

Minutes



Greater Gwent Cremation Joint Committee

Date: 24 January 2018

Time: 2.00 pm

Present: Councillors D Davies, R Jeavons, Jones, Williams, Taylor and Tom
Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation), Joanne Hazlewood and Paul Dundon

In Attendance:

Apologies: Councillors Daniels and Simmonds

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chair declared that his partner was employed by Tovey Bros Funeral Directors.

3 Review of Fees and Revenue Estimates for 2018/19

The Finance Business Partner referred to the above report which proposed a cremation fee increasing from 1 April 2018.

The Committee was informed that there had been a slight amendment to the figures and new copies were distributed. The new figures related to the employee cost, this had no impact on the income.

The suggested fee increase was 2%, this was projected to increase revenues by £29,000.

In addition, the budget due to be announced at Council would show that there would be a surplus of £750K. This took into account the anticipated decrease in cremations, predicting a loss of income due to new Crematorium recently opened in Llanwern. This was only a precautionary measure, projecting the decline in bookings year on year and was a minimum distribution requirement that would see the Crematorium's finances in good stead for a while.

The Chair also considered that there might be cause for concern with the new Crematorium and asked the Committee to give careful consideration to the increase in fees.

Councillor Williams (MBCB) felt that the Committee was led to believe that the new Crematorium would not affect the income of the Gwent Crematorium.

Discussion ensued regarding the decrease in figures, this was highlighted in the Manger's Report (item 6), showing that December 2017 saw a considerable drop in bookings.

The Committee, Head of Finance and Superintendent Registrar would monitor the figures continually and see if there was a significant decrease after 12 months.

S Tom, Association of Funeral Directors advised the Committee that the death rate in Llanwern was also down for the month of December, again, this would have to be monitored on a monthly basis rather than speculating on why there was a significant decline in bookings.

The Committee was notified that the medical referee requested an increase to £20. This had not been changed since 2006 and would see an increase of £2. The Superintendent Paul explained that the medical referee's role was a direct recommendation by the Department of Justice to review any medical forms, ensuring that they had been completed correctly; the medical referee had the power to request a further examination or stop a cremation from being carried out. This role however would only exist for 12 months and was due for review by Central Government.

Councillor Davies said that it was a private sector that was benefitting from the cremation services in Llanwern and that the Committee but needed to be mindful of how it could impact on the Gwent Crematorium in the future.

The Chair, referred to the limitations of the Gwent Crematorium and that consideration should be given as to where the excess funding could be spent.

Finally, the Superintendent Registrar also referred to the cut-off age range point for children which was 16 years and suggested that it be increased to 18 years. There was a concession for children and because the frequency of services within the 16-18 year age range was negligible, it was felt that the age range should allow for the extra two years. The Committee unanimously agreed the increase the age to 18 years.

Agreed:

That the fee increase would be raised to 2% for 2018/19.

That the medical referee fee be increased by £2.

That the age range be extended from 16 to 18 years for government concession.

4 **Funeral Director's Report**

S Tom referred to the newly built Lanwern Crematorium which was being used frequently by Funeral Directors and asked fellow members to give a 'top five' list as to why they were using it more than the Cwmbran Crematorium. Apart from the pleasant surroundings and new build, it was considered that the top three reasons that the Funeral Directors preferred to use Llanwern was due to the following:

1. The availability to have a photo tribute, ie slide show which played during the service.
2. An additional set of voile curtains to close around the casket.
3. Online booking facility to secure a slot for a service.

Members of the public were not put off by the fees which were £120 higher than the Gwent Crematorium.

The Committee therefore unanimously agreed that these services should be matched to compete with the Llanwern Crematorium.

The Superintendent Registrar did highlight some logistical obstacles that might hinder the progress, where to install media facilities, the age of the building and electrical installation etc.

After lengthy discussion for and against the modernisation of the building and facilities, it was unanimously agreed by members that the issues mentioned above should be investigated and overcome for the long term benefits of the crematorium.

S Tom pointed out that there was not the facility for a wheelchair user to speak at the pulpit. The Superintendent Registrar however was currently looking into this.

Finally, S Tom requested that the chapel attendants be trained to change the music on the Wellesley machine, rather than wait for officers who might be indisposed when a service was about to commence.

Agreed:

1. That installation of media equipment to provide a slide show for photo tributes be investigated.
2. That an online booking system be investigated.
3. That a new voile curtain and track be installed.

5 **Manager's Report**

The Superintendent Registrar highlighted the above report and gave an outline of the following:

Cremations:

As was the running theme of the meeting, the cremation figures were much lower than the average for the month of December 2017, however S Tom did say that deaths in December were lower than anticipated.

The figures for January were likely to be 239, this was also lower than average and would await to see what happens in February.

Single Use Plastics:

The Chair made reference to the single use plastics which caught the interest of the BBC earlier in the week when they contacted the Chair for further information. The Crematorium used both plastic containers and cardboard boxes for cremated remains. The boxes were recyclable and locally sourced and have been used since 2003. In line with recent moves by central government, it was proposed that the use of the single use plastic containers no longer be purchased, removing any harm to the environment and lowering the carbon emissions due to deliveries round the country. It was also proposed to cease using the heavy plastic bags accompanying any other purchase within the Crematorium and use paper bags instead.

Interment of Cremated Remains:

There had been a change in what people did with cremated remains over the past years, which meant that remains interred in garden of remembrance had significantly reduced. With this in mind, it was suggested by the Superintendent Registrar that weekly interments be reduced to fortnightly, preserving the remaining the grounds that were set aside for burials and also allowing clients more time to change their minds, should they so wish.

Work on garden of remembrance was almost complete, including the planting of native trees, giving and extra 25-30 years burial space within the grounds. Due to recent storms, there was a loss of five conifers between the Crematorium and the neighbouring golf course. The area had been cleaned up and debris from the trees were removed and purchase of native trees to replace the conifers was underway, to maintain the natural habitat.

Councillor K Williams referred to availability on the website, which appeared to be out of date. The Superintendent Registrar apologised and had updated it that morning and would continue to do so on a regular basis.

Agreed:

To remove the use of plastic single use containers.
To reduce the burials from weekly to fortnightly

6 **Meetings for 2018**

The following dates were for 2018 would take place on a Wednesday at 2pm in Committee Room 4:

14 March
13 June
12 September
12 December