



Report to: **Mansfield and District Joint Crematorium Committee**

Date: Monday 18th September 2023 (10.00 am)

Director Lead: Mansfield District Council, Sarah Troman, Head of Neighbourhood Services, 01623 463036

Lead Officer: Mansfield District Council, Nada Colclough, Crematorium and Cemeteries Manager and Registrar, 01623 463882

Report Summary	
Type of report	Open Report
Report Title	Operations Report
Purpose of Report	This report seeks to provide an update on staff and the current operation of the crematorium
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the committee note the report2. That the committee approve the upgrade of the BACAS system at a cost of £26,820 over 5 years, with the additional cost being financed from existing budgets.3. That the committee approve the use of funds claimed back from the Child Funeral Fund, to be utilised to improve the child bereavement service provision.

1.0 Background

The previous report was presented to the committee in February 2023. This report provides the committee with an update on progress since the last meeting

2.0 Proposal/Options Considered and Reasons for Recommendation

2.1 Staffing

2.1.1 A staff restructure is being progressed in order to ensure further resilience across the service and make efficiency savings. In times of challenges with staffing, there is a need to maintain staffing levels within the crematory, which results in team members having to come in from their daily duties within the grounds often resulting in the gardens not being maintained sufficiently, leading to an increase in complaints from members of the public.

Due to this is proposed that responsibility for the grounds maintenance is being absorbed within the existing parks and open spaces team within Mansfield District

Council (MDC) in order to provide more resilience and have a wider pool of staff to work with, in the event of challenges with staffing. This will see a cost saving of one headcount on the establishment.

While staff have been informally consulted with, a formal consultation will take place in the coming weeks.

2.2 Cremator and Ancillary Equipment

- 2.2.1** Flue works have now been completed and there is improvement in the overall suction of the cremators, however there continue to be ongoing concerns with the age of the cremators and the controls.
- 2.2.2** Despite engaging with another contractor, for the purposes of proving a quotation for system upgrades and ongoing maintenance, this has been put on hold by the company as they currently do not have the capacity or resource to be able to work with us. Discussions are still ongoing. Meetings are also planned with Matthews Environmental in order to understand the upgrade needs and ongoing works for the next three years.
- 2.2.3** £198,000 is currently held in general reserves for the purposes of temporary cremators. Once the maintenance plan has been fully costed the committee may wish to consider repurposing this to utilise for cremator repairs.
- 2.2.4** A crack in the chimney stack is still being investigated and costs for repair will be presented to the committee as soon as they are available

2.3 BACAS Upgrade

- 2.4.1** This proposal is to procure a replacement crematorium and cemeteries software. As the software serves both the crematorium and cemeteries, the cost for the upgrade will be split 50/50 between the Crematorium Committee and Mansfield District Council Cemeteries. The crematorium element can be financed through existing budgets.

The existing crematorium software was implemented over 20 years ago and while the system was never fully utilised to its potential, it currently does not fair with more intelligent alternative options. The existing system does not integrate well with finance systems and does not meet the requirements of the crematoriums digitalised service, without the need for significant investment to the existing software. Current levels of support with the existing provider also require improvement and therefore moving to an alternative provider would be preferable.

The current system is not cloud based and therefore updates and 'fixes' to errors within the system become complex and issues cannot be resolved quickly.

An upgrade to the existing system is to provide further manpower efficiency savings and streamline existing processes, including service bookings, memorial ordering and financial management. Key system requirements include:

- Effective communication with the existing internal finance system in order to provide accurate accounting for the bereavement services provision; reducing the need for staff to work between two systems and minimize inaccuracies in the data
- Provide the ability for funeral directors to be able to book their own services on line, reducing the time needed for administrative staff to man the crematorium phones; calls from funeral directors placing bookings, currently accounts for 75% of all incoming calls.

Manpower time is currently administration heavy reducing the time spent with families. The vision for the crematorium is to enhance the service user experience through the delivery of bereavement support services. Reducing administrative time will enable the team to spend more, much needed time supporting families on the bereavement journey with access to support services and identifying appropriate memorialisation for their loved ones.

While the service has made huge steps in digitalizing, further improvements can be made with the implementation of a more intelligent system.

This proposal would require implementation costs and ongoing annual support costs, and this would incorporate, the fundamental software, mapping software and memorial testing along with the option to integrate to our existing finance system Integra. The system would also allow for funeral directors to be able to book their own services through an online portal, meaning a manpower efficiency saving along with an ability to reduce office working hours and weekend man power.

Current BACAS System:

The existing crematorium software is no longer fit for purpose for the following reasons:

- An online funeral director booking system was planned to be installed however, installation challenges were faced due to security concerns and the software not being cloud based. To convert the system to be cloud based would cost in the region of £9000. Phone calls from funeral directors making service bookings accounts for 75% of all incoming calls to the crematorium therefore having the online booking system would free the administration team to be able to support families more. Funeral directors also like the flexibility that online booking allows them; they can meet with a family and book a time slot immediately without the need to call the crematorium and provide the family with a number of options in real time, rather than have to make multiple calls to the crematorium for one booking. This also supports the funeral directors with bookings over the weekend, when the office is not manned. Mansfield Crematorium is currently the only crematorium in Nottinghamshire that does not have this facility for funeral directors.
- The system does not communicate with our existing finance software system and this means that the administrative team had to download information out of one system to then input into another. This leaves the process open to errors and is not time efficient.
- The system does not allow for pre-set letters to be edited, this has to be completed through the support system and then re loaded. This does not allow for timely editing as support is often delayed. Changes can take on average 10 days to be completed
- Non cloud based resulting in an inability to update the system regularly which can result in 'bugs' that often result in data glitches or data not being recorded accurately which is a risk with cremation, burial and finance data.
- Inadequate service levels
- Documents cannot be stored centrally on the system meaning that documents relating to individual deceased of service applicants have to be stored away from the BACAS system and on the Crematorium drive, rather than with the client record in BACAS

- Not user friendly and ‘clunky’ system requiring high amounts of key strokes to carry out simple actions
- Duplicate records for different activities for the same family; cremation, memorial, burial, requiring you to come in and out of different sections within the system

In addition to the reasons listed above, commercially the crematorium will make changes to improve our service offer and consider alternative income streams, in order to remain competitive within an ever-changing industry. This could include providing a direct cremation offer or considering pet cremation. This would require the software to be adaptable in terms of processes and data capture. The requirement is therefore for a software provider that can adapt and change in line with our requirements, which BACAS currently does not do.

Costs to replace the existing BACAS system:

BACAS System		Cost to Crematorium
Upgrade to cloud hosted system	£9,000.00	£4,500.00
Annual support charge	£5,940.00	£2,970
Cost Year 1	£14,940.00	£7,470.00
Cost year 2	£5,940.00	£2,970.00
Cost year 3	£5,940.00	£2,970.00
Cost year 4	£5,940.00	£2,970.00
Cost year 5	£5,940.00	£2,970.00
Total project cost	£38,700.00	£19,350.00

Proposed new system:

- Real time updates allowing for us to have the most up to date version
- Funeral director ability to book services online reducing incoming calls by 75% - analysis carried out on calls received over a four week period in 2021
- Integration with internal finance system allowing for reduction in invoicing time
- Reduction in admin heavy tasks allowing team members to provide more one to one family support, enhancing delivery of bereavement services
- Improved stakeholder experience specifically for funeral directors having the ability to book services online in real time, but also member of the public being able to access burial and cremation records online
- The ability to share funeral service time on the crematorium and cemeteries website in order to further reduce staff time on the phone
- Ability to move one step closer to becoming a paperless service. Only remaining paperwork required to be physical being the medical forms produced by either the hospital or doctors surgery.

Proposed new system costs:

Edge – Epitaph		Cost to Crematorium
Initial Set up	£4,498.00	£2,249.00
Training	£738.00	£369.00
Data Conversion	£5,964.00	£2,751.00
Hardware	£374.00	£187.00
Hosted Services Annually	£8,982.00	£4491.00
Total year 1	£20,556.00	£10,278.00
Total year 2	£8,982.00	£4491.00
Total year 3	£8,982.00	£4491.00
Total year 5	£8,982.00	£4491.00
Total year 6	£8,982.00	£4491.00
Total Project Cost	£56,484.00	£28,242.00

In summary the existing BACAS system is no longer fit for purpose and even with moving the software to a cloud based system would not make the improvements necessary to be able to make the efficiency savings. While the costs are increased with the new system, there is far more functionality that allows the administration of the service to progress and become a paperless more advanced digital system.

Mansfield District Council's contract procedure rules would apply and a full tender exercise would be completed.

2.5 Project Update

2.5.1 Previously agreed contract work:

2.5.1.1 Contract 1 – Investigations ongoing to establish capacity need for the crematorium new build in order to identify possible solutions with Severn Trent.

2.5.1.2 Contract 2 – Fire doors, ducting removal, making good from old abatement system, partition wall to be erected, Thoresby chapel works and general works. Work now completed

2.5.1.3 Contract 3 – Mezzanine Flooring – Work now completed

2.5.1.4 Contract 4 – Flue works – Work has now been completed on the flues which has seen an improvement in the overall performance of the cremators

2.6 Internal Audit

2.6.1 An internal Audit has been carried out, in order to review the systems in operation in respect of the Council's Crematorium and Cemeteries in accordance with Mansfield District Council's approved Internal Audit Plan. A huge piece of work was carried out over last year in order to update and improve processes and procedures and digitalising the service. This piece of work also included the updating of the internal Operating Procedures Handbook. The improvement to processes has resulted in clearer more efficient ways of working. This piece of work has resulted in the crematorium gaining an assurance Level of "Excellent". The Internal Audit report can be found at Appendix 1

to this report.

2.7 Children's Funeral Fund

Funeral services for children under the age of 18 are free at the point of sale, for bereaved parents. Crematorium and burial authority operators are able to claim back any costs associated with a child funeral service from the Government Child Funeral Fund. Reclaimed funds are in line with current fees and charges.

In order to improve bereavement service provision for the parents of deceased children it is proposed that funds claimed back from infant and child services be repurposed to improve the children’s section within the crematorium, on an ongoing basis, rather than these funds being utilised as income. Claimed back money could be used to improve the experience and memorial areas of bereaved families of children, which could include but is not limited to the following:

- Signage for the children’s section of the crematorium
- Shrubs for planting the children’s area
- Groundworks including the installation of a pathway to the children’s memorials
- Additional Memorials for families to lease
- Christmas memorial service costs
- Hosting support groups bereaved parents

Funds claimed back to date

Financial Year	No of Cremations	Amount Claimed Back
2022/23	15	£3427.00
2023/24	12	£2742.00
	Total	£6,169.00

2.8 Cremation Data

2.8.1 Cremation numbers increased during the last quarter. This is attributed to the utilisation of the holdover policy, allowing for increased capacity. This is also attributed to the flue works that have been carried out, resulting in no breakdowns and restricted capacity.

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Q1	565	745	533	576	561
Q2	505	511	558	595	
Q3	579	640	607	512	
Q4	660	838	601	691	
Total	2309	2734	2299	2374	

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations officers have considered the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding and Sustainability, and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Appendix 1 – Internal Audit Report