

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Saltwell Room, Civic Suite, Gateshead Council on **Friday 25 September 2015 at 2.00 pm**

### **Present:**

**Councillor O Temple (Chairman)**

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

#### **Durham County Council**

Councillors C Hampson, I Jewell and T Nearney

#### **Gateshead Council:**

Councillors D Davidson, L Green, J Lee and M Ord

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Batey, K Dearden, M Plews (Durham County Council) and M Charlton and P Ronan (Gateshead Council).

### **2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 June 2016.**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 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 External Auditors Issues Arising Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2015**

The Joint Committee considered a 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 2015 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance - Financial Services advised that the audit had not highlighted any material weaknesses around the Joint Committee's system of internal control and had concluded that the return was a true and fair view of the financial position at 31 March 2015.

### **Resolved:**

That the joint committee noted the conclusion of the Crematorium Audit and approve the Small Bodies in England Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2015.

## **5 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report**

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

The Bereavement Services Manager advised that during the period 1 June 2015 to 31 August 2015 inclusive, there were 297 cremations undertaken, a reduction of 12 on the comparable period last year.

It was further reported that during the period, 11 memorial plaques were sold which represented an increase of 4 (£1,900) year on year.

With regard to operational matters it was reported that arrangements were in place to cover the cleaner's post which was vacated in November 2014, and this would continue until a Service Level Agreement was put in place with Durham County Council's facilities management team, to continue the arrangement.

Moving on the Bereavement Services Manager advised that Mountsett Crematorium was once again successful in retaining its Green Flag Award for the fourth year running, which was a great achievement. This was in addition to being awarded the Gold Star Status by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management, a testimony to the dedication of the Crematorium's staff.

It was further reported that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had produced a surplus of £350,000 nationally from the 2014/15 collection. As previously determined the North of England Children's Cancer Research Fund had been nominated by the Joint Committee for the next distribution of funds. A cheque for the sum of £4,321 would be forwarded in due course.

The Bereavement Services Manager then went on to explain that next year would mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Crematorium and with such it was suggested that this was recognised and commemorated by way of special event. Suggestions and ideas were sought from Members.

Further to discussions at the last meeting regarding the options for extending car parking facilities on site, it was reported that a feasibility study had now been undertaken and had determined that the extension of the existing car park was possible. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that there were two options available as detailed within the report. It was further reported that subject to members' views it would seem appropriate to progress option 1, providing 22 additional car parking spaces which would supplement the 12 spaces recently created along the exit road.

In conclusion the Bereavement Services Manager advised that the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) had been amended following the meeting on 3 October 2014 and now provided further direction and highlighted future investment requirements and budget pressures for the Joint Committee. The revised SAMP was appended to the report for members' consideration. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that the plan was split into four main areas of priority and included all planned crematorium improvement

works up until 2018. Further discussion related to the SAMP would be undertaken during Item 9 regarding cremator replacement.

Councillor Nearney queried whether the staff involved in the crematorium's grounds maintenance had been rewarded in any way for their efforts. It was further suggested that a nomination be put forward for the Great staff Great stuff awards on behalf of the joint committee.

In addition Councillor Temple added that he wished to further congratulate the finance / admin teams for such a positive audit outcome.

Councillor Temple further raised a query regarding the cleaning services currently being provided and asked what the benefits were of using Direct Services to carry out the work. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that Direct Services were able to clean the facilities 5 days per week. In addition where cover was not previously possible for sick leave or holiday, Direct Services were able to provide cover at short notice. Councillor Jewell asked how much this service cost. In response the Head of Finance (Financial Services) advised that the services cost approximately £1000 more under the SLA, however this also included 2 additional days per week which were not provided under the old arrangement. The Head of Direct Services advised that the SLA was flexible and the number of days provided could be altered if required at any time, and this would be reflected in the cost.

Councillor Temple then asked for any ideas or suggestions regarding the 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary celebrations. Councillor Nearney in referencing Watford Crematorium's celebrations suggested, that a balloon release could be arranged, with one balloon for each year of its operation. He suggested that this could be a good non-faith way of marking 50 years.

Further discussion ensued and it was felt that holding a dinner would be inappropriate. It was also noted that the joint committee would have to be mindful of all faiths in determining the most appropriate way of marking his occasion. Councillor Temple suggested that any ideas should be brought forward to the next meeting for consideration.

Moving on to the proposed car park extension Councillor Jewell commented that he felt there were 3 options, the third unmentioned option, being that the smaller option be implemented immediately with the option to extend further at a later stage. The Bereavement Services Manager added that this may not be possible due to drainage issues however this could be explored further with the design team.

Councillor Ord asked whether it was felt that 22 spaces was adequate enough to meet future demand. In response the Bereavement Services Manager advised that no matter how many spaces were provided, it was unlikely that they could ever fully meet the demand.

Councillor Green in referencing option 1 asked whether retaining the hedgeline as detailed in option 1 could cause problems in the future for extending the car park. In response the Bereavement Services Manager advised that the hedgeline consisted on mainly privet and hawthorn and could potentially impact on future works.

The Head of Finance - Financial Services added that with the 12 spaces recently created and the additional 22 proposed, the total number of spaces would be in line with Durham Crematorium. In addition he advised that funds could be redirected from the major works reserve if the committee wanted to implement option 2. Councillor Temple then commented that he could therefore see no reason to preclude option 2 at this stage. Members however agreed that Option 1 would be the most suitable at this time, however wished for the option of possible future extension works to be explored.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the current performance of the crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the current situation with regards to the sale of Memorials be noted.
- (iii) That the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award be noted. In addition that the joint committee shall nominate the staff involved in its maintenance for a Great Staff Great Stuff award.
- (iv) That the current round of money available with regards to the recycling of metals scheme be noted.
- (v) That the outcome of the car park extension feasibility study be noted and that Option 1 be implemented, with costs being met from the Repairs Reserve.
- (vi) That the content of the Service Asset Management Plan be attached at Appendix 3.
- (vii) That Members should submit any ideas regarding the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations to the next meeting for discussion.

**6 Financial Monitoring report 2015/16: Position at 31/08/15 with Projected Outturn to 31/03/16.**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Corporate Director and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2015 to 31 August 2015, together with the provisional outturn position for 2015/16, highlighting areas of over/underspend against the revenue budgets at service expenditure analysis level. The report further detailed the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2015 and the forecast outturn position at 31 March 2016, 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 £395,326 against a budgeted surplus of £306,196 (£89,130) more than the budgeted position. The report further details the reasons for those variances broken down by subjective analysis area.

With regard to income the Head of Finance – Financial Services advised that contributions to reserves were forecast to be £89,130 more than originally budgeted and this was primarily due to the increase in CAMEO income and the over provision of the CAMEO abatement budget.

After taking into account the transfer to reserves it was reported that £198,516 would be transferred to the Cremator Replacement Reserve.

With regard to the retained reserves of the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee at 31 March 2016, it was reported that they were forecast to be £949,905 along with a General

Reserve of £242,070, giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £1,191,975 at the year end.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.

## **7 Risk Register 2015/16 - Update**

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 Joint Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Finance – Financial Services advised that the Risk register which was considered and approved by the Joint Committee on 24 April 2015 had been reviewed, reassessed and updated in accordance with the Durham County Council methodology and approach to Risk Management. Following this review it was reported that service and operational risks had been plotted onto a risk matrix and were set out within Appendices 2 and 3 of the report.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.
- (ii) That the Risk Register be kept up to date and be reviewed by the Joint Committee on a half yearly basis.

## **8 Exclusion of Public**

**Resolved:**

That under Section 100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the said Act

## **9 Options Appraisal -Cremator Replacement / Mercury Abatement, Potential Extension and Refurbishment**

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 options for the cremator replacement, taking into account the Asset Management Requirements / lifespan of the existing cremators and the Mercury Abatement Regulations, which came into effect on 1 January 2013 (for copy see file of minutes).

Members of the Joint Committee discussed in depth all options presented regarding both the construction, timing and financial aspects of the project. Members were also given the opportunity to view plans of the various options and the Senior Projects Manager was in attendance to talk through the design aspects of the project and feasibility study.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That option 1a, which mitigated the legislative risks and allowed for a simpler delivery be agreed.
- (ii) That the cremators be replaced in 2017/18, mitigating interest rate rises and allowing sufficient time to procure the equipment, design and deliver the finished facility at the earliest opportunity.
- (iii) That a negotiated tender with Direct Services be undertaken with regards to the building works.
- (iv) To receive update reports throughout the lead up to and delivery of the project.