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2015, 388 cremations had been undertaken compared to 325 in the comparable period last year, an increase of 63 year on year. The total number of cremations in 2014/15 was 1320 compared with 1191 in 2013/14 an increase of 129 year on year. As a result of the increase in cremations an overachievement of cremation fee income of £104,525 had been factored in to the budgetary control report.

It was explained that as cremation numbers did fluctuate on a year by year basis prudent financial planning took place when setting the budget. In addition it was also encouraging

to note that the increase in cremation numbers also reflected the good service and reputation that was offered by Mountsett Crematorium.

Moving on the Neighbourhood Protection Manager provided an update with regard to the sale of memorial plaques and it was noted that although the number of plaques sold during the quarter was lower than the previous year, the number of plaques sold during the course of the year was higher than the same period last year.

Further details were then reported regarding staffing and it was noted that the new member of staff recently appointed had settled in well and was awaiting a test date in order to qualify as an operator.

With regard to the recycling of metals scheme it was reported that a sum of £4,487 had been donated to the Child Funeral Charity in March 2015.

The Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that as members would recall at the previous meeting details had been provided regarding the car park extension. It was reported that work was progressing well and a full update would be provided to the meeting in September 2015.

Councillor Milburn raised a query regarding the capacity of the crematorium and whether it had as yet reached its saturation point. In response the Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that the crematorium was quite some way away from saturation at this time, however it did of course have its peak days and times where it was running to full capacity. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager further made reference to the ICCM and work that had been commissioned to determine where there was increased demand on a regional basis.

Councillor Charlton queried the automatic recycling of metal implants and the process by which the relatives were consulted. In response the Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that the recycling of metal was covered in the detailed paperwork that was completed with the relatives. It was further noted that most people wanted to retain the ashes only and were happy for any metal to be recycled and the sum to be donated to charity.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

5 Financial Monitoring Report 2014/15 - Provisional Outturn:

The Joint Committee received 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 2014 to 31 March 2015, together with the provisional outturn position for 2014/15, highlighting areas of over / underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level (for copy see file of minutes).

The report further set out details of the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2014 and the forecast outturn position at 31 March 2015, taking into account the provisional financial outturn.

The Principal Accountant advised that the projected outturn showed a surplus of £481,664 against a budgeted surplus of £276,695. This reflected a £98,337 improvement on the previously reported forecasted surplus position and is a result of the increased number of cremations to budget and a large underspend on the environmental surcharge from CAMEO.

Further details were reported which outlined the reasons for any significant variances by subjective analysis as detailed within paragraph 8 of the report.

In conclusion details were reported with regard to earmarked reserves. It was forecast that the earmarked reserve position was £204,969 more than originally budgeted. This was primarily as a result of the increase in cremation income.

Further details were provided regarding contributions to the Cremator Replacement Reserve and retained reserves.

Councillor Temple asked that the Principal Accountant provide a brief summary of the CAMEO scheme and how the payments were allocated.

Councillor Green asked whether it was known what the current level of interest was that was being paid on reserves. The Principal Accountant advised that the interest accumulated was included within the income line under miscellaneous, would be reported separately in the final 2014/15 outturn report in June 2015.

Councillor Charlton further queried plans for cremator replacement and associated costs. In response it was reported that detailed options for cremator replacement would be reported to the September meeting.

In response to the discussion regarding CAMEO and mercury abatement, Councillor Jewell asked whether CAMEO would be defunct once all crematoria were using mercury abatement equipment. It was reported that in effect yes this would be the case.

Councillor Jewell further asked what the anticipated timescale was for the installation of new cremators. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) identified that work would be undertaken late this decade following a rigorous procurement process in line with European legislation.

Councillor Nearney asked whether it was likely that increased maintenance would be required on the existing cremators over the coming years. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that the requirement for increased maintenance had been picked up under the SAMP and had been factored in to the maintenance budget.

Resolved:

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.

- (ii) That details of the interest accumulated on reserves be reported back to members following the meeting.

6 Risk Register 2014-15:

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which provided an update on the current position with regards to the Risk Register of the Mountsett Crematorium Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

It was reported that an emerging issue had been identified during the quarter relating to the decrease in revenue over the period March 2014 – September 2014 which could be attributed to the fall in national death rates. In addition other risks could include increased competition from other providers. It was therefore reported that this would be closely monitored and any further changes would be reported back to the next meeting.

The Principal Accountant advised that both sections of the Risk Register had been reviewed and actions to mitigate and / or tackle issues arising had now been agreed for the forthcoming year.

It was further noted that Operational Risks had also been reviewed and there were no changes to the net risk scores and all risks were considered to be at a tolerable level.

Councillor Ronan commented that she found the risk associated with violence / assaults on staff to be high and queried why it was ranked so high. In response the Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that there were no recorded incidents, however it was acknowledged that families often found themselves in highly charged and emotional circumstances at funerals and in some cases staff had to step in when issues flared up due to family issues. It was noted however that 6, scored as a minor risk on the risk matrix.

Councillor Batey commented that she feared that due to austerity measures the crematorium may struggle to cope with the pressures of an emergency planning situation. The Neighbourhood Protection Manager advised that plans were regularly reviewed to ensure that adequate planning was in place in order to manage an emergency or pandemic situation. He did however appreciate Councillor Batey's concerns regarding mass fatalities and the loss of knowledge, trained staff and other resources due to austerity measures and reassured members that the crematorium and council together worked to ensure that the staff base of cremator operators was expanded and adequate facilities were available.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

7 Internal Audit Charter:

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which sought agreement on the revised Internal Audit Charter to take immediate effect and to be applied to reviews undertaken as part of the Internal Audit Plan for 2014/15 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager reported that the revisions to the charter were detailed within paragraph 6 and 7 of the report.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

8 Annual Internal Audit Report 2014/15:

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which presented the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2014/15 (for copy see file of minutes).

It was reported that based upon the work undertaken, a Substantial overall assurance opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control operating across the Joint Committee in 2014/15 had been given. the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager advised that this opinion provided assurance to the Joint Committee that there was a sound system of control in operation and there were no significant control weaknesses that warrant inclusion in the 2014/15 Annual Governance Statement.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.