

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 31 January 2018** at **2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor L Maddison (Chairman)

Durham County Council:

Councillors D Bell, D Brown, J Chaplow (Vice-Chairman), K Corrigan, P Jopling, M McKeon, S Quinn and K Thompson

Spennymoor Town Council:

Town Councillors I Machin

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Liddle, M McGaun, J Stephenson and G Darkes.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chairman.

In relation to items within the minutes, Councillor K Thompson asked as regards the list of subcontractors, "senior management" within the Internal Audit Charter appendices.

The Principal Accountant, Ed Thompson noted that list of sub-contractors could be circulated. The Principal Accountant noted that in relation to the risk register, the Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison would meet with the Internal Auditor, and the Clerk to Spennymoor Town Council could attend those meetings. In terms of the internal Audit Charter, the Principal Accountant noted that a response had been received from the Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager, Paul Bradley noting that Internal Audit were responsible and reported back to the Joint Committee for their information. He added that the specific Officers mentioned were the Treasurer to the Joint Committee and the Corporate Director responsible, and that should there be an issue this would be brought to the attention of the Committee.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted the next heritage weekend would be in October, with further information to follow in due course. Councillor K Thompson noted that Spennymoor Town Council held a number of events over the year and that it could be beneficial to have a Crematorium and or Bereavement Services presence and some of these events. The Bereavement Services Manager noted he could look into this matter.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

4 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 September 2017 to 31 December 2017 and the comparison to the same period for 2016, highlighting that there was a net decrease of 25 cremations year on year. It was noted there was a total of 734 for the 3 month period with the September to December profile breakdown showing 209 from Durham, 29 from Spennymoor and 496 from outside of the area. It was added that while the overall number of cremations was lower for the period, it was forecast that the budgeted number of 2,200 for the whole financial year would be exceeded.

Members were asked to note that the number of memorials sold had increased in comparison to the same period the previous year, however, revenue was £1,266 less than the comparable period last year.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained that currently there was no wifi connectivity at the Crematorium and explained that there had been several requests from members of the public and funeral directors and clergy to have this facility. It was added that installing wifi would also bring the Crematorium in line with other Council buildings. Members noted the cost would be approximately £2,750 and were asked if they wished for wifi to be installed, to be accommodated from within existing budget provision.

The Joint Committee noted that cleaning at the Crematorium was provided by Durham County Council's facilities management team via a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and was due to expire on 31 March 2018. Members were referred to a revised SLA for April 2018 to March 2020, noting a 10.3% increase on the recharges levied in 2017/18. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that a high quality service had been provided and that the costs included all labour and materials required to carry out the cleaning activities.

Councillors were asked to recall that at the September meeting it had been noted that for the sixth year running the Crematorium, in a joint bid with the South Road Cemetery, had achieved the Green Flag Award. It was added that an application would be submitted for the 2018 Award and progress would be reported back to the Joint Committee.

In respect of the Recycling of Metals Scheme, Councillors noted a cheque in the sum of £5,000 had been received from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management for the North East of England Children's Cancer Research Fund. It was added that arrangements had been made for the Chairman to present the cheque and a photograph of the presentation was included in the report at Appendix 4.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted that for the seventh year running it had been agreed for St. Cuthbert's Hospice to provide a Christmas tree and baubles at the Crematorium, a facility to allow visitors to leave a personal message and place in on to the tree. It was noted that this had proved to be very popular again, with a substantial amount raised for the charity.

Councillor K Thompson noted that as regards wifi provision he felt that the Crematorium should not fall behind and for the relative small cost it should be installed. He asked as regards the 10.3% increase in relation to the cleaning SLA noting it seemed a large increase. The Principal Accountant stated that the recent pay award had increased the staffing budget by around 7.5-8% for low paid staff and that the 10.3% increase covered two years from the commencement of the current SLA.

The Chairman noted the information relating to the Green Flag Award and that this was very good promotion for the Crematorium, with costs being covered within existing budgets. The Chairman added that the charities that received cheques from the recycling of metals scheme had been very grateful for the support and noted that she felt the Christmas tree placed by St. Cuthbert's Hospice could be promoted more. The Chairman concluded by noting that looking at the breakdown of cremations by area that 15% came from outside of the area and that this was encouraging.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That wifi connectivity be installed at the Crematorium.
- (iii) That the Service Level Agreement with regards to cleaning be approved.
- (iv) That the application for the Green Flag Award for 2018 be noted.
- (v) That the distribution of recycling income received to the respective charity be noted.
- (vi) That the provision of a Christmas tree by St. Cuthbert's Hospice in 2018 be approved and publicised.

5 Financial Monitoring Report 2017/18: Position at 31/12/17 with Projected Outturn to 31/03/18

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 set out details of income and expenditure in the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017, together with the forecast outturn position for 2017/18, 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 2017 and forecast outturn position at 31 March 2018, taking into account the provisional financial outturn (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Principal Accountant explained that the updated projected outturn showed a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to the partner authorities) of £678,072 against a budgeted surplus of £610,165, (£67,906) more than the budgeted position. Details of the significant variances were detailed in the report. It was further reported that an increase in income of (£57,850) from the 2017/18 budgeted position was included within the updated outturn projections and was mainly as a result of additional cremations undertaken during the year.

The Principal Accountant went on to advise that, in relation to the capital budget, following a survey, cremator 3 was found not to require a relining and works to the car park had also resulted in an underspend. Members noted the retained reserves at 31 March 2018 were forecast to be £1,180,588, along with a General Reserve of £467,550, giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £1,648,138 at the year end.

Town Councillor I Machin noted another crematorium was being built and asked as regards the lead in time for this facility being operational. The Principal Accountant noted a planning permission had been granted for a facility at Castle Eden, and the Bereavement Services Manager noted potentially around a year to be up and running.

Resolved:

That the April to December 2017 revenue spend financial monitoring report and associated provisional outturn position at 31 March 2018, including the projected year end position with regards to the reserves and balances of the Joint Committee be noted.

6 Provision of Support Services 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 outlined the propose Service Level Agreement (SLA) for Support Service provision by Durham County Council to the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2018 to March 2019 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Chairman noted the report, at Appendix 1, set out that under “risk” that many tasks needed to be completed within statutory timescales and in line with changing legislation.

Resolved:

That the Service Level Agreement attached at Appendix 2 (including relevant schedule) for the year 2018/19 be approved.

7 Fees and Charges 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 set out details of the proposed fees and charges for Durham Crematorium for 2018/19 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Principal Accountant advised that taking into account inflationary and cost pressures, particularly the redevelopment works that have been undertaken and the fact that there was no increase made in 2017/18, it was proposed that there was a £30 (4.6%) increase to the current cremation fees and charges for 2018/19. All other fees and charges were proposed to remain at the same levels as 2017/18.

Members were reminded that following Local Government Review in 2009 the fees and charges at the Central Durham Crematorium were harmonised with the charges at Mountsett Crematorium and that the cremation fees and charges were not increased in 2017/18 in recognition of the major works that were being undertaken at Mountsett Crematorium in the current year, reciprocating the position while cremator replacement works had taken place at Durham Crematorium.

A full schedule of the proposed fees and charges for Durham Crematorium was shown in Appendix 2 of the report, alongside benchmarking comparison data shown in Appendix 3.

Councillor K Thompson noted the report set out 2,200 cremations as a prudent figure and asked if this took into account the potential loss of cremations from the east of the county to a new facility. The Chairman noted she suspected the new facility at Castle Eden would have more of an effect in terms of the Hartlepool area. The Principal Accountant noted that there would be a lot of factors and that this would be looked at before the 2019/20 budget.

Councillor M McKeon noted that she felt it was very good that Durham continued its position in terms of no fee for child cremations.

Town Councillor I Machin asked whether it was possible to establish a “market share” against local facilities and nationally. The Bereavement Services Manager noted that this was possible against other Local Authority facilities, though not for private facilities. Town Councillor I Machin noted that new technology could mean cheaper prices, the Bereavement Services Manager noted cheaper did not mean a better quality. Councillor J Chaplow noted the quality service offered at Durham.

Councillor P Jopling noted the point raised as regards new technology and added that businesses needed to make their offer different from others and also understand what people were willing to pay for. The Chairman noted that the facility at Coundon had provision for bariatric cremations. Councillor J Chaplow noted an additional offer could be something like a coffee machine. The Bereavement Services Manager noted there was now a coffee machine in the waiting room. Councillor S Quinn noted there would always be competition, however, she felt the quality of the offer at Durham spoke for itself.

Resolved:

- (i) That Members of the Joint Committee note and approve the proposed fees and charges at Appendix 2 effective from 1 April 2018, which seeks to increase the cremation by £30 (4.6%) per crematorium from £650 to £680.
- (ii) The proposed fees and charges are incorporated into the 2018/19 budget.

8 2018/19 Revenue and Capital Budgets

The Joint Committee considered a joint report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Local Services and Corporate Director Resources which set out proposals with regards to the 2018/19 revenue budgets for Durham Crematorium (for copy see file of Minutes).

Town Councillor I Machin asked as regards the potential cost of rebuilding the Crematorium, the Bereavement Services Manager noted in the region of £3million.

Resolved:

- (i) That the budget proposals contained within the report be noted.
- (ii) That the forecast level of reserves and balances at 31 March 2019 be noted.