

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE
HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON FRIDAY, 15 JULY 2022 AT 14:00**

Present

Councillor – Chairperson

E L P Caparros
Lynch-Wilson

P Davies
JC Spanswick

S J Griffiths
Stephens

G John

Apologies for Absence

G Hopkins and Stallard

Officers:

Mark Galvin
Joanna Hamilton
Michael Pitman
Eilish Thomas

Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar
Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Finance Manager - Financial Control & Closing

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON (FROM BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL MEMBERS)

RESOLVED:

Members agreed by way of a unanimous decision, that Councillor JC Spanswick be elected Chairperson of the Coychurch Crematorium Joint Committee for the ensuing year.

Councillor Spanswick took the Chair.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRPERSON (FROM RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL MEMBERS)

RESOLVED:

Members agreed by way of a unanimous decision, that Councillor B Stephens be elected Vice-Chairperson of the Coychurch Crematorium Joint Committee for the ensuing year.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of a meeting of the Coychurch Crematorium Joint Committee dated 4 March 2022, be approved as a true and accurate record.

5. ANNUAL REVIEW OF 2021/22 BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVES

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar submitted a report and the accompanying Business Plan, that included service objectives and proposed maintenance and improvement projects to enhance and maintain the Crematorium grounds and the buildings for the forthcoming financial year.

She explained that in line with the Memorandum of Agreement, the purpose of the June annual review was to look back at the performance of the Crematorium during the preceding financial year of 2021/22; to review performance against the 2021/22 business plan, and a number of headings have been identified, which could be analysed in more detail, commencing on page 13 of the report.

Firstly, she confirmed that the total number of cremations in 2021/22, was 1681 made up of 1024 from Bridgend, 140 from Vale of Glamorgan and 459 from Rhondda Cynon Taff, with 58 from outside of the 3 authorities. While the mid-part of 2021 was still experiencing some impact from the Covid-19 pandemic with higher cremation numbers, this began to drop to more normal levels towards the latter part and into the early part of this year, as the vaccination programme took effect. When she delivered this report last June, she reported 2086 cremations for the financial year 2020/21, an increase of 416 cremations on the previous pre-covid financial year, which was a quarter more deaths than would have been expected. So, a more normal death rate return was being seen, replacing those very sad circumstances.

The second heading on Page 13 of the report, detailed service standards through the results of the Public Satisfaction Questionnaires in 2021/22, which are sent to all cremation applicants. The target is to achieve 100% overall satisfaction levels rated at good or excellent, and the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, was pleased to report that these remained constant at 100%, with a target set in the 2022/23 Business Plan for the same result.

The observations and comments provided by the cremation applicants were detailed, so she had added some notes where applicable to assist with clarity.

Due to the pandemic, 2021/22 has remained extremely challenging, and despite the higher numbers of funerals and the restrictions in place to keep mourners and staff safe, feedback is very positive and where necessary she had responded to the cremation applicant in writing. There were some really positive comments regarding the professional sensitive attention received from Crematorium staff and the way that the funeral services are run, and also the high standards of maintenance of the grounds and buildings, including the peaceful atmosphere of the site. The benefits of the Crematorium's webcast system had been clearly very much appreciated during the pandemic period. Members will note some comments between April and September relating to restrictions in place as a result of the pandemic, but from October onwards these comments cease as restrictions slowly relaxed. The Joint Committee will also note some negative comments regarding the Crematorium's sound system between April and September, but again from October onwards these comments cease, when both chapels received completely new digital music and media systems, which were proving to be extremely successful.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar stated that it was of some particular note, that the Crematoria had once more achieved the Green Flag award in 2021 for the 12th year in succession. This is the nationally recognised award for standards of care, maintenance and good management practices of the site and grounds. The award confirms the commitment to maintaining high standards, which can be appreciated by all its visitors.

The third heading on Page 20 of the report, detailed the expenditure programme for planned works in 2021/22. In combination with the table on Page 21, Members could analyse the progress of the service objectives for last year.

In summary the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, confirmed that planned works in 2021/22 primarily concentrated on, firstly, the installation of external lighting to the site. Despite the challenges of the pandemic this was completed in July last year with a final spend of £250k, which was within the original estimated budget of £300k. Not only does the new external lighting look excellent and had received many complements, it has enabled the Crematorium to provide later service times in the winter months, when previously the darker nights prevented this for reasons of safety.

Secondly, the upgrade to the chapel music and media systems took place, which were replaced in both chapels and included additional speakers and new overflow and visual tribute screens. This was completed in December last year with a final spend of £45k, again within the original estimated budget.

The Coronavirus pandemic has caused delays to the Crematoria other main project, the Flower Court extension, with the project moved to the current 2022/23 budget. A further report on this would follow on the agenda.

The budget strategy review had been completed and was reported in the 2022/23 Business Plan Report at the previous meeting of the Joint Committee on 4th March this year, with the service remaining financially self-sufficient.

The table on Page 21 of the report, summarised the timescales and officer responsibilities for the service objectives over the past and current financial years.

In addition to these proposed service developments, a property contingency is included in the Crematorium's revenue budget to cover unplanned works and general repair and maintenance.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, also reminded Members of the Crematorium's surplus fund which is designed to build up reserves for the future replacement of the cremators and ancillary plant in approximately 10 years, as well as fund all future service improvements. Maintaining this reserve will ensure the Crematorium has sufficient long-term funds for both, plus any unplanned eventualities that could occur. Further details of this and the overall budget would be explained in the Treasurers report, she added.

Members commended the report, whilst the Chairperson also paid tribute to the extensive rose gardens in the grounds that were the second largest in Wales.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee noted the report with pleasure.

6. **INTERNAL AUDIT OF COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM**

The Group Manager – Highways and Green Spaces presented a report, that informed the Joint Committee of a recent Internal Audit of Coychurch Crematorium to allow certification of the 2021/22 annual return.

He advised that the objective of the Audit was to provide assurance to the Joint Committee on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control, governance and risk management arrangements in respect of Coychurch Crematorium.

Audit testing was undertaken in respect of the financial year 2021/22 and the internal control, governance and risk management arrangements were evaluated against the audit objectives listed in paragraph 3.2 of the report, ie in relation to Governance, Budgetary Control, Income Management and Invoice and Order Management.

The Group Manager – Highways and Green Spaces confirmed that the Audit identified a number of strengths and areas of good practice. There was one recommendation made as a result of the Audit and the action in respect of this, had been implemented.

The Audit opinion concluded that there was substantial assurance that a sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

He concluded his submission, by advising that there were no further actions required.

A copy of the Internal Audit Report was attached for the benefit of Members at the Appendix to the report.

A Member advised that he was pleased to note that the Audit feedback and resulting recommendation made by them, had been acted upon so quickly by the Crematorium.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee noted the Internal Audit Report.

7. **FLOWER COURT FACILITIES**

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to advise the Joint Committee on the progress of the construction of an extension to the Flower Court facility at Coychurch Crematorium and to request approval to award the Contract resulting from the tender process as detailed in the report.

The proposed extension was designed to improve the mourners experience and the movement of the congregation by providing a larger covered facility on the currently unused grass area, the design being in keeping with the Crematorium's Grade 2* listed building status and the design ethos of the extremely eminent original architect, Maxwell Fry.

At the meeting on 14th June 2019 the Joint Committee was introduced to the architect, Jonathan Adams (of Percy Thomas Architects, Capita Real Estate and Infrastructure), a previous president of the Royal Society of Architects in Wales and noted for various prestigious projects including the millennium centre in Cardiff Bay. Members were provided with a detailed presentation of his proposed design for the extension works. The Joint Committee were then shown pictures of the works, expanded upon by the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar, as follows:

- (i) The design is most impressive, effective for the requirements of the bereaved and staff but also compliments the religious ethos of the existing buildings and grounds.
- (ii) It maximises the use of space – being a large structure.
- (iii) It provides a new door aperture from the rear of the chapel that leads directly into the extended covered Flower Court, greatly improving the speed at which mourners can vacate the chapel to view the floral tributes while additionally improving safety in the case of an emergency evacuation.
- (iv) It also provides covered access between the door at the top of the Cloister walkway to the chapel exit doors.

The design takes its dome-like form from historic religious buildings of different faiths, displaying handkerchief vaults built from steel and hardwood frames and featuring stone walling, stone paving and stained glass, all high-end natural materials beautifully crafted, which complement the current architectural style of the building.

The Joint Committee approved the design and authorised that officers proceed to apply for planning permission and invite tenders for the construction works, subject to further approval. The funding for the project was then estimated at £540,000 and would be accommodated from the crematoriums reserve funds.

At the meeting on 4th September 2020 the JC was again updated, that despite the pandemic, work had progressed in some areas, mainly that:

- All statutory approvals had been achieved, including listed building consent from Welsh Government. The Crematorium had worked extremely closely with our conservation planners and CADW on this project, who have very positively endorsed the design.

At the meeting on 5th March last year, Members were advised that the pandemic had impacted upon the timetable and funds were moved to 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 the speed at which the tender stage could be reached and at the meeting of 4th March this year, the Joint Committee was advised that tenders would be invited through E-Tender Wales in March, in accordance with BCBC's Contract and Financial Procedure Rules, with construction works planned to commence summertime this year. The original estimated budget cost of £550,000 was included in the Crematorium's Business Plan and 2022/23 revenue budget, and approved by the Joint Committee.

Members delegated to the Clerk and Technical Officer the power to approve the acceptance of the most economically advantageous tender, unless the tender amount exceeded the allocated budget cost, at which point a further report would be submitted to the Joint Committee to confirm final approval of tenders. The Crematorium's reserve fund would be able to accommodate a higher construction cost if required.

On the 18 March last, Bridgend County Borough Council invited tenders via an open tender process through E-Tender Wales and an advert on Sell2Wales. The final date for the return of tenders was 17 June 2022 and one tender was opened by BCBC's procurement manager and cabinet/committee. The invitation to tender contained several quality questions as well as a commercial submission and Capita Real Estate and Infrastructure was instructed to carry out a qualitative and quantitative tender evaluation. The combined Quality and Commercial Scoring can be seen in the table on page 40 of the report

The most economically advantageous tender, taking into account Quality and Price, was submitted by South Wales Contractors Ltd in the sum of £1,269,956.74. The quality element of the tender submission was scored extremely highly.

The Tender Review Report produced by Capita is attached at Page 49 of the report, which included a recommendation to engage South Wales Contractors Ltd as the successful tenderer.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised, that whilst it is recognised that the commercial sum for the project is substantially higher than the estimated budget amount originally provided by Capita back in 2019 and with one tender submission, the architect, Mr Jonathan Adams, has provided a number of reasons and reassurances for the current status of the project, those being:

- The impact of the pandemic largely placing the project on hold in 2020, following the first Covid-19 lockdown. The bespoke design depended greatly on the input of specialist suppliers and manufacturers, to finalise the design of the timber roof structure, including the construction of a prototype frame, all of which closed down. The design team began working with specialists again in 2021, the resultant staff resource issues prevented them from also submitting tenders.
- The unconventional bespoke design creates procurement challenges. It has been tailored to the unique character, history and listed building status of the Crematorium so, like the existing building, the new design has few standard components, so the accurate execution of the details and good quality workmanship is crucial, limiting those capable of tendering.

The positioning of the construction site directly adjacent to Crallo Chapel and the existing Flower Court, demands special care to ensure public safety and also limited working hours to enable the Crematorium to remain operational. These constraints are specific to the Crematorium and add significant risk for the contractor.

The scale of the build, the high quality of skills required and the challenging site constraints, all taken together, have the effect of making the project unattractive to potential bidders from outside the South Wales area, as they would incur additional costs that would represent a significant percentage of the contract value, especially as their supply chains are also likely to be geographically remote.

Having conducted a search, Capita concluded that tender submissions would be low in number and received from firms with prior knowledge of the Crematorium site. Consequently, although unusual to receive one tender, it is not unexpected.

- The tender received is a strong submission. The contractor has invested much time and effort into fully understanding the detailed specifics of the design information to ensure that their pricing is comprehensive and accurate. They have given careful consideration to the sequence of works (and I can confirm that they provided an extremely comprehensive and impressive build programme which demonstrated a deep understanding of the technicalities of the build) and, because they have successfully completed several projects at the Crematorium already, they have a better understanding of the constraints and the risks of the site than any other bidder could have.

Their previous experience of working at the Crematorium and providing the highest standards of workmanship meant that they scored highly on the information they provided in the quality section of the tender. It was therefore Capita's view, that this contractor would most likely have won the tender process regardless of more tenders being received.

- Price Inflation has impacted greatly: The project was approved over three years ago but from the summer 2020 was then on standstill due to the pandemic lockdown.

When the construction industry in the UK re-mobilised towards the end of last year, construction costs rose rapidly and significantly right across the industry due to acute shortages of both materials and labour, with materials costs for timber rising by 80% and steel by 60% for example. Inflation remains well in excess of RPI inflation. We are all aware of Brexit, rising fuel costs, etc, and Capita feels that the tender submission reflects current market prices and risk allowance and is a good tender.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar added that having worked closely on this tender and having scrutinised the 80 plus design drawings provided to contractors as part of the tender, she appreciated the large scale and complexity of the very bespoke build and the high quality materials used to complement the listed building status, and therefore why the commercial value of the tender is considered very competitive. When you consider that over seven years ago via competitive tender, it cost the Crematorium 1.2 million to build a basic small block extension and install two new cremators and associated plant, this provided a little perspective.

The Joint Committee is further advised that South Wales Contractors regularly win competitive tender construction projects and civil engineering works with BCBC, which reassuringly demonstrates their reliability to provide high quality workmanship and competitive pricing. When preparing their tender, they would have expected to be in competition with other tenderers.

They are a contractor of choice by the Facilities and Corporate Landlord construction team, having worked on endless projects across all sections of the council, including the Civic Offices, nursing homes, schools and the Highways Department, also proving to be experts in working on live buildings. In relation to Coychurch Crematorium, they have carried out a vast number of building projects won on competitive tender, including the extension of the Waiting Room facility and installation of new disabled toilets, the reconfiguration and refurbishment of the Flower Court toilets and the toilet block adjoining Coity Chapel, the provision of the new road infrastructure and car park in the new land extension, and most recently were awarded the tender for the external lighting project, completed July 2021. They have demonstrated very high standards of workmanship at competitive costs and an ability to work seamlessly around the crematorium while it remains operational, and with timely efficiency.

There has been no structural addition to the public areas of the main Crematorium building since it opened in 1970. The extension will vastly improve the bereavement experience at the facility, resolving the current bottle neck as mourners leave the premises and assist with the safer movement of mourners through the building as a whole. It will provide a large, pleasant, covered open space from which mourners can disperse after a funeral, away from the toilet corridor and with an additional door opening to the rear of Crallo chapel to assist with this. The problems associated with the existing flower court corridor have been further highlighted during the recent pandemic, when the confined space and social distancing requirements meant that it could not be utilised during the period of restrictions, requiring mourners to pass straight through to the outside road area, regardless of weather conditions.

The current plastic side to the existing flower court corridor, which was a new addition and installed prior to the listed building status of the Crematorium does not complement the high standards of architectural design provided by Maxwell Fry and by today's standards, would not have been accepted by planners, and it will benefit from being replaced by a high end designed facility using the very best of natural materials, which has gained a positive endorsement from the planning Conservation Officer.

Since the Crematorium opened in 1970 the choice for cremation has increased to over 80% and congregation sizes have increased hugely, with complete funeral services taking place at the crematorium rather than in churches first. This has been further emphasised by the need to install screens and speakers in the cloister to accommodate the large numbers of mourners attending the crematorium, despite the chapel being one of the largest in the UK. With the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Crematorium having occurred during the height of the pandemic in 2020 such an improvement to the building would provide a befitting way to mark the occasion and address the needs of

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modern times, by investing in the Crematorium's future expansion in a way that embraces its listed building status.

As a result of the increased death rate during the 2020 and 2021 of the pandemic, a total of 570 additional cremations took place which created £400 thousand pounds of additional income in cremation fees and this does not include a substantial amount more revenue created from the sale of memorials.

YEAR	CREMATIONS	ADDITIONAL CREMATIONS	COST PER CREMATION	ADDITIONAL INCOME
2019	1625			
2020	1933	308	£696.40	£214,491.20
2021	1887	262	£707.50	£185,365.00
TOTAL		570		£399,856.20

The project provides a befitting way of investing that additional income in a manner that improves the bereavement experience for future generations, in recognition of the sadness that has facilitated it.

The additional £720k required for the project will be transferred from the Crematorium's accumulated surplus/reserve fund which currently has a balance of £3.2 million. This would be reduced to £2.5 million and is considered a sufficient level to fund future cremation plant and improvements and maintain and protect the service in light of unknown demands or emergencies.

A Member asked if the Crematorium had sufficient reserves to accommodate this extra expenditure going forward, to which the Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar confirmed that they had and that such Reserves had been and still were, in a healthy position.

The Chairperson asked when the project would start and would the work be undertaken in the evening, when there were no burials taking place.

The Bereavement Services Manager and Registrar advised that the Contract would be awarded next week with the build probably commencing in September 2022.

RESOLVED:

- (1) The Joint Committee approved the Tender from South Wales Contractors Ltd in the sum of £1,269,956.74 and to award the Contract to this contractor.
- (2) The Joint Committee delegated to the Clerk and Technical Officer the power to approve the final terms of the Contract in consultation with Bridgend County Borough Council's Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, Human Resources and Corporate Policy and thereafter arrange for the execution of the Contract on behalf of the Joint Committee.

8. ANNUAL ACCOUNTING STATEMENT 2021-22

The Finance Manager, Financial Control and Closing presented a report, in order to present the unaudited Annual Accounting Statement for the 2021-22 financial year to the Joint Committee, and to obtain approval to submit the Annual Accounting Statement for Coychurch Crematorium to Audit Wales.

Following the report outlining certain background information, she confirmed that Section 1 of the Annual Accounting Statement (Appendix 1 to the report) showed that in 2021-22 Coychurch Crematorium made a net surplus of £280,724. The surplus had been added to the accumulated reserve for the Crematorium brought forward at 31 March 2021, bringing the total of that reserve to £3,179,607 at 31 March 2022, compared to £2,898,883 in the preceding year.

Table 1 in paragraph 4.1 of the report, showed a summary of the final financial position for the Crematorium for 2021-22 as compared to the budget set at the start of the financial year.

The Finance Manager, Financial Control and Closing stated that explanations for the more significant variances from budget were shown in bullet point format at paragraph 4.2 of the report.

Table 2 in the report, then reflected a breakdown of the Planned Capital Maintenance Budget along with the Outturn and Variances for 2021-22, relating to the Flower Court extension, Site Lighting and the Chapel Sound equipment.

Further to the Annual Accounting Statement, a supplementary Balance Sheet was provided in Table 3 of the report and this supplementary information provided a further breakdown of the figures recorded in the Annual Accounting Statement.

Further information to explain the balances was expanded upon in paragraph 4.4 of the Treasurers report.

RESOLVED: That the Joint Committee approved the Annual Accounting Statement for Coychurch Crematorium for 2021-22 (Appendix 1 to the report referred), and agreed that the Chairperson of the Joint Committee signs the Annual Accounting Statement prior to submission to Audit Wales.

9. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 15:15