

# **MANSFIELD AND DISTRICT JOINT CREMATORIUM COMMITTEE**

**7 December 2020**

## **OPERATIONS UPDATE REPORT**

### **1. SUMMARY**

1.1 This report seeks to provide an update on staff and current operational issues.

### **2. STAFFING**

2.1 The Operational Supervisor and the full time Administrative Assistant are both now in post and the temporary administrative support that has been provided by Customer Services ceased on the 12 November.

2.2 We have asked for an assessment date for the Gardener / Relief Technician that was already registered, as he is close to completing all his relevant paperwork. Applications will then be submitted for the two remaining staff to start their training.

2.3 There is currently two Technicians off on long term sick, but this is being managed in line with our Attendance Management Policy.

2.4 Due to the shortfall of staff and ongoing Covid pandemic / spike in infection rates, we are seeking to train additional members of staff from across Neighbourhood Services to be able to carry out non-technician duties to build resilience for the service over the winter period to ensure services can continue to operate.

2.5 Interviews for the new Crematorium Manager & Registrar were held on 19th November, but unfortunately was not successful in appointing to the post. Given the proximity to Christmas a second round of recruitment will commence in January.

2.6 In the interim Julie Snowdon, Town Centre Manager continues to provide temporary operational cover for the service, however further options are currently under review to identify the most appropriate interim solution. An external interim crematorium manager has been identified, who would be available to start at the beginning of January, at a rate of £450 per day, plus expenses. This option would be anticipated to cover three days per week only. An initial conversation has also been held with Nottingham City, who

also deliver crematorium and bereavement services, with a larger team, to consider whether there may be some resource that could be diverted from their team to support our facility on a similar three days per week basis, with a suitable recharge being made to cover the cost of the arrangement. A meeting is scheduled with City for 30<sup>th</sup> November to discuss what may be feasible.

2.7 A further option may be to back-fill Julie Snowdon's regular post as Town Centre Manager temporarily, to increase capacity and ensure that covering the crematorium can continue through the next round of recruitment without significantly impacting on other services. This is potentially a cheaper option with agencies advising that a suitable candidate could be sourced for around £250 per day. CVs have been received and are being reviewed, along with a potential option to deliver some specific functions through a third party for an appropriate fee.

### **3. COVID-19**

3.1 The number of funerals have now started to increase with the majority of services still being booked in the Thoresby Chapel due to the higher capacity and ability for web casting, but numbers are slowly increasing in Newstead Chapel as well.

3.2 The staff continue to work in a Covid secure way, maintaining bubbles where possible and adhering to additional measures when this is not possible due to staff numbers. They remain flexible and committed to ensuring that services are not affected and are operated in a safe manner.

3.3 They have also been working hard to improve the standard of the grounds since the impact of the first lockdown and continue to work outside as much as possible with the available resources. The additional trained staff we are seeking will also be expected to carry out work in the grounds.

3.4 Witnessed strewing's continue in line with the latest government guidance on permitted numbers of attendance.

3.5 The Book of Remembrance re-opened and has continued to remain open through the second lockdown due to the safety measures that have been implemented to reduce the risk to staff and visitors. However, the floral hall remains closed to visitors, other than service attendees.

3.6 Face coverings in public areas are now a requirement for both staff and visitors, in line with MDC procedures and QR Track & Trace codes are in place at all entrances.

## **4. New Proposals**

4.1 We are still working on the review of the internet and phone supplier contracts with a view to negotiating a better deal, improving connectivity and reducing cost to the service. The contract has been in place for some time, and as such a review of what is necessary is likely to yield positive results.

4.2 We have now attended two demo meetings with alternative suppliers for the BACAS system and one with Obitus with a view to enabling funeral directors to book their own services and music, which is in-line with the majority of other crematoriums and reduces the amount of paperwork that is processed. We are in the process of setting up further demos with two more alternative suppliers for the BACAS system before making a decision to ensure we are obtaining the best possible system. Once these are complete we will then consider procurement options and migration of data.

It is anticipated that the cost of any upgrade or alternative booking system can be found through a budget re-alignment from a vacant 22 hour Grade 2 post, which will realise £7,445.70 savings this year (basic salary plus on-costs) and £14,891.44 in future years, as the efficiency savings will result in that post no longer being required.

After reviewing the extra module for Obitus and the benefits it can provide to both funeral directors and crematorium staff, it has been decided that we will procure that service straight away at a cost of £250 per month for the remainder of this year and through 2021/22.

## **5. Grounds Maintenance works**

5.1 The crematorium will be closed to services from Thursday, 26 November to Tuesday, 1 December to enable critical repairs and grounds work to be carried out on the site.

5.2 During this period the following work will take place:-

- Removal of two Cherry trees, stump grinding, wall removal and levelling of ground at the main entrance.
- Three Pine trees removed from the Newstead Chapel and compound area, including stump grinding.
- The Beech hedge along the right hand side of the main drive will be cut and re-shaped.

- Investigation work and potential repair to collapsed drains between Thoresby Chapel and Newstead Chapel entrances.
- Music control room stripped out and new electrics fitted.
- Low wall opposite the entrance to Newstead Chapel re-built and pointed where necessary.

There will also be a significant amount of staff training carried out during this period, which is often difficult to deliver when the facility is fully operational.

## 6. Cremation Data

**6.1** The number of cremations carried out between 1 August 2020 and 31 October 2020 is 468, which is a decrease of 35 (6.96%) compared to 503 over the same period in 2019/2020.

**6.2** The table below shows the last 5 year annual throughput totals per area.

	Ashfield	Mansfield	Newark	Out of Area	Total
<b>Aug - Oct 2020</b>	183	198	20	67	468
<b>Aug - Oct 2019</b>	191	200	32	80	503
<b>Aug - Oct 2018</b>	206	194	33	104	537
<b>Aug - Oct 2017</b>	206	220	40	96	562
<b>Aug - Oct 2016</b>	190	218	51	124	583

Appendix 1 shows the number of cremations and the percentage split between Ashfield District Council, Mansfield District Council, Newark & Sherwood District Council and Outside of the Joint Committee area between August and October.

The budgeted number of cremations for 2020/21 was 2,100, which was amended due to the impact of Covid-19 and increased number of cremations to 2,430. This figure has been reduced slightly to 2,400 to reflect the dip in number of cremations in October.

The throughput figures will continue to be reviewed monthly and any further changes will be reflected in the budgetary forecasts.

## 7. PPW

**7.1** The outline PPW stock condition report has recently been received and is currently being reviewed. A detailed report with officer recommendations will be submitted at the February 2021 meeting.

This is to ensure that the work is carried out in line with current procurement procedures, all options are considered, which will result in value for money for all projects.

The contract for awarding the Crematorium roof repairs following the theft of the copper roof is currently being drawn up by Legal Services and the work will commence as soon as all the necessary documentation is in place.

The total cost of the work is £56,844.00, £31,622.43 has been claimed from the council's insurers and the balance of £25,221.57 will be paid through re-alignment of existing Crematorium budgets.

## **8. Emergency Decision Update – F&C's**

At the start of the pandemic an Emergency Decision was taken on the 17 April 2020 to amend the current Fees & Charges to the following:-

- Offer direct cremations at a cost of £490.00 after 4.00 pm.
- Remove £108.00 surcharge for Saturday funerals and extend available services from 8 to 14 due to longer operating hours up to 3.15 pm.
- 

The report stated that these fees and charges would apply up to 6 months during the pandemic to assist with resilience and potential storage issues.

This report proposes to return to the agreed 20/21 fees and charges for all new bookings from the 8 December 2020 as the service has seen a significant decline in the number of Saturday services since the start of the pandemic and reducing the number of direct cremations after 4.00 pm would reduce overtime and there is sufficient capacity in Newstead Chapel to cope with these in normal operating times.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 That members note the report.