

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL OFFICER

### COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2006

#### 1. CONFERENCE OF THE FEDERATION OF BRITISH CREMATION AUTHORITIES

- 1.1 The Conference of the Federation of British Cremation Authorities (FBCA) was held in Malvern in September 2006 and attended by the Chairman and the Superintendent and Registrar.
- 1.2 Prior to the conference, a meeting of the Federation's Executive Committee took place at which it was decided that the FBA needed to extend its constitution to represent those members who were only Burial Authorities. The organisation will now be known as the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities.
- 1.3 A number of subjects were discussed at the conference which directly affect the cremation service, namely a reform of the Coroners Service, CAMEO, Filtration in Holland, the Durham Project and Abatement in Manchester, and Promession. The following is a brief summary of the relevant presentations:
- 1.4 **Reform of the Coroners Service** – Geoff Bradshaw of the Department for Constitutional Affairs confirmed that the government would not be introducing a requirement to report every death to the coroner for a second scrutiny. This is contrary to the recommendation made by Dame Janet Smith as a result of her investigation into the critical defects in current death certification as highlighted by the Harold Shipman case. Death certification for cremation will, therefore, remain unchanged.

Instead, the Coroners Service is to be reformed, with the following aims:

To provide a better service for bereaved people  
To create a good national framework and leadership with more effective investigations and inquests.

A draft Bill has been published, although there is no indication of a timetable for reform. There are five key reforms in the draft Bill.

First, a coroners' charter will set out guidelines and standards to make clear what level of service the bereaved can expect. They will have new rights to appeal against decisions which concern them.

The Bill will introduce national leadership through a Chief Coroner and support staff, and an advisory Coronial Council.

Coroners will become full-time and existing boundaries will be reassessed. Coroners will continue to operate as a local service, appointed and funded by their local Councils.

Coroners will be given new powers to obtain evidence for investigations. Also, there will be a new chief medical advisor to the coroner service to whom the Chief Coroner can seek advice on strategic medical issues and each coroner will be funded to procure medical support.

The Bill will give coroners new powers to impose reporting restrictions where the public interest would not be served by the publication of details. The draft Bill is currently subject to scrutiny.

- 1.5 **CAMEO** – Brendan Day, CAMEO Manager, provided an update on the national target of 50% abatement by 2013. Confirmation was provided that current legislation does not allow burden sharing before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. A Steering Group has been established, consisting of the President of the FBCA, Secretary of the FBCA, three members of the Federation, the CAMEO Manager, and three representatives from other industry related organisations. DEFRA has confirmed that it is currently happy with the figures provided by CAMEO as a result of the survey carried out of all cremation authorities during June 2006. The survey indicates that the cremation industry is on target to achieve 50% abatement by 2013. DEFRA has reaffirmed, however, that if this situation changes and burden sharing appears not to be viable then it will require all crematoria above a certain size to fit abatement plant. The Joint Committee will recall that it resolved, at the December 2005 meeting, to opt for the burden sharing alternative at this stage (minute 60 refers). If this proves not to be viable, the Crematorium is below the size where abatement plant will be required.
- 1.6 **Filtration in Holland** – Auke Rentenaar, Sales Executive for DFW Europe, gave a detailed description of a mercury abatement plant that his company had supplied in the Netherlands. Mercury filtration is the norm in Dutch crematoria and a good understanding was gained of how such plant could be installed in British crematoria.
- 1.7 **The Durham Project and Abatement in Manchester** – Both of these papers reflected upon the extensive building works carried out at both crematoria in order to prepare for the installation of abatement plant. “The Durham Project” paper was presented by the engineering company and the architects who had designed and built the extensions to the existing crematorium. The “Abatement in Manchester” paper was presented by the cremator manufacturer responsible for the installation of abatement plant. It was evident that both buildings had been extended substantially in order to incorporate the new plant.

- 1.8 **Promession** – Widespread media coverage offered a foretaste to this paper. Susanne Wiigh-Maska, the Swedish biologist who had perfected the technique of freeze-drying as an alternative to cremation, gave an interesting presentation on the principles involved, focusing particularly upon the disposal of the remains after treatment. Her commitment to environmentalism was evident from her enthusiastic presentation. A manufacturing partner has been secured to develop and market the technology and experimental work is well under way. Discussions with government departments are continuing with a view to amending current legislation to allow the process to be adopted as an alternative to cremation in the United Kingdom.

This process would remove the need for mercury filtration equipment. A more detailed explanation of the promession process is attached at **Appendix A**.

1.9 **Recommendation:**

The Joint Committee notes this report.

2. **WAITING ROOM**

- 2.1 At the site meeting prior to the AGM in June, Members of the Joint Committee inspected the redundant office accommodation at the Crematorium. The possibility of utilising this space as an extension to the existing waiting room was suggested as a topic for future discussion. Members of the Joint Committee may recall the limited size of the existing waiting room.
- 2.2 The old office has been assessed by one of the Council's building surveyors in conjunction with a planning officer responsible for work to listed buildings. It is considered it would be a relatively simple process to remove a section of the wall which currently separates the old office from the existing waiting room, to enable both rooms to be utilised by mourners.
- 2.3 The estimated cost of carrying out improvements is £10,000. I can confirm that there would be sufficient resources within next year's revenue budget to fund the work.
- 2.4 **Recommendations:**
- a. The Joint Committee approves, in principle, the provision of an extension to the waiting room.
  - b. The Joint Committee authorises the Technical Officer to invite tenders, in respect of the works to be undertaken to provide an extension to the waiting room, and report back to the February 2007 Committee with a view to works commencing in April 2007.

### 3. **CHRISTMAS SERVICE**

- 3.1 This year's Christmas Service has been arranged for Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006 at 7.00pm. The service will be attended by Reverend Barbara Wood of St Julius and St Aaron Church, Llanharan, and Reverend Michael Worsey of Bridgend United Church and Brynna Methodist Church. The Minne Singers, a local choral group, will provide musical items. An order of service will be produced by the Crematorium staff and agreed by the officiating ministers and the Joint Committee Chairman.
- 3.2 Invitations have been sent to the Mayors of Bridgend and Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Councils, the Chairman of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council, Members of the Joint Committee, Bridgend County Borough Councillors, Bridgend Town Council, Bridgend Community Councils and the Community Councillors of Llanharan and Llantrisant.
- 3.3 The event will be advertised in the local press, radio and on Bridgend County Borough Council's Internet site.
- 3.4 As is the normal practice, it is proposed that the proceeds from the collection for the event should go to the current Joint Committee's Chairman's Mayor's fund.
- 3.5 **Recommendations:**
- a. The Joint Committee endorse the arrangements for the Christmas Service.
  - b. The Joint Committee approve the donation of the service collection to the Chairman's Mayor's fund.

### 4. **QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE**

- 4.1 As part of Bridgend County Borough Council's service improvement arrangements, a range of "local indicators" has been introduced to assist with the monitoring of performance. One of these indicators monitors users' satisfaction of the Council's bereavement services.
- 4.2 Attached at **Appendix B** are the results that relate to the Crematorium for the last quarter, from July to September 2006. The statistics are obtained by means of a questionnaire, which is sent to bereaved families following a cremation. Members will note that the overall satisfaction, to a standard of good or excellent, was 100%. Also included are responses to questions, included in the questionnaire, which relate to the disposal of cremated remains, memorialisation and general comments.

**4.3 Recommendation:**

The Joint Committee notes this report.

**RHODRI-GWYNN JONES**  
**TECHNICAL OFFICER**  
27<sup>th</sup> November 2006

**Background papers:**

None

## **APPENDIX A**

### **TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH ITEM 1 OF THE REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL OFFICER TO THE COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE TO BE HELD ON FRIDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2006**

#### **PROMESSION – THE PROCESS**

The funeral director will ask the person making the arrangements for the disposal of the deceased what type of coffin they would want. The process can accommodate the same kind of coffin as that used for cremation. It is hoped, however, that people will choose an environmentally friendly coffin e.g. constructed of either cardboard, willow or bamboo. If the family wish for a more ornate/traditional coffin then it is suggested that a reusable coffin of this design be used as an outer shell in which the environmental coffin can be placed.

There will not necessarily be a difference in the format used for cremation in the funeral service. The coffin will be placed on a catafalque at the “Promatorium” and remain there until the committal has been performed and the bereaved have left the building. The coffin will then be removed into a chamber where the body will be frozen to -18 degrees Celsius, in an ordinary mechanical freezer. This will take between 24 and 48 hours.

Once the body has been cooled to -18 degrees Celsius, it is ready to be placed onto a moving platform that will transport the coffin through the different stages of the process, this part of the process takes place within a sealed unit, the Promator.

#### **Stage 1**

The coffin is first weighed, to determine how much liquid nitrogen will be required to freeze the body to -196 degrees Celsius, the calculation will be carried out automatically by specially designed weighing machines, and based on 1kg liquid nitrogen per 1kg of body weight. This cooling process will take 2 hours, and the liquid nitrogen will meanwhile evaporate into the atmosphere (where it originally came from) in its natural gas form of nitrogen.

#### **Stage 2**

Once the body has reached -196 it will be mechanically transported onto a belt which will give off small, 5 millimetre vibrations. This part of the process takes approximately 60 seconds.

#### **Stage 3**

The powder will then move into a vacuum chamber where clean water will evaporate and be dispersed into the atmosphere as natural steam.

#### **Stage 4**

The dry powder passes through electrical currents which will extract any metals that exist. The metals will be placed in a container ready to be recycled.

**Stage 5**

The dry powder residue, which will weigh approximately one third of the original body weight, will within the sealed unit be placed into a bio-degradable coffin (1 metre square by area and 0.2 metre high).

Incorporated into the coffin will be an iron-net that will rust away, and having a natural mineral, found in soil, will not be harmful to the environment. The net will protect the remains from disturbance by animals, etc.

**Stage 6**

The coffin will be buried to a depth of approximately half a metre. In approximately 6 to 12 months the remains and the coffin will have become part of the life giving nutrients of the soil. It is suggested that a plant or tree be placed on the grave to feed on the nutrients and become a symbol of the person or just a possibility of new life.

Alternatively, it will be possible for the remains (the organic metal free dry powder) to be cremated in a smaller incinerator/ furnace, and for the remains to be scattered or buried in a biodegradable urn.

## APPENDIX B

### SERVICE FOR THE BEREAVED – CREMATORIUM

(July. 2006– September 2006 incl.)

Responses 40

**During the implementation of your funeral requirements, how would you rate:**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
The availability of service times	58%	35%	7%	
The arrangements on the day of the funeral	79%	21%		
The presentation of the cremation plot	77%	23%		

**In your dealings with staff how would you rate: -**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Literature and Information given	76%	21%	3%	
Presentation of personnel	77%	23%		
General Attitude of staff	75%	25%		

**How would you rate the following conditions within cemeteries/crematorium: -**

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Chapels	89%	8%	3%	
Access roads and footpaths	81%	19%		
Rose gardens and grounds	92%	8%		
Grass cutting around memorials	81%	16%	3%	
Toilets	58%	39%	3%	
Water stations & waste bins	65%	32%	3%	
<b>OVERALL SATISFACTION</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>3%</b>	

**If the cremated remains of the deceased were removed from the crematorium please state why:-**

- Needed to be a little closer for me to visit
- Staying home
- To be interred with mother and father
- To be interred at existing grave
- For place in church cemetery
- To be later buried with his late grandfather
- To be scattered on the sea
- Interred in family grave at Glyntaff
- To be buried in another cemetery
- To be interred with wife's remains in local church
- Relatives asked if they could personally scatter the ashes at sea
- To have my husband home with myself and family
- Private scattering
- Request by deceased for special placement



**What other form of memorialisation would you like to see: -**

**Do you have any further observations or comments: -**

- All who attended were very complimentary of the stunning peaceful grounds and condition of also the chapel service & atmosphere. It really is a credit to those that manage and maintain it and everyone involved.
- All staff were very helpful
- I have no complaints to make. All went smoothly. Thank you
- First class facility with very high standards
- Did our dad proud on the day. Thanks
- Everyone and everything was beautiful. Many thanks
- I think Coychurch is a lovely, peaceful place
- The sad day was eased by your excellent service. Thank you again.
- Only to thank you for your kindness and consideration at this very sad time for us
- Every part of the service was undertaken with dignity. I was delighted with the service. Thank you
- Whilst understanding the Memorial Regulation No. 1 re: Burial Plots makes the work of the grounds man easier I found it particularly distressing that the flowers left at my fathers (and now my mothers) plinth was removed so soon after the funeral on Friday after. I consider such an action cold and insensitive at a time when we as a family were still grieving. Perhaps you would care to respond. In my view you do not provide a caring and quality service, you just provide a function. The only redeeming feature is your organist.