

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held at Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton on **Tuesday 30 January 2018 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors A Bainbridge, A Batey, C Hampson and O Milburn

Gateshead Council:

Councillors K Dodds (Vice-Chairman), D Bradford, M Charlton, J Lee and M Ord

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Charlton (Durham County Council) and Councillors L Green and S Green (Gateshead Council).

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 September 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chairman with the inclusion of the following apologies for absence:-

Councillors L Green, J Lee and M Ord.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any.

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Mountsett Crematorium Performance and Operational Report

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

It was reported that there were 422 cremations undertaken during the period 1 September 2017 to 31 December 2017, compared to 445 in the comparable period last year, a decrease of 23 year on year. The total number of cremations undertaken in the 9 months to 31 December is 976, compared to 1,044 in the same period last year, a year on year reduction of 67 (6.5%).

Performance was also reported in respect of the sale of memorials. In overall terms the number and value of memorials sold of 15 / £5,436, compares with 10 / £2,881 in the same period last year, an increase of 5 / £2,555 year on year.

The Bereavement Services Manager went on to report that the Crematorium did not currently benefit from Wi-Fi connectivity and several requests had been received from members of the public, funeral directors and clergy for this to be provided. The estimated cost of installing Wi-Fi connectivity was approximately £2,750, though the exact cost was to be confirmed. Costs could be met from within existing budget provisions. It was also reported that providing Wi-Fi at the Crematorium would bring the building in line with other council buildings.

Members were also advised that the existing two year Cleaning Service Level Agreement which currently costs £6,599 per year commenced on 1 April 2016 and was therefore due to expire on 31 March 2018. A high quality service had been provided and Members were therefore asked to approve a revised SLA for the period April 2018 to March 2020, costing £7,280 per year. It was explained that service would cost £7,280 per year (a 10.3% increase on the recharges levied in 2017/18) however took into consideration inflationary pressures such as the staff pay award.

The Bereavement Services Manager reminded Members that Mountsett Crematorium was successful in retaining its Green Flag for the sixth year running in 2017. An application would be submitted for the 2018 Award and progress would be reported to future meetings.

Details were then reported with regard to the possible development of a dedicated website for the Crematorium. The suggestion had come following attendance of the Chair at the most recent ICCM Conference and following enquiries a business case had been submitted to Durham County Council's Digital and Customer Services team. A dedicated website would incur a one off cost of £4,944 for design and site build and £578 per year in respect of annual hosting and maintenance costs. These costs had also been factored into the 2018/19 budget.

In line with recycling of metals scheme, the Crematorium received a cheque from the recycling of metals from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management to the sum of £5,000 for Stillbirth and neonatal death charity on 1 September 2017. The Chair of the Joint Committee presented the cheque to SANDS on 20 November 2017.

Moving on, the Bereavement Services Manager went on to advise that an update on the replacement of cremators and installation of mercury abatement plant would be provided under Item 9.

Councillor Dodds asked whether it was necessary to go to the expense of providing WiFi when most devices would be able to access good 4G connectivity. The Head of Finance and Transactional Services advised that there was an expectation by the public that all publically accessible buildings have free WiFi connectivity. He further noted that Mountsett Crematorium was one of the only council owned buildings which did not.

The Bereavement Services Manager advised that there had been one complaint received from a member of the public and clergy members had also requested that it be provided.

Following a query regarding the cost of installation, it was noted that the WiFi if installed, would cover the whole of the site and with such would be available in the Book of Remembrance building.

Further discussion took place regarding whether the facility was offered at Durham Crematorium and Gateshead Crematoria. It was noted that the same proposals were to be considered by the Durham Crematorium Joint Committee.

Councillor Batey went on to comment that she considered the website to be a great idea however queried the associated costs. In response it was reported that the website would be provide by DCCs own ICT. Furthermore by utilising the councils own service, it was guaranteed that the site would be secure by being held on a public sector network and future proofed for any future improvements that wished to be made, for example transactional services such as the facility to be able to purchase memorial plaques online for example.

Councillor Charlton agreed that provision of a site through in-house services would be preferable given the obvious safeguards that this provides.

Further discussion took place regarding the proposed content of the website and it was suggested that given the sensitivities relating to any proposed website, that further research be undertaken and that the joint committee delegate responsibility to the Chair and Bereavement Services Manager to agree the final details.

Resolved:

- That the current performance of the crematorium be noted.
- That the installation of Wi-Fi connectivity at the crematorium be agreed.
- That the SLA with regards to cleaning be agreed.
- The application for the Green Flag Award 2018 be noted.
- That the development and associated costs of a dedicated website be approved in principle with the final determination being delegated to the Chair of the Joint Committee alongside the Bereavement Services Manager.
- The distribution of recycling income to the respective charity be noted.

5 Financial Monitoring Report - Position at 31/12/17, with Projected Outturn at 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 Head of Finance and Transactional Services explained that the updated projected outturn showed a surplus (before transfers to reserves and distribution of surpluses to the partner authorities) of £544,521 against a budgeted surplus of £460,636, (£83,885) more than the budgeted position. This compared with the previously forecast position (based on actual performance to 31 August 2017) of a surplus of £548,830, £88,194 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 (£41,900) 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 and the increase in sale of memorial plaques.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services went on to advise that the cremator replacement and extension works were scheduled to be completed this year and therefore contributions from earmarked reserves of £1,597,765 was forecast to fund those works. It was also reported, that in line with the reserve policy, a transfer to the General Reserve of (£900) was required in year. This would result in a net transfer from the Cremator Replacement Reserve of £1,235,484.

The retained reserves at 31 March 2018 were forecast to be £39,370, along with a General Reserve of £264,300, giving a forecast total reserves and balances position of £303,670 at the year end.

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 Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee for the period April 2018 to March 2019 (for copy see file of Minutes).

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 the Mountsett 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.

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

Discussion ensued regarding the fees associated with use of the chapel and it was noted that the fee was in place for those who wished to use the chapel only and reflected charges at peak times to avoid loss of income from no cremations.

Further clarification was sought regarding charges for non-resident adults and it was noted that the table required amendment in this regard.

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 Budget

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 the Mountsett Crematorium (for copy see file of Minutes).

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.

9 Update Report on Cremator Replacement and Extension

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 members with a progress update regarding the procurement of the replacement cremators and associated extension works to the crematorium (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Batey noted that she felt it important that compensation for the delays be sought from the contractor as soon as possible in order to mitigate those additional management issues that had occurred as a result.

The Joint Committee further added their thanks to the Bereavement Services Manager for his management of the project in light of the difficulties faced.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and the current position with regards to the cremator replacement and extension be noted.