

Minutes



Greater Gwent Cremation Joint Committee

Date: Wednesday 19 June 2024

Time: 1pm

Present: Councillors S Evans (Torfaen-Chair), Rhian Howells (Newport), Chris Smith (Blaenau Gwent), Ross Leadbeatter (Blaenau Gwent), Mike Ryan (Funeral Director), Joanne Hazelwood (Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities), Joanne Gossage (The Service Manager Environment & Leisure) Karl Donovan (Newport Norse Representative), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Jill Martin-Edmunds (Deputy Manager- Bereavement), James Webster (Team Manager-Bereavement) Taylor Strange (Governance Officer), Emily Mayger (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Yvonne Forsey (Newport)

1. Apologies

Councillor Yvonne Forsey (Newport City Council).

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on the 31st January 2024

The Minutes of the previous meeting were held as a true and proper record.

4. Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24

The Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities outlined the report.

Key points

- Members were to receive and approve and the draft accounts, with signatures required from the Head of Finance and the chair of the Committee.
- Note distribution of £250,000 to constituent authorities.
- Mercury abatement lone was repaid as agreed in the prior meeting.
- The carried forward balance was a balance of £812,000
- Reduced income levels and increased expenditure linked with the works done at the crematorium and the repayment of the abatement loan.
- The crematorium had many staffing changes in the financial year due to lack of staff agency staff was required which led to an overspend.
- Energy costs were budgeted higher than what was seen so the budget was adjusted
- Some expenditure linked with maintenance was due to the storm
- A loan of £256,000 was repaid which would lead to a positive saving of £53,000
- Over £200,000 less was taken in due to refurbishment works.

- In the last quarter of the year increased number of cremations took place which had led to the overspend being reduced.

Questions from the Committee

Councillor R Howells queried why it took 12 months to hire a replacement manager for the crematorium.

The Service Manager Environment and Leisure tried unsuccessfully to recruit twice as well as the team also facing on official retirement notice which took longer than expected.

The Chair questioned would the figures rebound following the completion of the cremator works.

The Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities explained there had been increased numbers however the cremator works could alter these figures

Agreed:

The Committee -

- Received and approved the draft accounts position.
- Approved the annual return.
- Noted that a distribution of £250,000 was made to Councils as agreed.
- Noted that the mercury abatement loan balance of £265,803 was repaid in full, as agreed
- note the carried forward reserves balance of £812,825.

5. Facilities Management Report

The Newport Norse Representative detailed usual minor works although it was highlighted that there was a significant problem in the chapel roof as clear evidence of tile slippage and the roof had reached the end of its suitability.

The Newport Norse Representative informed the Committee a replacement roof would be required however, the tile slippage would not cause direct harm to anyone due to the tiles landing on a flat roof below.

The Newport Norse Representative explained 3 options for the required works concrete with a cost of £104,000, Welsh slate at £130,000 or Spanish slate for £106,000.

The Newport Representative noted an ecology survey would be needed as well as a bat survey and a structural survey.

The Newport Norse Representative highlighted that Items such as rotten timber and asbestos would only be found after work to the roof was completed.

The Chair asked was there a timescale on the repairs and if a report would follow.

The Head of Finance explained that Newport Norse needed to produce a report highlighting the repairs needed with all available options as well as having a sign off from Torfaen due them being the located authority in which the crematorium was located.

The Chair declared an interest as a Torfaen Councillor.

The Newport Norse Representatives noted timescale for works would be roughly 8 weeks and over £100,000 in cost.

The Service Manager Environment and Leisure highlighted the full scope of the work needed to be conducted before bringing the paper to the committee such as its impact on previously agreed works.

The Chair highlighted that it was important to have the report in order to make a clear decision.

The Service Manager Environment and Leisure explained that the full scale of works would need to be assessed as well as its impact on other works mentioned.

Councillor R Howells asked whether other sections of the roof should be looked at while the works were taking place.

Newport Norse noted that the roofs of other buildings within the site were looked into and in addition further works, such as painting the chapel would also be considered.

Councillor R Howells queried that if sections of the crematorium were being closed was it worth maximising the time used by carrying out any other required works.

The Newport Norse Representative asked if a visit would be required to see what other works needed to be completed.

The Deputy Manager- Bereavement noted 2 bat surveys were to be conducted in the next few months. In addition, the plastic roofs needed to be cleaned however suggested prices were high, although due to budgets some works had to take priority.

The Norse Representative invited Committee members to walk around the facility to see what other works were needed.

6. Funeral directors Report

The Funeral Director highlighted the issue involved in the cost to remove remains from the site and asked for a response from the officers.

The Service Manager Environment and Leisure noted a response would be prepared within the following weeks.

The Funeral Director questioned whether a memorial service was allowed to take place at the crematorium as conducted in similar facilities such as Langstone.

The Deputy Manager - Bereavement noted a memorial service was offered subject to timeslot availability however this was not a common occurrence.

The Deputy Manager - Bereavement and the Team Manager-Bereavement reiterated that the memorial service did occur in the crematorium.

Councillor R Howells asked whether the memorial service was advertised.

The Team Manager- Bereavement highlighted it led to a loss in fees but had always been advertised although uptake was low.

The Deputy Manager - Bereavement noted that the memorial service be conducted in the same way that a traditional burial service was undertaken, whereby the coffin was taken away and not cremated.

The Funeral Director commented on the positive impact of the site visit.

The Committee Members also noted this impact.

7. Managers' report

The Service Manager Environment and Leisure highlighted the following key points.

- The report gave figures on cremation figures which showed the number of cremations had begun to increase back to capacity following the completed works.
- Early morning time slots were available as these were the time slots typically hard to fill.
- A later time slot at the end of the day was being considered and was currently trialed, a report on the findings would be brought back to the Committee.
- A cremator operator was set for retirement, with a new cremator technician due to start on the 24.06.2024.
- The Manager position was still being outsourced until Ceri Pritchard started in the post.
- Existing staff as well as new staff were provided with training to build resilience within the service as well as provide additional skills within the team, any successes as a result of the the training would be reported back to the Committee.
- A quote on the flower bay roof cleansing as well as various other works had been looked at.
- The Green flag judging took place with the hopes that the crematorium would keep its status.
- The new cremator would be considered by the procurement team in the following days after the Committee.
- The waiting room was fully operational with positive reviews received.
- The increase into the number of sanctums offered was being considered

The Funeral Director wanted to thank James Webster for the works he had undertaken.

The Chair Evans wanted to pass on thanks to all staff at the crematorium.

8. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 18 September 2024 at 1pm.