

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 28 April 2017 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors A Batey, C Hampson, I Jewell and M Plews

Gateshead Council:

Councillors Dave Bradford, M Charlton, L Green, J Lee and M Ord

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Dodds.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report - Position to 31 March 2017

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Bereavement Services Manager, which provided members with a quarterly update relating to performance and operational matters (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Bereavement Services Manager reported performance figures from January 2017 to March 2017 and the comparison to the same period for 2016, highlighting that there was a net increase of 46 cremations.

It was also noted there was a total of 395 cremations undertaken in the period 1 January to 31 March 2017. 218 of which were from Durham, 101 from Gateshead and 76 from outside of the area. Councillors were asked to note that the figure for the total number of cremations to 31 March 2017 was 1,439 compared to a prudent budget assumption of 1,300 cremations, representing an over-achievement in cremation fee income of £90,295 in year.

Regarding the sale of memorial plaques the Bereavement Services Manager asked Members to note the number of memorials sold in comparison to the same period the previous year, an increase of £2,535 in value terms.

Moving on to discuss operational matters, it was reported that the trainee crematorium operative had now been in post since December 2014 and was doing well in the position. The employee had indicated their willingness to enrol of the ICCM Diploma Course, the cost of which if agreed being partly met from the training budget.

Members noted that on 5 May 2017 the Bereavement Services Manager would have worked in the bereavement services industry for 30 years. Members were asked if they wished to mark the occasion in some manner at the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

Details were also reported in respect of the Cremation and Burial Conference and Exhibition which would be taking place between 3 - 5 July 2017. The Bereavement Services Manager would be attending to represent the joint committee.

The Bereavement Services Manager further informed Members that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had generated a sum of £5,000 for Coping with Cancer North East and that arrangements were being made in respect of the cheque being presented to the charity.

In conclusion the Bereavement Services Manager provided an update on works to replace cremators and associated extension works. He advised that during the groundwork phase, shale had been found which had delayed work by 2 weeks, however it was anticipated that work would still be completed on schedule. A monthly update on the works would be circulated to members during the course of development.

Councillor Jewell in reference to the ICCM training request queried whether there would be any conditions attached to the approval. In response the Bereavement Services Manager advised that conditions were included within the training contract signed by the employee.

Councillor Jewell further queried whether any effect had been seen on parking due to the reduced number of car parking spaces available due to ongoing works. The Bereavement Services Manager advised that cars were using the road towards the Plough Inn public house as overflow, however it was hoped that the stone currently placed on the car park would be moved by next week freeing up spaces.

Councillor Batey asked whether there would be any income from the recycling of the old cremators for scrap metal. It was noted that this rolled in to the tender contract with ATI.

The Chairman thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and asked him to leave while they discussed the issues in terms of the 30 years of service.

Members discussed the request and the Solicitor advised members that Durham County Council did not have a policy in place to recognise long service of employees, however the committee could arrange an informal recognition of his service should they so wish.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the request for a member of staff to be enrolled on the ICCM Diploma Course be agreed.
- (iii) That the committee agree to proceed with an informal recognition of long service for the Bereavement Services Manager.
- (iv) That the attendance at the Burial and Cremation conference be noted.
- (v) That the distribution of recycling income to the respective charity be noted.
- (vi) That progress in regard to the cremator replacement programme be noted.

5 Financial Monitoring Report - Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2017

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 set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, 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 the forecasted final position at 31 March 2017 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Green in reference to falling gas prices queried whether options were being explored for alternative utility providers. In response the Principal Accountant advised that the crematorium gas supply was linked in to the existing County Council contract which had been awarded following a full procurement exercise.

Resolved:

That the provisional 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.

6 Risk Register Update 2017/18

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 provided an update on outcome of the half yearly review of the service and operational risk registers in March 2017 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

- (i) That the Joint Committee note the content of the report and the updated position following the March 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.

7 Annual Internal Audit Report 2016/17

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager, which presented the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2016/17 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Audit and Fraud Manager 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 2016/17. Members were reminded that "Substantial" was the highest level of assurance rating.

A summary of the findings were contained within Appendix 2 of the report.

Councillor Jewell queried the external audit arrangements between authorities and the Audit and Fraud Manager advised that there was an agreement between 4 local councils for the audit.

The Chairman noted his appreciation to the team at Mountsett for the excellent report and assurance opinion given.

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 2016/17 be noted.

8 Such other business as in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

The Chairman added that he wished to pass on his best wishes to Councillors T Nearney and K Dearden who would not be standing in the forthcoming elections and thanked them for their input and dedication shown to the joint committee.

The Chairman further noted that a request had been received from Gateshead Councillors that all future meetings of the joint committee take place at Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton, Stanley. After discussion it was agreed that the relevant arrangements be made to change the venue of meetings going forward.