

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held in **Mountsett Crematorium Meeting Room - Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton** on **Friday 27 April 2018** at **3.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor O Temple (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Durham County Council

Councillors A Bainbridge, J Carr, C Hampson and J Shuttleworth

Gateshead Council:

Councillors D Bradford, M Charlton, L Green, S Green and J Lee

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Batey, K Dodd and M Ord.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor S Green, representing Gateshead Council, to the Joint Committee.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2018

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed and initialled by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4 Quarterly Performance and Operational Report - Position to 31 March 2018

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from January 2018 to March 2018 and the comparison to the same period for 2017, highlighting that there was a net increase of 24 cremations. It was added that the annual total for 2017/18 was 1,396 compared with 1,439 in 2016/17, a decrease of 43 year on year.

Councillors were asked to note the figure for the total number of cremations compared to a prudent budget assumption of 1,300 cremations, representing an over-achievement in cremation fee income of £60,022. Members noted comparative figures for the previous eight financial years, noting an eight year average of 1,311 cremations.

The Bereavement Services Manager asked Members to note the number of memorials sold in comparison to the same period the previous year, a decrease of 9 memorials, £2,913 year on year.

The Joint Committee noted that the Business Administration Apprentice had handed in their resignation and noted the position had been re-advertised with a closing date of the 18 April 2018 and the advertisement had also been placed on the national Apprenticeship website. It was added there had been 15 applicants and a shortlist of 6 to go to interviews next month.

Members noted that The Phoenix Partnership had carried out the installation, maintenance and repair of the old L&P Cremators for over 30 years and it was recommended a letter of thanks be sent in recognition of the valuable service they provided.

Councillors were asked to recall the 2018/19 Fees and Charges being approved at the last meeting of the Joint Committee, with an item being raised in terms of the £9.00 charge for Non-Viable Foetus (NVF), whereas children up to 16 years of age were free. It was added that this had historically been as cremations were organised via hospitals, though it was noted now this was via funeral directors. Members noted the low income generated from the NVF cremations and that it was proposed that the cost was amended to a nil cost with immediate effect.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained the necessary arrangements would be made as regards representation at the Joint Conference of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities and the Cremation Society of Great Britain, to be held at the Hilton Newcastle/Gateshead from Monday 11 to Wednesday 13 June 2018.

The Bereavement Services Manager informed Members that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had generated a sum of £5,000 for Cruse Bereavement Care with the Chairman and Bereavement Services Manager having presented the cheque to the charity. Members noted an extra round of nominations and also were reminded that at the last Committee it was noted that the current list of charity nominations was reaching its end and Members were asked to agree the list of charities and for any additional charities they wished to be included, noting that they needed to be bereavement related.

The Joint Committee noted the replacement of cremators and mercury abatement equipment, with details set out at paragraph 19 to 22 of the report.

Councillor L Green asked if any charity nominations should be forwarded to the Bereavement Services Manager. The Bereavement Service Manager noted this was correct, or if there was any charities Members wish to nominate now they could do so. Councillor L Green noted an outreach charity connected to the Armed Forces, noting helping with funeral costs. The Chairman noted that any charity would need to link to bereavement and restrict accordingly.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services, Paul Darby noted that the Joint Committee would normally mirror the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee in terms of fees and charges and noted the Durham Committee had met and agreed the nil charge for NVF.

The Chairman noted that he had attended the last conference with the Bereavement Services Manager, and asked if any other Members wished to attend the upcoming conference. Councillor J Shuttleworth noted he felt the Chairman should attend, with Councillor L Green adding that perhaps those attending could alternate between the constituent Local Authorities. The Chairman noted he would attend the upcoming conference, though he asked that attendance at conferences be widened out to other Councillors.

Resolved:

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the position in relation to the Business Administration Apprentice post be noted.
- (iii) That a letter of thanks be sent to The Phoenix Partnership.
- (iv) That the change in NVF cremation charge from £9 to nil be agreed.
- (v) That the attendance at the Burial and Cremation Conference be noted.
- (vi) That the distribution of recycling income to the respective charity and subsequent charity nominations be noted.
- (vii) That the progress with regards to the cremator replacement be noted.

5 Financial Monitoring Report - Provisional Outturn as at 31 March 2018

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services referred Members to the Financial Monitoring Report, with the provisional outturn as at 31 March 2018 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Joint Committee noted that the updated projected revenue outturn was showing a shortfall of £992,467 against a budgeted surplus of £460,636. It was noted that the major variances were set out within the report, with the main issue being the £1,562,132 relating to the crematorium extension and cremator replacement being transacted through the revenue account at year end. Members noted the policy to maintain a general reserve of 30% of the income budget and noted a transfer of £900 to the General Reserve, with a projected total reserve of £293,536 at the year-end.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted the reduction in the reserves though explained that all the major works and those within the Service Asset Management Plan (SAMP) had been accounted for and the reserves would build up over the next 15-20 years in line with when cremator replacement would be required.

Resolved:

That the April 2017 to March 2018 Revenue Spend Financial Monitoring Report and associated Provision Outturn position at 31 March 2018 be noted.

6 Risk Register Update 2017/18 - 2

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services asked Members to note the Risk Register Update 2017/18 update report, the Joint Committee considering updates on a 6 monthly basis. Members recalled that the report set out Strategic Risks and Operational Risks with risks regularly reviewed by the DCC Risk Management Team and the Bereavement Services Manager.

It was noted that there had been one risk removed “Adverse impact on Crematorium business due to the ongoing refurbishment of the crematorium”, following the completion of the works in March 2018. Members noted that the net likelihood of the “failure of Cremators” risk had been reduced from possible to remote, following the installation of new cremators. It was explained that the Bereavement Services Manager and Team had been looking at issues in terms of GDPR, privacy notes and staff training to ensure compliance. Members noted that a fireproof door had been installed and were referred to the full register at Appendices 4 and 5.

Resolved:

That the Members of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee note the content of the report and the updated position.

7 Annual Internal Audit Report 2017/18

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager, Paul Bradley referred Members to the Annual Internal Audit Report 2017/18 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate 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, he was able to provide a “Substantial” overall assurance opinion of the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control operating across the Joint Committee in 2017/18. Members were reminded that “Substantial” was the highest level of assurance rating.

The Chief Internal Auditor and Corporate Fraud Manager noted that the appendices to the report set out the work undertaken by Internal Audit and that there had been no significant control weaknesses that warranted inclusion in the 2017/18 Annual Governance Statement.

The Head of Finance and Transactional Services noted there were several observation in terms of strengthening arrangements relating to document retention, scanning documents, with the Bereavement Services Manager explaining he had spoken to procurement in terms of these issues and would come back to the Joint Committee in September with further information.

The Chairman noted it was an excellent report and thanked the Officers for their hard work in once again obtaining a substantial assurance. The Chairman also noted, on behalf of the Committee, thanks to the Bereavement Services Manager and all staff in terms of the hard work to ensure there was no impact on business while the new cremators were being installed.

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 2017/18 be noted.