

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee** held at **Mountsett Crematorium Meeting Room - Mountsett Crematorium, Dipton** on **Thursday 28 June 2018** at **9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor O Temple (Chairman)**

**Members of the Committee:**

**Durham County Council**

Councillors A Bainbridge, A Batey, J Carr, J Charlton, C Hampson and O Milburn

**Gateshead Council:**

Councillor D Bradford

### **1 Membership of the Joint Committee**

The Chairman noted a change of Membership in respect of the Joint Committee, with Councillor M Charlton of Gateshead Council having been replaced by Councillor C Buckley.

**Resolved:**

That the change in the Membership of the Central Durham Crematorium Joint Committee be noted.

### **2 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Green, S Green, J Lee, M Ord and J Shuttleworth.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest submitted.

**COUNCILLOR O Temple** left the Chair

#### **4 Appointment of Chairman**

The Legal Manager Litigation, Bryan Smith, acting in the role of Clerk to the Joint Committee, noted that the Chairmanship of the Joint Committee could alternate between the two constituent Local Authorities, or Members could decide to nominate and vote accordingly. He added that if there was only one candidate then it could be agreed that the nominated Councillor be appointed as Chairman.

Councillor A Bainbridge nominated Councillor O Temple for the position of Chairman to the Joint Committee, he was seconded by Councillor D Bradford. No further proposals were made.

#### **Resolved:**

That by unanimous agreement, Councillor O Temple be appointed Chairman for the ensuing year.

**COUNCILLOR O Temple** in the Chair

#### **5 Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

The Chairman thanked Members for their continued support and asked for nominations for Vice-Chairman to the Joint Committee for the ensuing year. He added that the previous Vice-Chairman, Councillor K Dodds had previously mentioned he would not be seeking nomination and thanked him on behalf of the Committee for his service. Councillor C Hampson proposed Councillor D Bradford for the position of Vice-Chairman to the Joint Committee for the ensuing year, she was seconded by Councillor O Milburn. No further proposals were made.

#### **Resolved:**

That by unanimous agreement, Councillor D Bradford be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

#### **6 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2018 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies for absence from Councillor J Charlton, and were signed and initialled by the Chairman.

The Chairman noted in terms of matters arising that a letter of thanks to the Phoenix Partnership from the Chairman had been sent on behalf of the Joint Committee.

## **7 Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee, Changes to Constitution / Terms of Reference**

The Clerk to the Joint Committee referred Members to the report within the agenda papers outlining the Terms of Reference for the Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee (for copy see file of minutes).

Members were reminded that following audit reviews it was recommended that the Joint Committee undertake an annual review of the Terms of Reference and update as necessary. It was explained that there were no proposed changes to the Terms of Reference at this time.

### **Resolved:**

That the Members of the Joint Committee note the Review of the Terms of Reference and reapprove the Constitution as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

## **8 2017/18 Annual Governance Statement**

The Joint Committee considered a Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources / Treasurer to the Joint Committee and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which provided details of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year April 2017 to March 2018 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Accountant, Ed Thompson, reminded Members that the AGS was prepared in line with CIPFA and SOLACE guidance and formed part of the Annual Return for the Joint Committee. Councillors were reminded that the AGS set out the governance framework for the Joint Committee and was informed by the views of Internal Audit, which had been set out in the report to the Joint Committee in April, noting “substantial assurance”. There were no significant governance issues or matters worthy of disclosing in the AGS.

It was added that the AGS looked to answer seven assertions relevant to the Joint Committee, as set out within the report and the AGS at Appendix 2, providing evidence of how the Joint Committee and Crematorium satisfy those assertions.

### **Resolved:**

That the Annual Governance Statement be approved for consideration as part of the Joint Committee’s Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2018 and that the Chairman and Treasurer be authorised to sign the Statement.

## **9 Revenue Outturn & Joint Committees Annual Return for the Financial Year Ended 31 March 2018**

The Joint Committee considered a Joint Report of the Corporate Director of Resources / Treasurer to the Joint Committee and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services which sought approval of the Joint Committees Return, with the report also including details of the financial outturn position against approved budgets for 2017/18 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Principal Accountant referred Members to the financial outturn position for 2017/18, advising that the final outturn position was broadly in line with the provisional outturn position, with a minor increase in the overall net income for the year. Details of significant variances were contained within the report and duly noted. The report also included details of the updated position in terms of reserves and balances held and it was added that the Major Capital Works reserve was maintained in line with agreed policy.

With reference to the Joint Return, it was highlighted that this was a statutory return and once agreed and signed by the Chairman, Treasurer and Clerk it would be submitted to the Joint Committee's External Auditors accordingly. Members were also asked to note the balance sheet was attached at Appendix 2 of the report.

### **Resolved:**

- (i) That the revenue and capital outturn position as at 31 March 2018, including the year-end position with regards reserves and balances of the Joint Committee, together with the Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2018 be noted.
- (ii) That Section 1 - Annual Governance Statement 2017/18 of the Joint Committees Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2018 be approved.
- (iii) That Section 2 - Accounting Statements 2017/18 of the Joint Committees Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2018 be approved.
- (iv) That the Chairman, Treasurer and Clerk sign the Joint Committees Annual Return for the financial year ended 31 March 2018.

## **10 Mountsett Crematorium Performance and Operational Report**

The Bereavement Services Manager, Graham Harrison asked Members to note the performance figures from 1 April 2018 to 31 May 2018 and the comparison to the same period for 2017, highlighting that there was a net increase of 37 cremations year on year. It was noted that Office of National Statistics data had also shown an increase in the death rate nationally in this period.

Members were asked to note that the number of memorials sold was greater when comparing to the same period the previous year, with those sales representing an increase of income, £120 greater. The Bereavement Services Manager noted the wider choice of memorials was proving popular with service users.

The Joint Committee were asked to recall the vacant Business Administration Apprentice position had been advertised via the National Apprenticeship website, and the Bereavement Services Manager noted that a shortlist of 6 applicants had been produced and those applicants had been invited to interview. He explained that 5 candidates had failed to attend their interview, and accordingly he would be arranging for the position to be re-advertised.

The Joint Committee noted that the usual arrangements as regards attendance at the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Learning Convention and Exhibition, to be held 1 to 3 October 2018 in Oxfordshire, had been made for the Bereavement Services Manager and the Chairman.

Councillors noted that the Recycling of Metals Scheme had generated a sum of £5,000 for Cruse Bereavement Care and that a cheque had been presented to the charity by the Chairman. It was added that additional funds from collections in 2017 resulted in an extra round of nominations and therefore an additional cheque in the sum of £5,000 was available for Marie Curie, arrangements to be made with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman as regards presentation to the charity.

The Bereavement Services Manager noted an update had been given at the last meeting in respect of the installation of 2 new cremators with mercury abatement equipment and that work was ongoing with A.T.I. in terms of resolving issues.

Councillor A Bainbridge asked what work was ongoing with A.T.I. The Chairman noted that the Senior Projects Manager, Richard Fenwick was in attendance to speak to Members as an additional item, with the ability to move the meeting to closed session should Members require further details that may constitute an exempt item.

Councillor O Milburn noted she was surprised as regards only 1 candidate from 6 attending an interview for the apprentice position. Councillor A Batey asked if the apprentice process had been via the DurhamWorks programme. The Bereavement Services Manager noted it had, and also via the national apprentice service. Councillor A Batey asked how many hours the position was, the Bereavement Services Manager noted it was full-time, 37 hours per week, over a 2 year period. The Chairman added his surprise as regards those not attending interview and Councillor A Batey noted her disappointment as Council apprenticeships had been proving to be very popular.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the current performance of the Crematorium be noted.
- (ii) That the re-advertisement of the Business Administration Apprentice post be noted.
- (iii) That the attendance of the Chairman and the Bereavement Services Manager at the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Learning Convention and Exhibition 2018 be noted.
- (iv) That the distribution of recycling income to the respective charities be noted.
- (v) That the progress with regards the cremator replacement be noted.

## **11 Forward Plan 2018/19**

The Joint Committee considered a Report of the Corporate Director of Resources / Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out proposals in respect of the Forward Plan of meetings of the Joint Committee for the municipal year 2017/18.

The Principal Accountant advised that the list of business to be conducted by the Joint Committee was not exhaustive and further items of business may be considered throughout the course of the year, an example being the strategy paper in terms of distributable surplus.

The Chairman recalled that the use of the small meeting room had been questioned in terms of the practicalities of the small size and asked for the Joint Committee's thoughts in terms of meeting location, for example at County Hall, Durham and the Civic Centre, Gateshead, or indeed within the Chapel at Mountsett Crematorium.

Councillor A Batey noted that she much preferred the Chapel at Mountsett. Councillor D Bradford noted he could not speak for other Gateshead Members, however, he felt for 4 meetings a year it was worth having the meetings at the Crematorium, being able to look at any issues at the Crematorium and also there was good parking provision at the Crematorium. Councillor J Charlton noted that 9.30am starts may be an issue, the Bereavement Services Manager noted that services may begin from 10.15am. The Chairman asked if Members were happy for meetings to take place at 9.30am, at Mountsett Crematorium, in the Chapel, Members agreed.

### **Resolved:**

- (i) That the proposed schedule of meetings as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved.
- (ii) That future meetings of the Joint Committee take place at 9.30am in the Chapel at Mountsett Crematorium.

## **12 Cremator Control and Progress**

The Chairman noted he would ask the Bereavement Services Manager and Senior Projects Manager to speak to Members in relation to two matters, local cremator control and progress with the new cremator works. He reiterated that if Members wished for specific details that may be exempt information then Members would need to propose and agree that the meeting move into closed session.

The Bereavement Services Manager explained as regards local control, cremation times and further training and explained he was working with A.T.I. as regards the issues. Members asked as regards whether there were technical issues and the Bereavement Service Manager reiterated that work was ongoing with A.T.I. in terms of looking at software and local control. Councillor J Charlton asked if there had been an impact in terms of the number of services. The Bereavement Services Manager noted the number of services had not been affected and that staff at the Crematorium had worked very hard to ensure this.

The Senior Projects Manager explained there had been some teething problems, largely software related, and that A.T.I. were working in terms of the issues raised. The Legal Manager Litigation reminded Members as regards discussion of issues, the public interest test and the level of detail in terms of the information.

*Councillor J Carr entered the meeting at 10.10am*

The Senior Projects Manager noted actions that could be undertaken should issues not be resolved and reassured Members in terms of warranty and the work ongoing with A.T.I. in looking to resolve issues. The Chairman asked if Members had sufficient information and assurance from the Officers, highlighting that the Joint Committee's role in terms of staff, as well as protecting the dignity of the services.

**Resolved:**

That the information as regards local control and the progress with the new cremator works be noted.