

# Minutes



## Greater Gwent Cremation Joint Committee

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Date: Wednesday 18 September 2024

Time: 1pm

Present: Councillors Malcolm Lane (Monmouthshire-Chair), S Evans (Torfaen), R Howells (Newport), C Smith (Blaenau Gwent), Y Forsey (Newport), A Sandals (Monmouthshire), J Taylor (Caerphilly) 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), Ceri Pritchard (Team Manager-Bereavement) Taylor Strange (Governance Officer) and Joseph Walliker (Electoral Services Administrator)

Apologies: R Leadbeater (Blaenau Gwent)

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### 1. Apologies

Councillors R Leadbeater (Blaenau Gwent)

### 2. Declarations of Interest

None.

The Interim Head of Law and Standards highlighted that Declarations of Interests should be declared at the start of the meeting however if members needed to declare on a specific item this would also be acceptable.

### 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2024

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

### 4. Review of Budget Performance 2024/25

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

#### Key points

- Appointments of staff had been made and training was underway for new staff members.
- The forecast showed a slight underspend however temporary administrative staff were required that could impact the underspend, a clearer position would be made at the following Committee.
- A renewal and repairs fund had been set up to help mitigate any future costs.
- The Cremator replacement was due to take place in October which it was hoped would reduce future repair costs.

- A garden redevelopment allowed for more burial memorials with the increased spend on these memorials leading to an increase in costs for the financial year.
- The income position at the end of August 2024 showed an outturn forecast of £78,000 which was less than budgeted.
- The budgeted position was based on 1614 cremations.
- Quarter one saw a higher uptake in cremations, however a continual increase had not been predicted due to the likely impact of the cremator replacement.
- The Position would be reviewed in December following more information.
- The Mercury Abatement Loan had been repaid.
- The Capital finance costs associated with the cremator replacement would be actioned in the next financial year.

#### Questions from the Committee

Councillor Evans (Torfaen) asked were any actions outstanding from Audit Wales. The Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities explained that there was a £1 adjustment however there had not been any issues other than a narrative change on the Annual Return.

#### **Agreed:**

The Committee-

- Consider the budget position, and the potential impact on reserves.
- Note/approve the restated Annual Return for 2023-24.

### **5. Facilities Management Report**

The Newport Norse Representative provided an update on the ongoing works at the Crematorium.

The Chapel roof report did not come to committee due to new information relating to the roof needing targeted repairs rather than full replacement which was being reviewed and would be brought to the following committee

The Newport Norse Representative met with Ceri Pritchard (Team Manager Bereavement) and his team with issues highlighted below.

- Issues with the bollard lighting.
- Ongoing issues with the Boiler.
- The lack of power to the chiller in the cold room.
- To Provide a price for cleaning the lower-level windows.

There was a potential issue relating to the watertightness of the roof over the waiting room, with further inspection revealing that latent dampness in the walls was the issue. The situation would be monitored with works being carried out once the area was proven dry.

General maintenance took place during the time period.

The CAT ladder access to the chapel ceiling was made compliant to the required standards. A heavy-duty D-Ring was fitted above the opening to the attic space in order to protect those from falling through the ceiling.

#### Questions from the Committee

Councillor Evans (Torfaen) asked if the costs relating to the roof had increased following the initial investment. The Newport Norse Representative explained that should the roof be repaired in a targeted way then the costs would be lower however should the roof need to be fully repaired then the costs would be higher. The Service Manager Environment and Leisure highlighted the issues found by the building surveyors such as the wooden battens, however the survey was conducted by drone. A detailed survey could be conducted on the internal structure.

Councillor Lane (Monmouthshire) asked if the issue related to the roof could be deferred. The Newport Norse Representative agreed to present the report in its entirety at the next meeting.

## **6. Funeral directors Report**

The Funeral Director welcomed Ceri Pritchard (Team Leader-Bereavement) and thanked James Webster for all the work he had done.

The Funeral Director asked if double yellow lines could be placed outside of the crematorium entrance. The Service Manager Environment and Leisure noted this could be passed along to highways.

## **7. Managers' report**

The Team Manager-Bereavement introduced himself to the Committee

### Key points.

- Consistency in levels of cremations had occurred and noted numbers were impacted by works conducted.
- The new 4pm slot had been in trial since August with low uptake however it needed to be assessed over a longer period.
- The 30-minute time slot had been beneficial to funeral directors as well as other stakeholders.
- The Team Manager-Bereavement would like the table in the report to show the difference between infant cremation, direct cremation and normal cremation numbers.
- New legislation relating to the Statutory Medical Examiner had been introduced, therefore staff were given online training sessions in order to get up to speed.
- The Crematorium retained the green flag award for its eighth consecutive year, the flag raising would occur on the 20 September 2024 with all Committee members invited to attend.
- The recycled metal scheme led to £11,600 donated to McMillian, with another charity needing to be selected the Committee were invited to choose.
- A new Cremator Operator had started his training, with another member of staff awaiting the final assessment.
- Thanks was given to James Webster the former Team Manager for Bereavement.
- Positive feedback had been provided on the new 4pm slot.
- The officers were working on a plan to bring in the new cremator following the procurement.
- A full service of the 2 remaining cremators would occur in October.
- New gardens were being developed however lack of space was becoming a key issue.
- An Infant memorial location was in development however more information could be provided at a later date.

- Gower Consultants provided the crematorium administration software from 1990 to present day however they were ending support for the system, officers were currently looking at a new administration service.

### Questions for the Committee

Councillor R Howells (Newport) queried the additional costs associated with the system upgrades and asked whether consulting as many companies as possible would be worthwhile. The Team Manager-Bereavements highlighted four main providers with two providers that were developing and future proofing the service. Gower Consultants new system would be feasible but at an up cost. The Team Manager-Bereavement further added that the team was looking at all available software, following this the officers would be able to come back to give the committee a better view.

Councillor Evans (Torfaen) questioned how long the trial period was on the early and late slots. The Team Manager-Bereavement noted there was no requirement to stop the process, but the officers would inform the Committee in the future of the feedback.

Councillor Forsey (Newport) proposed Dreams and Wishes for the new charity that could be supported with the recycled metal scheme.

Councillor Sandals (Monmouthshire) asked which crematoriums came under the remit of the Committee. The Team Manager-Bereavement confirmed it was the Gwent Crematorium.

The Service Manager Environment and Leisure reiterated Councillor Forsey (Newport) proposed charity and indicated to the Committee to pass on any charities they wish to be considered.

The Interim Head of Law and Standards asked if a report could be shared before any decisions were made on the new charity for the recycled metal scheme.

### **8. Date of the Next Meeting**

As mentioned during the Committee an additional date would be added in December 2024.