

COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE - FRIDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 2020

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE
HELD IN REMOTELY VIA SKYPE FOR BUSINESS ON FRIDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 2020 AT
14:00**

Present

Councillor RE Young – Chairperson

G Cox
R Turner

S Edwards
E Venables

G John
JE Williams

AA Pucella

Apologies for Absence

G Hopkins, R Turner and JC Spanswick

Officers:

Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Joanna Hamilton	Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar
Michael Pitman	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Eilish Thomas	Finance Manager - Financial Control & Closing

72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

73. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Coychurch Crematorium Joint Committee dated 6 March 2020.

74. ANNUAL REVIEW OF 2019/20 BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVES

The Clerk and Technical Officer submitted a report, purpose of which, was to advise the Joint Committee on the performance of Coychurch Crematorium during 2019/20.

By way of background, he confirmed that Clause 3.2 of the Joint Authority 'Memorandum of Agreement' relating to the Coychurch Crematorium Joint Committee, requires that the Joint Committee shall receive a report at the Annual General Meeting reviewing performance against the Business Plan for the preceding financial year.

Paragraph 4.1 of the report identified that Appendix A to the report, ie the Crematorium Annual Performance and Financial Review 2019/20 identified the performance of the Crematorium, relating to

1. The number of cremations
2. Service standards
3. Planned expenditure
4. Achievement of Business Plan objectives

Referring to some key points in Appendix A, the Clerk and Technical Officer advised that the Crematorium carries out a quarterly review of questionnaire results which feeds into an annual assessment of the quality of service. For 2019/20, this showed that the overall

satisfaction level, to a standard of good or excellent, remains at 100%. An analysis of this information was outlined in this part of the report.

In terms of an observation made by a person who had previously been involved in a cremation service, on the Crematoria providing a video display for pictures etc, the Clerk and Technical Officer advised Members that the purchase of such a video system had been delayed, but was going to be purchased in the not too distant future.

He then referred to page 17 of Appendix A and the expenditure for planned works for 2019/20, where it reflected that some works had slipped into the next financial year, relating to the Flower Court extension, External lighting to Site and Electrical Distribution Boards.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee noted the report.

75. FLOWER COURT FACILITIES

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar presented a report, the purpose of which, was to update the Joint Committee on the provision of an extension to the Flower Court facility at Coychurch Crematorium.

She advised that, the buildings of the Crematorium are carefully designed to provide for the ceremonial and sacred aspects of the cremation service and to complement the landscape in which they sit. The Crematorium is an important work by a British architect of international reputation (Maxwell Fry) and is Grade 2* listed. As such, any proposed changes to the scheme must be carefully considered.

The Crematorium was regularly complemented by service users for the high standard of facilities provided and this is evident on the returned service questionnaires. The Flower Court facility, however, is an area that lends itself to improvement due to its compact layout. It was now proving inadequate for the functions it was required to accommodate.

Architect Mr Jonathan Adams (Capita) was placed in charge of the design works. Mr Adams is a Welsh architect particularly known for his landmark buildings in Cardiff and was previously President of the Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW) from 2005 to 2007. His notable projects include the prestigious Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay, the new headquarters building for the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) in Llandaff and the Sherman Theatre refurbishment in Cardiff.

At the meeting on 6th March 2020 the Joint Committee approved the Service Level Business Plan for 2020/21, moving £520,000 of the estimated amount for the project that was included in the 2019/20 budget to the 2020/21 budget.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that work on the project was progressing well on three fronts, namely:-

- Statutory Approvals
- Detailed Design
- Health and Safety/CDMA Requirements

Further information in respect of the above, was given in paragraph 4.1 of the report, while paragraph 4.2 stated that the Covid-19 Pandemic had impacted upon the timetable of the works and that it was anticipated that a further report would be submitted to Members of the Joint Committee in March 2021.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee noted the report.

76. GREEN FLAG AWARD

The Clerk and Technical Officer presented a report, in order to advise the Joint Committee on Coychurch Crematorium's successful application for a Green Flag Award in 2020.

He confirmed as Members were aware, that the Green Flag Award is the benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales. It was launched in 1996 to recognise and reward the best green spaces in the country. The first national award was introduced in 1997 and it continues to identify the high standards against which our parks and green spaces are measured. It is also seen as a way of encouraging organisations to achieve high environmental standards, setting a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas. All green spaces are different and diversity is encouraged with each site being judged on its merits.

Coychurch Crematorium had received its first award in 2010 and annually thereafter. A re-submission for the Green Flag Award was made in January 2020 and awards were announced on 14 July 2020.

The Clerk and Technical Officers confirmed that the Crematorium has once again been successful in securing this nationally recognised award for the standards of care and maintenance of the site and grounds. The award confirms the commitment to maintaining high standards, which can be appreciated by all visitors.

Members appreciated the continued hard work that had gone into achieving this award for the 11th year running.

Plans were being made to mark the event on 14 October 2020, the Joint Committee were advised.

The Chairperson concluded debate on this item, by stating that he wished to place on record that this was a real achievement and he thanked the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar and her staff for maintaining and improving standards at the Crematoria, in order to once more be given the Green Flag award.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee noted with pleasure the success of the Crematorium in securing the Green Flag Award for 2020.

77. CHRISTMAS SERVICE

The Clerk and Technical officer presented a report, in order to advise the Joint Committee on arrangements for the Coychurch Crematorium Christmas Service 2020.

He advised Members that sadly, due to the ongoing situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, it was considered necessary to cancel this year's Christmas Service, which would hopefully resume in December 2021.

The Chairperson advised that though the cancellation of this year's Service was entirely understandable, he was still sad to see that it would not go ahead, as it gave individuals who attended this an opportunity to reflect upon the last 12 months and perhaps mourn the loss of any loved ones during that period.

He acknowledged the efforts of the Bereavement Services team who had been there for members of the public during the peak of the pandemic when sadly a lot of people had lost their lives due to Covid or Covid related illnesses. From March up until recently when cases had subsided, the pressure on staff had been unrelenting.

He added that he would on behalf of the Joint Committee, as Chairperson, be sending an email to the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar thanking both her and her staff, for their continued efforts in dealing with the high level of cremations that had taken place in the spring time.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee approved the cancellation of the Christmas Service for 2020.

78. **COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar presented a report, in order to update the Joint Committee on the arrangements at Coychurch Crematorium during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

By way of background information, she advised Members that In March 2020, "The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020", imposed restrictions for crematoria. This included allowing them to hold funeral services only if social distancing measures were introduced, ensuring a distance of 2 metres between all individuals on the premises (unless they were from the same household). The regulations allowed only immediate family and close friends to attend the funeral service as long as it did not involve extensive travel and that those attending were:

- The person organising the funeral;
- Invited by the person organising the funeral;
- The carer of a person invited to attend the funeral.

Initially the regulations stated that the Crematorium grounds should remain shut to the public with only those officially attending funerals allowed access to the site. This resulted in the Crematorium grounds being closed for a short period which included the two-week Palm Sunday and Easter period. The regulations were quickly amended by Welsh Government allowing the Crematorium grounds to re-open for those invited to attend a funeral and to enable members of the public to lay flowers at a graveside.

As part of these tight restrictions, the larger chapel, Crallo, was the only chapel utilised and the chapel layout was adjusted under government social distancing rules.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar added, that all staff worked at the facility throughout the pandemic with relevant PPE and social distancing measures in place. Risk assessments were carried out and regularly reviewed, and procedures adapted to enable the service to continue its normal duties.

She proceeded, by confirming that the administration office remained fully operational but was closed to the visiting public with all assistance provided over the telephone and via e-mail/postal correspondence. Funeral Directors were provided with access to the office via an intercom service in order to deliver forms and deliver/collect urns and were additionally allowed to deliver forms electronically. They were provided entry to the office via the use of screens and additionally hand sanitizer was provided. Staff at the Crematoria also socially distanced, with work stations adapted where appropriate.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, continued by advising that extra measures were implemented to ensure the Crematorium did not become overwhelmed during the pandemic. Funeral service times were restricted to thirty minutes and additional service times were introduced to increase the daily capacity from a maximum of ten funerals to fourteen, to ensure that the bereaved did not have a long wait for a service to take place. Additional staff members were redeployed into the service to

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enable additional cremator technicians to be trained to ensure resilience and business continuity, with shift patterns also put in operation out of normal working hours.

At the height of the pandemic, funeral attendance numbers were restricted to ten and then relaxed to twenty when it became safer to do so, to try to protect staff and mourners from infection. Risk assessments were carried out and regularly reviewed during this important time. Mourners continued to be provided with the option to stream the funeral service over the internet and to record the service. They were also reminded of the option to hold a memorial service at a later date. While the Crematorium was placed under pressure during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was never close to being overwhelmed she was pleased to confirm.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar at this time, held regular briefings and communications with Funeral Directors to ensure that Welsh Government pandemic regulations were observed and that all Crematorium procedures and strategies were fully understood as the pandemic unfolded and progressed.

Turning more to the present position, she referred Members to paragraph 4.1 of the report and a table that provided a comparison of the number of funeral services during 2019 and for the same period in 2020. 2020 showed a significant increase to 2019 for the months shown, ie January to June, inclusive.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar assured the Joint Committee, that Coychurch Crematorium continued to operate under pandemic regulations. In order to adhere to Welsh Government legislation and that of Public Health Wales regarding social distancing, local measures remain in place restricting funeral attendance, selected by prior invitation.

The health and wellbeing of bereaved families, funeral directing teams, Council staff and their families, and the wider community, continued to be the Crematorium's highest priority and Welsh Government guidance was being monitored accordingly, she explained.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar concluded her submission, by stating that numbers attending funerals was under constant review in accordance with Welsh Government guidance. The Crematorium service remains appreciative of how difficult this pandemic period is for bereaved families and their friends as it continues to manage the service safely.

A Member asked if the levels of funeral services had now started to return to a normal level in terms of numbers, following the initial surge due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that numbers were returning more to normal, though occasionally the Crematorium were being advised of a Covid-19 related death still. Though presently, the impact of the virus had subsided. There was a possible second wave anticipated however, but hopefully that would not materialise, she added.

The Chairperson closed debate on this item by stating that the table in the report and the figures illustrated within that, gave a sad reflection in terms of the extent the virus has had on individuals and their families.

RESOLVED:

That the Joint Committee noted the report.

79. ANNUAL ACCOUNTING STATEMENT 2019-20 AND REVENUE MONITORING STATEMENT 1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 20

The Treasurer submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present the audited Annual Accounting Statement for the 2019-20 financial year to the Joint Committee, following closure of the accounts, and to inform the Joint Committee of details of income and expenditure for the first quarter of the 2020-21 financial year, and provide a projection of the final outturn position.

The Finance Manager, Financial Control and Closing advised that, under Regulation 14 of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014, Cychurch Crematorium Joint Committee is required to complete an Annual Accounting Statement as they are classed as a smaller local government body with annual income and expenditure below £2.5 million.

The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2018 require that the Joint Committee must formally approve the Annual Accounting Statement by 15 June and certify that they present fairly the financial position of Cychurch Crematorium. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Joint Committee were unable to approve the statement by this date. It has been agreed with Audit Wales to accept the Annual Accounting Statement being certified at the meeting on the 4th September.

Due to Covid-19 the auditor has already undertaken their audit and as a result has identified that no amendments are required, as outlined in their Audit letter in Appendix 1 to the report. The certified Annual Accounting Statement must be published by no later than 15 September 2020, the Officer explained.

Section 1 of the Annual Accounting Statement (Appendix 2) shows that in 2019-20 Cychurch Crematorium made a net surplus of £298,201 (difference between Line 1 'Balances brought forward' and Line 7 'Balances carried forward'). The surplus has been added to the accumulated reserve for the Crematorium brought forward at 31 March 2019, bringing the total of that reserve to £2,053,652 at 31 March 2020 compared to £1,755,451 in the preceding year.

Table 1 in this section of the report, showed a summary of the final financial position for the Crematorium for 2019-20, as compared to the budget set out at the commencement of the financial year.

The Finance Manager, Financial Control and Closing referred Members to paragraph 4.2 of the report, where there were explanations for the more significant variances from budget.

Table 2 in the report, then gave a breakdown of the Planned Maintenance Budget, along with the Outturn and Variances for 2019-20.

She explained that The balance of £245,000 on the flower court extension, £300,000 for Site Lighting and £20,000 for Electricity Distribution Boards have all been carried forward and form part of the 2020-21 Planned Capital Maintenance budget.

Income is higher than budgeted by £22,000 due to the Child Burial Fees Grant (£13,000) and Cremation Fees (£9,000).

In addition to the Annual Accounting Statement, a supplementary Balance Sheet is provided in Table 3 below. This supplementary information provides a further breakdown of the figures recorded in the Annual Accounting Statement. This was for information only, and is not subject to audit at year end.

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Table 3 then outlined the Balance Sheet for Years ended 31 March 2019 and 2020 and further information explaining the balances within this table, was detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report.

Table 4 then gave the Crematorium Financial Position 2020-21, with an explanation of the variances between the Budget and Projected Outturn, detailed immediately below this table.

Finally, Table 5 in paragraph 4.6 of the report, reflected the Capital Financing budget of £882k as broken down for the various works so listed in such table.

RESOLVED: The Joint Committee:

- (a) Approved the Annual Accounting Statement for Coychurch Crematorium for 2019-20 (Appendix 2 to the report), and requested that the Chairperson of the Joint Committee signs the Annual Accounting Statement.
- (b) Noted the projected financial performance of Coychurch Crematorium for 2020-21.

80. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 15:02