

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 28 September 2016 at 10.00 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor O Temple (Chairman)**

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

#### **Durham County Council**

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

#### **Gateshead Council:**

Councillors K Dodds (Vice-Chairman), D Davidson, L Green and J Lee

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Plews (Durham County Council) and Councillor M Ord (Gateshead Council).

### **2 Declarations of Interest, if any**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 June 2016**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **4 External Audit Annual Review of the Return for the year ended 31 March 2016.**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Interim Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which presented the External Auditors (BDO LLP) Annual review of the Joint Committee's Return for the year ended 31 March 2016 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Account, Ed Thompson advised that the audit had now been concluded, adding that there had been no material weaknesses highlighted around the Joint Committee's system of internal control.

### **Resolved:**

That the Joint Committee approve the Joint Committee's Return for the year ended 31 March 2016 including the External Report 2015/16 Certificate.

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

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

The Bereavement Services Manager advised that during the period 1 June– 31 August 2016 there were 342 cremations undertaken and increase of 45 on the comparable period last year. He further reported that the number of plaques during the period was 12 (£3,816) which was an increase of 1, however resulted in a decrease of income of £475.

Moving on to operational matters, it was reported that the Business Admin Apprentice position had now been filled following interviews held on 23 September and the successful candidate was awaiting a formal start date from HR.

The Bereavement Services Manager further reported that the Crematorium had been successful in retaining the Green Flag Award for the fifth year running and was testimony to the dedication of the staff. This award was in addition to the Gold Star Status awarded by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management.

It was also reported that the national recycling of metals scheme had produced a surplus of £350,000 from the 2015/16 collection. It was noted that Macmillan Cancer Support had been nominated for the next distribution of funds.

Members were reminded that Mountsett Crematorium marked its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Saturday 23 July 2016 and a Memorial Service was attended by approximately 50 guests. A booklet was also produced covering the 50 years and was circulated to those who attended on the day. Copies were also made available to Members of the Joint Committee.

The Bereavement Services Manager reported that further to discussion regarding the installation of a curtain to cover the cross in the Chapel, discussions with the manufacturer had determined that a curtain would be difficult to maintain and instead had suggested that an electronic roller blind be installed. Works were expected to be completed during October 2016.

Members further noted progress in respect of the replacement of cremators and installation of mercury abatement equipment. It was reported that the extension project could commence on site as early as January 2017. The Bereavement Services Manager went on to provide a brief update on the Service Asset Management Plan and planned crematorium improvement works.

Councillor Green added that she was disappointed to learn that the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event had been so poorly attended by public and attributed this to the late timing and lack of advertising. Councillor Temple added that unfortunately the council's corporate communications policy on promotion of such events was restricted and this was something that the committee would continue to challenge.

Councillor Batey commented that she would like to congratulate the team at Mountsett for achieving the Green Flag Award for the fifth consecutive year.

The Bereavement Services Manager reported that members may be aware, that a petition was currently running on change.org regarding notices which were displayed at Mountsett Crematorium, prohibiting the placement of personal items, flowers and memorial items. It was noted that to date 1850 signatures had been received; however the lead petitioner had not been in touch with the crematorium to discuss their concerns.

Lengthy discussion and debate took place regarding the policy which was operated by Mountsett Crematorium. Councillor Dodds commented that by allowing the placement of such items, had the potential to impinge upon other people's form of grieving and in addition detracted from the beautiful setting of Mountsett. He commented that although he had deep sympathy for those concerned the decision was tempered by the impact this could potentially have on others.

Councillor Batey further commented that because crematorium grounds had no demarcation they could not apply the same rules regarding memorabilia as a graveyard and agreed that although she did have sympathy for those affected, the joint committee had to be sensitive to all users. She further asked what information was issued to relatives regarding the regulations of the crematorium and whether these details could be better communicated. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that a form was given to relatives which allowed them to identify what information they wanted to be provided with. Councillor Dodds commented that in his opinion this was a matter which should be dealt with by Funeral Directors and with such suggested that processes could be reviewed.

In summary the Chairman advised that the general consensus was that the Joint Committee endorse the current policy and position on memorabilia. However, the Joint Committee would review how information was communicated to the bereaved in future. It was further agreed that a response to the lead petitioner be prepared and forwarded in line with the lead authorities' petition scheme.

#### **Resolved:**

- (i) That the current performance of the crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the current situation with regards to the Business Admin Apprentice be noted.
- (iii) That the continued success with regards to the Green Flag Award be noted
- (iv) That the current round of money available under the recycling of metals scheme be noted.
- (v) That the success of the 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary event be noted.
- (vi) That progress in regard to iconography within the Chapel be noted.
- (vii) That the current position with regard to cremator replacement be noted.
- (viii) That the content of the Service Asset Management Plan be noted and agreed.

#### **6 Financial Monitoring Report 2016/17: Position at 31/08/16 with Projected Outturn to 31/03/17**

The Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Interim Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2016 to 31 August 2016, together with the provisional outturn position for 2016/17, highlighting areas of over/underspend against the revenue budgets at a service expenditure analysis level.

The report further detailed the funds and reserves of the Joint Committee at 1 April 2016 and forecast outturn position at 31 March 2017, taking into account the provisional financial outturn (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Accountant noted that there had been a significant increase in cremations during the period which had led to an increase in income of £130,000. This had been a trend seen by crematoria across the area.

**Resolved:**

That the Joint Committee note the April to August 2016 revenue spend financial monitoring report and associated provisional outturn position at 31 March 2017, including the projected year end position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee.

**7 Risk Register 2016/17 - Update**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Interim 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 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Principal Accountant advised that the crematorium car park works had now been completed and was therefore now removed from the register. He further advised that major refurbishment involving the installation of new cremators and an extension was due to start in January 2017 and with such a full risk assessment had been completed and was appended to the report.

**Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted and that the Risk Registers be kept up to date and reviewed by the Joint Committee on a half yearly basis.

**8 Annual Review of the System of Internal Audit**

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services and Interim Corporate Director Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which provided details of the review of the effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service, which was carried out by the County Council's Audit Committee in July 2016 (for copy see file of Minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the contents of the report and review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Durham County Council Internal Audit Service be noted.

## **9 Provision of Internal Audit and Risk Management Services 2017-2020**

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager which presented proposals for the continued delivery of Internal Audit and Risk Management Services by Durham County Council to cover the period April 2017 to March 2020 (for copy see file of minutes).

### **Resolved:**

- (i) The proposed Internal Audit and Risk Management Services SLA with Durham County Council covering the next 3 financial years be approved.
- (ii) That the proposed annual audit plan and fee as set out in Schedule 2 of the SLA.