

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Scrutiny Board

Date **20 November 2014**

Report of: **Director of Finance and Resources**

Subject: **REVIEW OF PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM OPERATIONAL
ACTIVITY**

SUMMARY

To inform members of the Scrutiny Board of the principal work of Portchester Crematorium Joint Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to note the report.

INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this report is to update and inform members of the principal work of the Joint Committee during the 2013/14 financial year.

BACKGROUND

2. The Joint Committee operates under a Memorandum of Agreement between Fareham Borough Council, Portsmouth City Council, Gosport Borough Council and Havant Borough Council. Two members from each of the constituent authorities make up the 8 person Joint Committee. The constituent councils have delegated to the Joint Committee all the powers of the constituent authorities with respect to the provision and maintenance of the crematorium.
3. The agreement sets out the constitution of the Joint Committee; the objectives of the crematorium and relationships between the constituent authorities. The agreement also sets out the minimum number of meetings (three) to be held annually for the general business of the Joint Committee, although in practice to meet various statutory reporting deadlines four meetings are held. There is also in place a lease of the crematorium from Fareham Borough Council to the four constituent authorities.
4. The Joint Committee decides the overall policies to be adopted including approving a capital and maintenance works programme, consideration of and approval of accounts, and setting the scale of fees and charges. These could effectively be described as the Joint Committee's core functions.
5. The meetings of the Joint Committee have been supported by the Clerk (John Haskell), Treasurer (Andy Wannell), Engineer and Surveyor (Terry Garvey), and their respective deputies, together with the Horticultural Consultant (Ashley Humphrey) and the Manager and Registrar (James Clark). They report to the committee on financial and procedural matters including the operation of the crematorium and the quality of the service provided, which includes the grounds and buildings and plant to ensure the highest standards continue to be maintained.

DEVELOPING AND ENHANCING THE CREMATORIUM'S SERVICES

6. During 2013/14 the operating environment of Portchester Crematorium changed significantly, with the opening of 'The Oaks', a private crematorium on the East Hampshire / Havant border.
7. At the meeting in September 2013 the Joint Committee approved a report setting out a range of initiatives aimed at developing further and enhancing the established quality of the services provided by the Crematorium. These are detailed in the following paragraphs, with an update provided on each initiative.
8. Crematorium South Chapel Refurbishment – Robert Benn Associates have been appointed to bring forward a scheme of refurbishment of the South Chapel, with design principles and materials agreed by the Joint Committee. Works will take place over the 2014/5 winter period. The vast majority of the work will take place out of normal operating hours.
9. Provision of Video Screens – video screens have been installed in each chapel enabling personal tribute to be shown during services.

10. Video streaming of services through the internet – the Joint Committee has approved the provision of secure internet streaming of funeral services for any family requesting it. Media On Demand was selected to install the equipment, which was completed in October 2014.
11. Books of Remembrance to be made available on-line – The Books of Remembrance have been digitised. Arrangements for these to be available on-line should be progressed in the near future.
12. Publication of cremation records on-line – the Joint Committee gave its approval of this initiative in June 2014 to meet demand from the public regarding searches of cremation records for family history purposes. This substantial amount of work is currently underway with Deceased Online.
13. Extending the length of some time slots – the introduction of four, forty-five minute time slots per day in the South Chapel day has proved to be beneficial to both customers and crematorium operations.
14. The crematorium's web site is regularly refreshed with up to date information. The newly appointed Deputy Manager & Registrar will be completing a technical and content review over the coming months.

OPERATIONAL AND STATISTICAL UPDATE

15. Interim Building Maintenance Arrangements – Fareham Borough Council's Building Services are providing this support following the conclusion of the contract with the former external professional consultancy. Alongside the Engineer and Surveyor and Manager of the crematorium they are working with a contractor to install acoustic grilles that should provide the necessary noise abatement. This is the only outstanding issue following the extension of the crematorium building to house mercury abatement equipment which was successfully completed in 2012.
16. Statistical Information – Total Cremations

<u>YEAR</u>		<u>TO END AUGUST</u>
2011	4015	2772
2012	3975	2702
2013	4248	2998
2014		2327

MONTHLY COMPARISON				
	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>
JUNE	344	304	333	263
JULY	331	286	326	279
AUGUST	313	331	319	265

17. Estimated reductions in revenue were allowed for in the budget for 2014/15, based on a 30% annual reduction in the number of cremations at Portchester once the new crematorium opened. The impact on revenue income to the crematorium has been closely monitored throughout the 2014/15 financial year to date and compared with a ten year average of cremation numbers it is hoped that the reduction will not be as high as 30% in the opening year of the new crematorium. In the first half of 2014/15 the reduction against the ten year average figure is approximately 15%, although it is likely that this figure will increase over time as the new crematorium becomes more established.
18. In December 2014 a decision was made to maintain the 2014/15 payment to each authority at the same level as for 2013/14 at £150,000 whilst the impact on actual revenue levels could be monitored. In light of the level of reduced cremations and related income it is proposed that the payment to the constituent authorities is reduced over a two year period, initially to £125,000 in 2015/16 and to £100,000 in 2016/17.

RISK ASSESSMENT

19. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

CONCLUSION

20. The Joint Committee continues to function effectively through the members appointed to serve on it by their respective authorities. Much of the joint Committee's work continues to be of a recurring but important nature and good progress has been made on initiatives that develop and enhance the quality of services offered by the crematorium.

Background Papers:

None.

Reference Papers:

None.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Andrew Wannell (Ext 4620).