

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 25 January 2017** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor M Plews (Chairman)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, A Bonner, J Chaplow, P Conway, K Corrigan, N Foster, B Kellett, D Stoker and K Thompson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors JV Graham (Vice-Chairman) and D Taylor

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from B Moir, GD O'Hehir and M Simmons.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 September 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

4 Treasurer to the Joint Committee

The Clerk to the Joint Committee, Laura Renaudon explained that the vacant position of Corporate Director of Resources at Durham County Council had now been filled with John Hewitt having been appointed. Accordingly, Members were asked to note that, as previously the Treasurer to the Joint Committee had been the Corporate Director of Resources, John Hewitt would therefore take on the Treasurer role.

Resolved:

That the appointment of the Corporate Director of Resources, Durham County Council and consequently Treasurer to the Joint Committee be noted.

5 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 September 2016 to 31 December 2016 and the comparison to the same period for 2015, highlighting that there was a net increase of 4 cremations year on year. It was noted there was a total of 728 for the three month period with the September to December profile breakdown showing 247 from Durham, 42 from Spennymoor and 339 from outside of the area.

Members were asked to note that the number of memorials sold had decreased in comparison to the same period the previous year, and sales had generated £1,092 less than the comparable period last year.

Councillors were informed that a local Funeral Director had approached the Crematorium as regards a design he had drawn up for a memorial safe product, made from stainless steel and granite in which ashes could be interred. Members were asked for their views on whether to deviate from the current tender or remain with the current supplier.

The Joint Committee noted the recent appointment of a Technical Assistant, a former apprentice, and that she had indicated that she would be willing to enrol on the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Diploma Course. Members noted that the associated costs had been factored into the 2017/18 budget.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained that the use of the Crematorium chapel had started to increase with regards to Funeral Directors wanting to use the chapel to hold services only before moving to another location for burial. It was explained that this had an impact upon the number of cremations that could be accommodated on certain days and that the charge for a chapel only service was £100, compared to £650 for a cremation. It was proposed that a two-tier pricing structure was put in place, with the most requested slots between 10.00am and 2.30pm having the fee increased to £600 and the fee outside of those times to increase to £200, in recognition of the lost income associated with holding those services.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted the Crematorium had received the Green Flag Award in 2016, awarded five years in a row and a submission would be made for the 2017 award accordingly.

Councillors were updated in respected of the recycling of metals scheme and noted the presentation by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to Diabetes UK of a cheque in the sum of £4,336.

The Joint Committee noted that for the sixth year running it had been agreed for St. Cuthbert's Hospice to be allowed to place a Christmas tree at the Crematorium in 2016 to allow people to write a personal message and place it on the tree with a bauble, leaving a charity donation.

It was noted that St. Cuthbert's Hospice had raised £164.92 and had also asked permission to have a similar tree placed at the Crematorium in 2017, with no other organisations having approached the Crematorium in this regard.

The Chairman thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and added that Durham had been shortlisted for Most Improved Performer in the Cemetery and Crematorium category at the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Awards 2016. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that while Durham had not won the award, the shortlisting was good praise for the hard work of the Bereavement Services staff.

Councillor N Foster noted the documentation circulated with the designs of the memorial safe product and asked what differences there was in comparison to the existing memorials. The Bereavement Services Manager noted the current unit have stone front covers that can be removed allowing ashes to be interred, and noted the costs and length of lease. It was added that the proposed product would have the marble insert silicone sealed to the stainless steel and this would present an issue should there need to be gain access to ashes. It was added there would be also works associated with any additional plinth, as set out within the design documentation. Members all agreed that the Crematorium should remain with the existing memorials.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the Crematorium continue to use the existing memorial supplier and not to change over to the new memorial safe product.
- (iii) That the enrolment of a member of staff on the ICCM Diploma course be agreed.
- (iv) That the application for the Green Flag Award 2017 be noted.
- (v) That the updated position with regards to the recycling of metals scheme be noted.
- (vi) That the provision of a Christmas tree in 2017 by St. Cuthbert's Hospice be agreed.

6 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/16, with Projected Revenue and Capital Outturn at 31/03/17

The Principal Accountant, Ed Thompson referred Members to Financial Monitoring Report, as set out in the usual format, for the period to 31 December 2016 and with projected outturn to 31 March 2017 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that revenue expenditure was broadly in line with the budget, and it was noted that surplus of £831,677 was projected and the significant variances were set out within the report, noting the saving in terms of the revised business rates and the increased level of income. It was added that the Capital Programme was projected to underspend, due mainly to the relining of one cremator being carried forward into 2017/18.

The Principal Accountant explained that the projected total reserve of approximately £1,361,122 at the year-end, gave a strong financial position.

Resolved:

That the April to December 2016 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated Provision Outturn position at 31 March 2017, including the projected year end position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

7 Provision of Support Services 2017-2018

The Principal Accountant referred Members to the report setting out the proposed Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for 2017/18 (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillors were reminded that the SLA had been in place for a few years, following previous External Audit recommendations, and set out the support services provided to the Joint Committee by Durham County Council including:

- Management Services
- Financial Services
- Administration Services
- Payroll Services
- Human Resources Services

It was noted that the breakdown of services provided and costs were set out within the report, and that the SLA was reviewed and updated annually, with the slight increase in cost of 3% to take into account inflationary pressures.

Resolved:

That the Service Level Agreement for the provision of Support Services to the Joint Committee for the year 2017/18 be approved.

8 Fees and Charges 2017/18

The Principal Accountant referred Members to Fees and Charges 2017/18 report (for copy see file of minutes).

Councillors were reminded that in 2016/17 the Joint Committee had agreed to an increase of £20 to the cremation fee (3.3%). Members recalled that in a previous year the Joint Committee had agreed to hold the fees at a standstill position, to take into account the improvement works that were being carried out at that time and also Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee had agreed to hold their fees to maintain harmonised charges across County Durham.

It was explained that as Mountsett were in the process of carrying out improvement works it was proposed that the Joint Committee would reciprocate and hold charges at Durham. It was added that it was proposed that the fee for child cremations remained as a nil charge, and that the two-tier charges as regards chapel only use, as previously discussed, would be applied. For information, benchmarking data was attached at Appendix 3

Resolved:

- (i) That the proposed fees and charges as set out at Appendix 2 to the report be approved and be effective from 1 April 2017, seeking to maintain the cremation charges at existing levels.
- (ii) That the approved fees and charges be incorporated into the 2017/18 Budget.

9 2017/18 Revenue and Capital Budgets

The Joint Committee considered a report which set out for Members' consideration proposals with regards to the 2017/18 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Central Durham Crematorium (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Accountant advised that the changes in comparison to the 2016/17 budget were set out within the report and noted that the updated positions in relation to the SLA and Fee and Charges as agreed at the previous items were incorporated. Members were reminded of works as had been set out within the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) and agreed by the Committee at its September meeting, now included within the budget, though a number of these represented one-off works including the relining of one of the cremators.

The Joint Committee was reminded that the distribution of surplus to the constituent Authorities remained the same in 2017/18 and the Committee may wish to revisit this for the 2018/19 budget. The Principal Accountant concluded by noting that the projected level of reserves as at 31 March 2018 was £1,533,237, giving a strong financial position for the Joint Committee going forward.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Joint Committee note and approve the revenue and capital budget proposals contained within the report.
- (ii) That the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2018 be noted.

10 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

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

11 External Audit Arrangements 2016/17 to 2018/19

The Joint Committee considered a Joint Report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director, Resources and Treasurer to the Joint Committee which informed Members of the soft market testing exercise for the external audit arrangements for the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for the three financial years 2016/17 to 2018/19 and for Members to appoint a preferred audit firm (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That Mazars LLP be appointed to undertake the External Audit arrangements for the 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years.