

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Mansfield and District Crematorium Joint Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Mansfield District Council Offices on Monday, 13 January 2020 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs L Hurst (Chairman)
A Abrahams (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor T Hollis, Councillor H Smith, Councillor A Burgin, Councillor Richardson and Councillor T Smith

APOLOGIES FOR Councillor Barsby (Committee Member)
ABSENCE:

1767 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor A Burgin declared a personal interest as an employee of Ashfield District Council.

1768 DECLARATIONS OF INTENT TO RECORD THE MEETING

NOTED that no intention to record the meeting was declared.

1769 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2019

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1770 MATTERS ARISING

Minute No. 1762 – Recycling of Metals

Councillor T Hollis advised that Ashfield District Council would appoint the John Eastwood Hospice as their nominated bereavement based charity.

Councillor Hollis went on to query how the fourth year of the donation cycle would be allocated, stating that he had not been part of the decision as to the current order for donations. The Director & Registrar advised that the decision had been taken by the Joint Committee 6 years previously. She added that she would report back to the next meeting of the Joint Committee on the rotational system used.

Minute No. 1761 – Financial Management Review Report from 1 April - 31 July 2019

In relation to Resolution (c) and (d), the Director – Resources & Business Transformation (ADC) raised a query as to (c) what progress had been made with organising the opening evening with funeral directors; and (d) the compilation of the report to the Joint Committee detailing which funeral directors had used the facility, both recently and in the past etc. The Director & Registrar advised that the crematorium was experiencing resource/staffing issues which had led to a delay in actioning these resolutions.

Councillor Hollis noted that it had been suggested at the last meeting that a letter be written to funeral directors inviting them to engage with the 3 constituent authorities but this had not been actioned. The Chairman advised that she had spoken to funeral directors in the Newark area to ascertain the reasons a specific crematorium was chosen. They had indicated that the choice by customers was often dictated by tradition e.g. they used the same facility as other family members or one they had used previously. Councillor Hollis stated that this did not appear to be the case in Ashfield or Mansfield as customers/funeral directors were bypassing the Mansfield Crematorium and instead choosing to go to Gedling, which was relatively new. He suggested that other facilities were getting more business possibly due to more effective advertising. It was noted that this shift to Gedling was not due to price as the cost of a cremation at Mansfield was lower. Councillor Richardson queried whether there was a trade body that could be invited to a future meeting of the Joint Committee.

The Director of Resources & Business Transformation (ADC) stated that the long-term trend appeared to be downwards but with no obvious reason. In noting that the crematorium was a business, he suggested that it was perhaps time to look at procuring an additional temporary resource to further explore the reason for the downward trend, adding that it could be paid for by a very small increase in the number of cremations. Members were advised that the crematorium was currently undertaking an internal staffing restructure which would enable the Director & Registrar to focus on senior managerial tasks, adding that the meeting with funeral directors would be arranged for the spring. Councillor Hollis commented that the crematorium needed to be more commercial and requested that an additional member of staff be put forward for consideration.

The Clerk to the Joint Committee commented that there appeared to be a gap in the crematorium's research and business planning information which would enable Members to make an informed decision on how to progress, suggesting that a business analysis be carried out. In acknowledging the Clerk's comments, Executive Mayor Abrahams commented that the commercialisation of the crematorium was a sensitive issue. He suggested that objectives be set with input being sought from the Director & Registrar as to how they could be best achieved.

Councillor Smith queried whether it would be possible to adjust the role of an existing employee to assist the Director & Registrar, suggesting that it could also help with re-branding the crematorium.

AGREED that reports on the following 2 matters be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Committee:

- (a) rotational system used for the distribution of recycling monies; and
- (b) proposals for putting together a business plan to take a more commercial approach in relation to the Crematorium that brings together elements of throughput, investment, income and expenditure.

1771 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REVIEW 1 APRIL TO 31 OCTOBER 2019

The Joint Committee considered the report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee updating Members on the forecasted year end position for the 2019/2020 financial year as at 31 October 2019. The Joint Committee considered the income, expenditure and variances for the period. The Treasurer highlighted that the surplus was reducing due to the reduction in throughput but that it remained in-line with the 2018 outturn. The Director & Registrar advised that the services booked in until the end of January 2020 were higher than those for the same period in 2019.

In considering the report Members were advised that the figures had been compiled for the meeting in December which had been cancelled. The Treasurer advised that a report with revised up-to-date figures would be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

AGREED that the financial information provided in Appendix 1 and Table 3 of the report be noted.

1772 ANNUAL REVIEW FOR FEES AND CHARGES 2020/2021

The Joint Committee considered the report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee which set out the proposed fees and charges to be introduced from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Table 1 provided a comparison from other crematoria for previous years. Table 2 set out the recommended increase for basic cremation fees by 8% in 2020/2021 and 5% in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. The Treasurer advised that the proposed 8% increase would be apportioned - as 5% to revenue and 3% to capital, which would contribute to the future capital programme budget.

In considering the report, Councillor Richardson queried whether the proposed 5% increase to revenue was sufficient to cover the funds required. The Treasurer advised that years 1 and 2 would be balanced, but not so year 3. In response to whether monies could be taken from profits, the Treasurer advised that these had already decreased, hence the proposed 8% increase.

Members expressed concern in relation to the proposed increase in fees but accepted the reasons for doing so. The Treasurer advised that the surplus had already been reduced and it was understood that most crematoria would also be increasing their fees. The proposed 8% increase would take the Mansfield facility to mid-table with other facilities but by doing so would also allow time to review the capital programme and put forward a budget in the Autumn.

Councillor Richardson queried as to the latest position with the procurement of new abatement equipment. The Director & Registrar advised that this had been delayed due to the discovery of bats at the facility and work had been halted by Natural England. She added that this had implications in relation to VAT.

Members were advised that the percentage capital spend for the works was £725k with the budget for the abatement equipment being £625k, however, this did not include any ancillary building works. The Treasurer advised that any underspend

would be returned to the overall capital budget.

AGREED that:

- (a) the proposed cremation fee as shown in Table 2 of the report for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 be approved. The fee for 2020/2021 being £778 which is an increase of £58 (8%) on the 2019/2020 cremation fee. The medical referee fee of £18.50 will be added to the cremation fees; and
- (b) the proposed cremation fees as shown in Table 2 of the report for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 be approved, in principle. The fees being: 2021/2022 £817 and for 2022/2023 £859, being an increase of 5% in both years. The medical referee fee of £18.50 will be added to the cremation fees.

1773 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2020/2021-2022/2023

The Joint Committee considered the report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee which sought to update Members on the revenue and capital budgets for 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 and the proposals for 2022/2023. It was reported that a review of the budgets for 2021/2022 onwards would take place prior to the setting of the revenue budgets in 2020, in order to identify future savings and efficiencies.

The Treasurer advised that the figures used in the report were based on the previously agreed 8% increase (5% fee/3% capital). She advised that performance information on throughput was essential to ascertain its effects on the facility's finances. As previously mentioned a review of the facility was required so that it fed into the budget setting process resulting in a more informed picture of future years' requirements.

In considering the report Members noted the capital spend in relation to the new music system in both chapels stating that the cost appeared to be high. The Director & Registrar advised that it had not, as yet, been tendered for and the cost in report was an estimate.

In noting the proposal to transfer funds from the general reserve to the capital fund, the Clerk to the Joint Committee queried what level the general reserve should be maintained at. The Treasurer advised that there was no guidance available but that the proposal was taken based on risk. Councillor Hollis stated that he would prefer to transfer the funds from the general reserve when they were actually required.

The Director of Resources & Business Transformation (ADC) noted that Recommendation v) of the report was to establish a working group to review how the planned preventative works programme would be financed in future years. He suggested that the aforementioned transfer of funds from the general reserve would form part of the considerations during their assessment of the facility.

AGREED that:

- (a) the proposed revenue and capital budgets for 2020/2021 be approved;
- (b) the proposed revenue budgets for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 be approved, in principle;
- (c) a working group be established to review how the planned preventative works programme would be financed in future years as detailed in paragraph 3.5.10 of the report, such review to consider further the proposed transfer of £145,366 from the general reserve to the Capital Fund as detailed in paragraph 3.5.2 of the report;
- (d) the proposed income from the additional 3% cremation fee increase in 2020/2021 as set out in paragraph 3.5.4 of the report be moved into the useable reserve Capital Fund, such decision to be subject to an annual review; and
- (e) the proposal to review the planned preventative works programme on an annual basis with reports to the Joint Committee each September as detailed in 3.5.11 of the report be approved.

1774 CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

The Joint Committee considered the report of the Clerk to the Joint Committee which sought Members' approval for the reassignment of the role of Clerk to the Business Manager – Legal Services (NSDC), Mrs Susan Bearman.

AGREED that the Business Manager – Legal Services (NSDC) be appointed as Clerk to the Joint Committee.

1775 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Planning Preventative Maintenance

Executive Mayor Abrahams queried as to the latest position with regard to the above. The Director & Registrar advised that it was a 20 year rolling programme. Structural maintenance was carried out as and when required. A survey was undertaken approximately 2 years previously when the building was found to be sound.

It was noted that in previous years any surplus had been retained by the Joint Committee to be used for such works but this was not now the case. The Treasurer added that planning work was now ongoing for the long-term future of the facility. In noting that each constituent authority was being asked to contribute, Councillor Hollis requested that the Joint Committee receive a detailed breakdown of the abatement costs at the next meeting.

Visit to the Crematorium

A date for a general visit to the Crematorium was to be circulated to all Members.

1776 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday, 24 February 2020 (NSDC)

Meeting closed at 11.52 am.

Chairman