

Minutes



Greater Gwent Cremation Joint Committee

Date: 12 October 2020

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors Councillor R Jeavons (Chair), K Williams and Meredith
Joanne Hazlewood, Meryl James (Governance Officer), Paul Dundon and Joanne Gossage (Green Services Manager)

Apologies: Councillors J Taylor and Moore

1 Apologies for Absence

Gareth Price, Councillor M Moore

2 Declarations of Interest

None

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 4th December 2019 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

4 Appointment of a New Chair for the Joint Committee

The Committee confirmed that Councillor John Taylor from Caerphilly will be the new Chair for 2021-22. Councillor's John Taylor and Julian Simmonds both had connection problems and were unable to join the meeting.

5 Budget Monitoring Report 2020

The Committee is asked to note the current budget monitoring position

The budget monitoring summary report is projecting that income will be down by £148k for this financial year, which can be directly linked to the decrease in cremations, which in July/August alone, were 189 less than in the previous year.

Even with this loss of income, we are forecasting a £26k increase to the balances, after the £950k budgeted distribution. However, if the cremations continue to decrease at this rate, we will be reporting a deficit position at the next meeting, when we will also be presenting a fee increase/draft estimates report. This will give the Committee the opportunity to discuss options available going forward.

The other thing to note, as detailed in the report, is that the COVID related expenditure claimed from Welsh Government is £37,650.

6 Amended Final Accounts Oct 2020

1. The Committee is required to approve the annual return prior to External Audit, completing their audit of the accounts

Important procedure notes:

- If there are no amendments required, following the audit, no further action is required by the Committee
- If there are amendments, External Audit will report to Committee requesting amendment of the annual return, and will require a formal meeting to re-approve the amended return, and signatures from the Chair of the Committee and Head of Finance.

Required:

- members are asked to approve the draft accounts position
- members are asked to approve the remaining 20% distribution to constituent authorities
- Chair of the Committee and Head of Finance to provide electronic signatures on annual return

The draft accounts report was sent out the members electronically on 15th June, and the accounts and the recommendation to pay the remaining 20% distribution were approved by the Chair of Committee at that time, however this meeting is to formalise those decisions and obtain electronic signatures.

The reserves balance at 31st March 2020 was £1,374,275, which has been carried forward into the current year.

This year we changed our accounting practice in accounting for income. Since we moved from income returns, to the new income management system, the income we have reported each year has been March to February, as funeral directors are billed at the end of the month, so March income was received in April.

The change was deemed necessary due to the impact of COVID, and the loss of cremations to private crematoria, so going forward we will be reporting April to March income in the accounts.

The Committee approved the draft accounts also the 20% distribution.

7 Facilities Management

The Norse representative reported the following:-

The new roof to the cremator area has been replaced and is complete.

The paving stones around the public areas of the building have been replaced or re-set.

There is work programmed in to repair the coping stones to the top of the walls.

8 Funeral Director's Report

Not available.

9 Letter to Greater Gwent Joint Committee

P Dundon reported that Mrs Catherine Nolan contacted him by telephone in the Summer regarding having remains put into a plot in the Garden of Remembrance. She was informed that the area she wanted was full and was offered an adjacent plot which was likely to remain available for 18 months or so. However, when she discovered the crematorium did not offer witnessed interment of remains she was not happy with this policy decision. Prior to 2001, families were able to witness interments being carried out at the crematorium. However, subsequent to that date the Committee made the decision to stop offering this service.

Cllr K Williams asked if this was the only request that had been received for this. P Dundon confirmed yes it was the only complaint since the policy had been altered.

Cllr C Meredith asked if this facility to witness interments is available in other crematoria in Wales. P Dundon reported that other crematoria in Wales offered witnessed scatterings of remains and witnessed interments in purchased private burial plots. However, Gwent was unique in having interments in unpurchased communal plots. The method by which cremated remains are buried is detailed on the crematorium website.

The Committee voted to retain the current policy for interring cremated remains without offering appointments for witnessed interments.

The Chair asked P Dundon if he would reply to the lady on behalf of the Committee and ask the new Chair to sign the letter.

10 Manager's Report

The Manager reported that since Covid they have put the Book of Remembrance online and have received a lot of views. It has gone down really well with the public because its available 24 hours a day. They have also started re-selling original vaults. Cremation figures had increased initially however, they have subsequently lost a lot of cremations to Langstone as they were offering more seats than Croesyceiliog, we have now matched them with additional seats with the exception they allow ten people outside we do not.

Demand for Direct Cremations has increased across the country with Langstone our current nearest competitor offering £450. When Blackwood crematorium opens they will probably price match them. It is anticipated that the Competition and Marketing Authority report into the funeral industry will recommend or mandate cremation authorities to offer direct cremations in the near future.

We still do this however, the numbers are very small although it is popular practice in Langstone.

Cllr K Williams said he fully agreed with P Dundon that we should be offering them and price matching.

The Committee supported the above for Direct Cremations.

11 **Webcast of Meeting**

The meeting terminated