

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE  
HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON FRIDAY, 4 MARCH 2022 AT 14:00

Present

Councillor G John – Chairperson

S Edwards  
E Venables

G Hopkins  
JE Williams

AA Pucella

R Turner

Apologies for Absence

SE Baldwin, G Cox and JC Spanswick

Officers:

Nimi Chandrasena	Democratic Services Officer
Joanna Hamilton	Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar
Andrew Rees	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Eilish Thomas	Finance Manager - Financial Control & Closing

101. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

102. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 03.09.2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

103. FLOWER COURT FACILITIES

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar presented the report which advised the joint committee on the planned extension work to the Flower Court Facilities. The Facility has been designed to improve the mourner's experience and the movement of the congregation by providing a larger covered facility on the current unused grass area which is in keeping with the crematoriums listed building status and the design ethos of the original architect.

At the meeting on the 14th of June 2019, the Joint Committee was introduced to the architect, Jonathan Adams, previous President of the Royal Society of Architects in Wales and noted for various prestigious projects including the Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay. The Joint Committee was provided with a detailed presentation of his proposed design for the extension works, which the Joint Committee approved and authorised officers proceed to apply for planning permission and invite tenders for the construction works, subject to further approval. The funding for the project would be accommodated from the Crematorium's reserve funds at an estimated £540,000. At the meeting of the Joint Committee on the 6th of March 2020, funds were re approved in the 2020/21 budget. At the meeting on the 4th of September 2020, the Joint committee was again updated that despite the pandemic, work had been progressing. Firstly, in relation to statutory approvals, planning approval had been received from Bridgend Council in July 2020 and listed building consent had been provided by the Welsh Government on the 25th of August 2020. Secondly, in relation to the building design, the architect, Jonathan Adams, had been working to perfect the bespoke structural elements such as the roof domes and the vertical supports in order to minimise the construction risk and

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provide cost certainty in advance of the contract commencing. Thirdly, in relation to the projects, health and safety requirements on site and the skill set of the design team.

At the meeting on the 5th of March 2020, the Joint Committee was advised that the pandemic had impacted upon the timetable and the Joint committee approved the funds at £550,000 for the 2021/22 budget to enable the architect to continue to actively progress the procurement stage and the preparation of tenders. The pandemic has had a detrimental impact upon procurement timetable.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that tenders will be invited through E tender Wales in March 2022, in accordance with Bridgend Council Borough Council's contract and financial procedure rules. Construction works plan to commence summertime this year. The estimated budget cost of £550,000 for the project has been included today's accompanying business plan and fees report and accommodated in the 2022/23 revenue budget as detailed in the company accompanying Treasurer's report.

A member of the Joint Committee expressed his approval of the proposal and stated he was pleased with the progress made with an idea he had taken to the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar.

A member of the Joint Committee asked if there was a formal projection of the increase in costs due to the increase in prices in the construction industry. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar mentioned that a reasonable increase in cost was expected and the architect was aware that the cost of materials and construction has risen significantly right across the industry over the past 6 months, since the ending of the lockdowns. Everything is in short supply. It makes it very difficult to predict what new work will cost. If the project cost exceeded projection, it was not believed costs would increase by a large amount. The results of the tender would need to be awaited to give an accurate indication of the financial implications of the project. If the winning tender is within budget then the tender would be awarded accordingly but if costs exceeded budget, a further report would be brought before the Joint Committee. She stated there might be a requirement for an emergency meeting of the Joint Committee if the tenders exceeded the budget, but reassured the Joint Committee that the Crematorium's Reserve fund would be able to accommodate a higher construction cost if required as the accumulated balance of reserves by March 2023 is projected at 2.8 million. Should this be the case, Joanna would come back to the committee to discuss.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee:

- Delegated to the Clerk and Technical Officer, the power to approve the acceptance of the most economically advantageous tender, in accordance with Bridgend Council's contract and financial procedure rules. Should the tender amount exceed the allocated budget cost, then a further report will be submitted to the Joint Committee to confirm final approval of tenders.
- Delegated to the Clerk and Technical Officer, the power to approve the final terms of the contract, in consultation with Bridgend Council Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, Human Resources and Corporate Policy, and therefore arrange for the execution of the contract on behalf of the Joint Committee in accordance with the recommendation in 9.1.

104. **CREMATORIUM BUSINESS PLAN AND FEES**

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported on the business plan and the expenditure programme for 2022-2023, which includes proposed fees and charges.

She informed the Joint Committee that the business plan is presented annually for approval, which includes service objectives and proposed maintenance and improvement projects to enhance and maintain the crematorium grounds and buildings for the forthcoming financial year. She outlined the awards and achievements particularly, the achievement of the Green Flag Award again in 2021 and that the service remains financially self-sufficient. She detailed the staffing structure, which included the two temporary crematorium technicians employed in May 2020 to assist with resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The business hours were listed, the types of memorialisation provided, the different ways that the crematorium markets itself and communicates with its service users. The Business Plan also highlighted the different ways that the crematorium remains environmentally sustainable and the key achievements over the past ten years and mentioned those most recently in 2021. External lighting had been installed and the renewal of the two chapels digital music facilities, including the installation of visual tributes screens.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that performance indicators are shown for the previous five years which relate to user satisfaction, the results of which are taken from the service questionnaires sent to cremation applicants. The target is to achieve 100% overall satisfaction levels rated at good or excellent, and these remain constant at 100% with the target set for the same in 2022/23.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar detailed the annual statistics for cremations in the calendar year 2021, which was 1887.

The total number of cremations for 2020 was 1933 compared to the 1887 in 2021, which was a decrease 46 cremations in 2021. However, there had been an increase in the number of cremations of 308 on 2019 as a result of the pandemic, so despite the 46 cremations decrease, it still showed the impact of the pandemic on the number of deaths.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported on the agreed works in 2021-22, which relate to mercury abatement and improvements to Chapel Computerised music and media systems. The installation of external lighting to the grounds again delayed due to the pandemic in the previous year was completed in July 2021, below the original estimated budget. The flower court extension, very much delayed by the pandemic, has now reached the procurement stage for the construction phase of the project. The estimated budget amount is included in the 2022/23 budget. With regard to mercury abatement charges to Cameo following the installation of mercury abatement plant in April 2016, this enabled the crematorium to trade with Cameo to generate an annual income of £5006 which has been received from the trading year 2020/21.

Confirmation was awaited on the potential amount of income expected in 2021/22. There was an expectation of a slight decrease in this annual income in the future as more crematoriums install mercury abatement plant. The main focus of service objectives in 2022/23 is summarised and in addition to the construction of the Flower court extension will be firstly the refurbishment of the Chapel of Remembrance to include underfloor heating and the estimated budget amount is included in the 2022/23 budget. Secondly, improvements to the sight lines at the Crematorium's exit gate to improve safety. The estimated cost is included in the 2022/23 budget. Thirdly, the installation of additional pathways and memorial areas to improve safety and pedestrian access has also been included in the 2022/23 budget.

In addition to these proposed service developments are property contingency. These are included in the crematoriums revenue budget to cover unplanned works and general repairs and maintenance. The surplus spend is designed to build reserves for the future replacement of the cremators and ancillary plant in approximately 11 years' time as well as fund all future service improvements. By maintaining the reserve, it will ensure the crematorium has sufficient long-term funds and plans eventualities that could occur.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar summarised the projected costs of the planned works, further detail would be provided. in the Treasurer's report. Timescales and officer responsibilities for the project over the past and current financial year and for the reported new objectives for 2022/23 were detailed.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported on a comparison of cremation fees charged by Crematoria in South Wales and on the proposed increase for the weekday adult cremation fee in line with inflation from £707.50 to £745.70. She informed the Joint Committee that the upgrade of the music and media systems in both chapels has allowed the crematorium to offer additional audio-visual options. The proposed charges will pay for production costs and could contribute towards the maintenance of the equipment. The new charges would replace the current audio-visual charges in place for service recordings and web casts.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar explained that in recent years there has been an increasing demand for direct cremation where there is no funeral service and mourner attendance. The coffin being transported to the crematorium at the start of the working day. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar reported that the introduction of a low-cost direct cremation fee at Coychurch crematorium would provide more choice and recommended that a fee of £550 should be introduced for 2022/23, inclusive of the cremation certificate.

She informed the Joint Committee that all the variations to expenditure and income are outlined in the service level business plan and have been incorporated into the Treasurer's report.

A member of the Joint Committee asked for clarification of the term 'users', are they the people who are actually having the funeral. The member also asked whether the questionnaire is available on the website so people could do it at a later time when they feel more able to do so. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar informed the Joint Committee that the questionnaire is for the service user, being the member of the family who has arranged the funeral, the legal applicant for cremation, who completes and submits all the statutory application paperwork and the nearest surviving relative of the deceased would normally be that person. Following the funeral service, they are sent information from the crematorium, a covering letter providing condolences and contact details for the crematorium, should they need them. They are also provided with details of resting places and memorials that the crematorium can offer and a service questionnaire for them to complete and a prepaid envelope for its return. Applicants do not have to complete the questionnaire and they can disregard it if they feel that it is inappropriate, or they can take their time to complete it. There is no timeline on its return. There is a questionnaire on the BCBC's website which is the Council's questionnaire asking for reports on performance of all services received by Bridgend Council, which anybody can complete, that would get forwarded to the crematorium separately. The Crematorium's questionnaire is primarily aimed at the family and the organiser of the funeral to gain impressions and feelings about the service that they have received for the funeral they have arranged.

A member of the Joint Committee asked whether the Crematorium had data on feedback from non-users feedback. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar stated that as the whole team of the crematorium is based at the crematorium and are in daily contact with the families that visit there, so the Team tend to have a more intimate relationship with them, any issue whatsoever is raised directly with the crematorium office and it is dealt with on site. The Team tend to find queries on the telephone and by email if the users feel that they do not want to speak directly, examples cited, were of instances where families have raised issues directly with the crematorium staff which were attended to on site at the time.

A member of the Joint Committee asked whether records are kept of interaction or is it more informal. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar stated that records of all interactions like that are not kept because it is part of the daily management of the crematorium. The questionnaire is a more formal way of achieving an immediate response from a family who have literally just gone through the funeral process.

A member of the Joint Committee requested clarification of the direct cremation service, which is set at £550. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar informed the Joint Committee that it is a new formalised service for Coychurch and is something that has been taking place informally for many years, where a funeral director has arrived with a coffin and there has been no funeral service booked in the Chapel. Full fees have been charged for the service previously, but direct cremation has become more sought after in recent years and is something that families would like as an additional choice. A member of the Joint Committee asked whether direct cremation is presumably cheaper because not all of the facilities are being used. The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar informed the Joint Committee that it allowed funeral directors to bring the deceased at the beginning of the day so that it does not interfere with the running of the Chapel funeral services. There was still funeral director involvement because the coffin has to be transported to the crematorium and again everything will be done in exactly the same way as it would be for a funeral service in that the coffin would be taken into the chapel, and lowered into the crematory on the catafalque, ensuring the same level of dignity and respect was maintained. It takes into consideration that some families may have limited finances and direct cremation provides a much cheaper option for them, enabling them to have their own funeral service in their own way elsewhere without the additional cost.

**RESOLVED:** The Joint Committee:

- Approved the service level business plan for 2022/23.
- Approved the cremation fee for 2022/23 at £745.70, and a general increase in all fees of 5.4%.
- Approved the additional audio-visual fees for 2022/23 as set out in 4.4
- Approved the direct cremation fee for 2022/23 at £550.

105. **PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2022-23**

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar presented a report that sought approval from Members for the proposed programme of meetings of the Joint Committee for year 2022/23. She stated that the Memorandum of agreement stated that the joint committee should hold a minimum of two meetings each year. The first of which will be the annual general meeting, at which the chairperson and vice chairperson for the ensuing year would be elected.

She stated that the 10th of June meeting may be subject to change because of the Council elections and whether Members representing the Joint Committee will have been chosen in time for that meeting date. There may also be a need for an emergency meeting on the Flower court extension if budget costs are exceeded.

The proposed meetings were as follows:-

Friday 10th June 2022 - Annual General Meeting

Friday 9th September 2022

Friday 3rd March 2023

**RESOLVED:** That the Joint Committee approved the Programme of Meetings for 2022/23 , as outlined in the Officer's Report.

106. **FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2021-22 AND PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET 2022-23**

The Finance Manager reported on the projected financial performance for the crematorium for 2021/ 2022 and to obtain approval from the Joint Committee for the proposed budget and fees and charges for 2022/23 set out in Appendix One.

She stated that the 2021/22 revenue budget was approved by the Joint Committee at its meeting on the 5th of March 2021 and she outlined a comparison of the budget against projected spend as at the 31st of January 2022. When the budget was set, there was an anticipated budget deficit of £451,000, the projected outturn as at the end of January is a surplus of £148,000.

The Finance Manager reported on the main variances which are a £48,000 overspend on employees due to two additional crematorium technicians being employed for the full financial year, offset by an underspend of £2,000 on other employee costs, a £78,000 underspend on premises made up of underspends on planned maintenance of £75,000 and minor and underspends on business rates and grounds maintenance, a £26,000 overspend on supplies, services and transport, the majority of which is due to increase spend on items for resale and a £495,000 underspend on planned capital maintenance. The underspend on the flower court extension is due to the project being delayed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The underspend on site lighting relates to retention payment to be made in 2022/23 . Both projects are included in the capital budget for 2022/23 .

Income is higher than budgeted resulting from an increased number of cremations and receipt to the Welsh Government COVID-19 hardship fund.

The 2022/23 proposed budget showed a deficit of £232,000. All 2021/22 non-employee budgets have been reviewed and any necessary adjustments have been made to meet expected expenditure for 2022/23. Employee budgets have been adjusted to reflect salary increments and an increase in National Insurance due to the social care levy where applicable, although no allowance has been made for a pay award.

The Joint Committee was informed of the planned capital maintenance spending requirements, with four schemes detailed budgeted at £665,000 and will be met from the capital financing costs budget. The income budgets have been prepared assuming a general increase in fees of 5.4% and are based on the usual levels of activity and the 2022/23 proposed fees table outlined. The effect on the accumulated balance of the proposed budget for 2022/23 is shown, with an accumulated balance of £2.815 million. The balance of reserves as at the 31st of March 2022 is considered a sufficient level to maintain and protect the service in light of unknown demands or emergencies.

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Capital expenditure for 2022-2023 will not require any loan charge or contribution from constituent authorities and will be directly funded from revenue contributions and the accumulated surplus from the previous year.

**RESOLVED:** That the Joint Committee:

- Noted the projected financial performance for 2021/22.
- Confirmed and approved the revenue budget to be adopted for 2022/23
- Approved the increase in fees and charges with effect from the 1st of April 2022 outlined in Appendix One.

107. **URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent Items.

Councillor Julia Williams thanked the Joint Committee stated that she had enjoyed her work on the Committee and that she was standing down. Councillors Turner, Venables and Edwards were also standing down and they thanked the officers for the support they had been given whilst they were on the Committee.

The Chairperson thanked the members of the Joint Committee for their service and wished them well for the future.

The meeting closed at 14:57