

Minutes



Greater Gwent Cremation Joint Committee

Date: 20 January 2016

Time: 2.00 pm

Present: Councillors Jones (Chair), Simmonds, Brookes, P Huntley and Williams

In Attendance: G Price (Honorary Secretary), J Hazlewood (Assistant Accountant), P Dundon (Superintendent Registrar), K Donovan (Newport Norse) and A Jenkins (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillors V Delahaye, Dally, White and Taylor

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Dally & White (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council), Delahaye (Newport City Council) and Taylor (Caerphilly County Borough Council)

2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 September 2015

The minutes of the meeting were accepted as a true record.

4 Review of Fees and Review Estimates 2016/17 and Appendices A&B

The Committee gave consideration to the report by the Assistant Accountant. The report outlined the draft revenue estimates for 2016/17, which were detailed in Appendix A, and proposed fee increases. The fees were based on Gwent's nearest competitors, where lowest and highest fees were taken into account. The fees for Gwent during the period 2015/2016 were the second lowest.

It was proposed that due to the financial challenges that local government was currently facing that an increase of be 10% recommended for consideration by the Committee. This would raise the fee to £ 651.00 and give an additional estimated income of £164,079.

The estimates were also discussed as outlined in Appendix A. It was recommended that the Committee consider a distribution of £750,000 be made prior to the financial year end, retaining a sufficient level of reserves to cover any emergency works. It was noted that the mercury abatement loan was still outstanding, this was an interest based loan with annual capital costs of £110,000, which Newport funds out of the Crematorium income.

Councillor Brookes requested confirmation of the distribution sum for Torfaen County Borough Council. The Honorary Secretary clarified that the distribution was proportionate to each council population, in this case £159,000.

Councillor Williams was of the opinion that 10% was a considerable increase and suggested that 5% would be more agreeable additional charge.

Councillor Huntley referred to a similar discussion last year, where a 3-4% increase was considered but the Committee eventually agreed a higher increase of 10%.

Recommended:

- That the estimated fees for 2016/17 be approved.
- That the crematorium fees be increased to 10%.
- That a distribution of £750,000 be made prior to the financial year.

5 Budget Monitoring and Forecasting 2015/16 and Appendix A

The Committee considered the report for the budget monitoring and forecasting for 2015/16. The Assistant Accountant briefly outlined that the reports were distributed monthly and highlighted variances between budget and actuals.

There was originally a planned surplus of £740,695, however after a review the position at the end of December was a forecasted surplus of £855,373. There was an estimated addition of £114,678 due to two staff vacancies for gardener and Deputy Manager.

The Chair asked if the vacant posts were due to be filled. The Superintendent Register advised that the post of gardener was to be filled and the Interim Head of Streetscene was proposing to restructure the staffing within the Crematorium office. It was hoped that the Deputy Manager's post would be deleted from the structure and replaced with two senior administrative posts and one lower graded administrative post, which would make an estimated saving of £5,000. Employee costs for next year were also based on the current structure.

The Chair enquired as to whether this would be a committee decision. The Honorary Secretary advised that this was an operational decision, however, as a matter of courtesy it would be brought to committee at some point in the future for information.

In response to Councillor Huntley's query, the post of gardener would be filled as early as possible,

Recommended:

That the committee noted the report.

6 Facilities Management (Oral Update)

The representative of Newport Norse briefly informed those present that there were plans to decorate the chapel and that there was no further issues to report. The Chair did mention that at a recent visit to the Crematorium he noticed that an area of wall near the pulpit was in a state of disrepair. The Superintendent informed the Chair that this was due to recent water ingress, which had been addressed but had caused a damp mark. Unfortunately as this was a busy period there wasn't an opportunity to make good the area without interrupting the service requirements. This however would be rectified during a quiet period.

7 Funeral Director's Report

In the absence of the Funeral Director, there was nothing to report.

8 Manager's Report

The Superintendent Registrar went through the report and discussed the figures for the period. With regard to the memorial sales, there was a downward slide in December with

sales, this would usually pick up in February/March. It was noted that Cremation figures during September-December were of the fewest recorded since 1989.

Further to the Motion Proposal at Torfaen County Borough Council, which was discussed at September's meeting, it was decided that the Superintendent Registrar would compile a report on the statistics of staffing availability and time slots and be presented to January's meeting.

The Superintendent Registrar outlined the report giving a brief background of the history of the crematorium. The Gwent Crematorium was the busiest chapel and crematorium in Wales. Over the last 20 years, average cremations were 2743 with the highest figure being 2944.

Causes of delay in service time availability and cultural changes were highlighted as well as the current situation and ways of mitigating against delays.

Arising from the report, options were discussed. Consideration of opening on a Saturday was discussed however it was highlighted that staffing costs on a Saturday would be £384. Additionally, the utility costs of opening the building on a Saturday, would run into £100s. Wellbeing of staff at the crematorium was also a consideration.

Councillor Williams agreed that the wellbeing of staff working on a Saturday would probably be affected. The Superintendent Registrar wanted to state however that in emergencies there were no problems with staff working during out of hours.

As requested at the previous meeting, the Superintendent Register had advised that time slots have been published to the Crematorium website for members of the public to view.

Councillor Brookes referred to earlier bookings in the day and asked were there any improvements between this year and last. Generally, there was no problem with service provision. Members of the public were taking advantage of the earlier slots and there was more take up from last year. The diary bookings had increased and there was 10 days out of 20 when there wasn't a funeral at 9am.

Councillor Williams sought clarification on 11am bookings. These were currently being booked from now until the early part of February. This meant that availability tended to be earlier now. There was an increase in popularity with back to front bookings where the cremation carried out earlier in the day with a service booked for later that same day.

Councillor Brookes thanked the Superintendent Registrar for his report and said that considering it was raised by Torfaen County Borough Council he was impressed at the speed of the resolution.

Finally, The Superintendent Registrar was looking into entering the Crematorium in to the green flag scheme which would give a benchmarking profile to work to as well as provide good publicity. There was a cost however it was low cost therefore there would not be an issue.

Recommended:

- That the report be noted and that no further action should be taken to change the opening hours and cremation times.
- A copy of the report be forwarded to Torfaen as a completed action for their information.
- That the Committee fully supported the application for a green flag status for the crematorium.

It noted that all meetings would take place on a Wednesday at 2pm in Committee Room 4:

16 March
15 June
14 September
7 December

The meeting terminated at Time Not Specified