

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the NORTH DEVON CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE held at the Crematorium, Barnstaple on Friday 2nd November 2018 at 2.30 p.m.

Present: Representing North Devon District Council

Councillors Edgell, Lane, Moores and Yabsley (Chairman)

Representing Torridge District Council

Councillors S.Inch, T.Inch, Langmead (Vice Chairman) and Pennington.

Officers

Head of Operational Services, Treasurer, Crematorium Manager, Secretary and Accountant.

(a) APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Jones.

(b) MINUTES

(i) RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd August 2018 (previously circulated) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(ii) Matters Arising

(A) Phase B Project: Update

The Crematorium Manager reported that the relocation of the book of remembrance and memorial branch into the flower room had proven very popular with people and he had received many compliments from members of the public. He therefore questioned the need to rebuild a new Memorial Hall facility.

He considered that monies could be better spent on other works at the Crematorium.

It was agreed to DEFER phase B of the project and that the Crematorium Manager prepare a report for the next meeting on the possible savings by not undertaking Phase B of the project and the costings for other works within the Crematorium.

(c) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Langmead declared a personal interest in the North Devon Children's Holiday Foundation

(d) CREMATORIUM MATTERS

The Joint Committee considered a report by the Crematorium Manager (previously circulated).

i) Achievements

It was noted:

- A) That a new disabled access had been created to the office to improve facilities for visitors and that the opportunity had also been taken to redecorate and re-carpet the reception area and put up new pictures of local scenes.
- B) That the book of remembrance and memorial branch had been moved to their temporary home in the flower room in preparation for the original building's replacement and to prevent further maintenance spending on the leaking roof.
- C) That nine new maintenance free benches had been installed, one having been placed by each chapel entrance to provide seating for mourners preferring to wait outside the waiting room.
- D) That the previously agreed sanctums had been installed in the Royal's section.
- E) That two small beds adjacent to the Aspen toilets had been tidied up and block paved and 3 cycle racks installed to provide safe cycle parking.

ii) Metals Recycling Charity Award

It was noted that North Devon Children's Holiday Foundation had been awarded a £5,000 donation and that North Devon Hospice had been nominated for the next award in the normal order of nominations.

iii) Grounds Improvements Update

It was noted that the path between Authors & Royals had been ordered and it was hoped that the works would be completed during November.

iv) Larkbear

The Crematorium Manager reported that a representative from the contractor (Persimmon Homes) had met with the Chairman and himself. The Developer

reported that discussions were under way with Devon County Council but a camera enforced bus gate (with appropriate list of exempted vehicles) was currently the developer's preferred solution.

He stated that if the exemptions allowed for funeral traffic it would maintain the existing access route, add a new access via Gratton way and minimize the risks of the crematorium being cut-off by an highway incident such as accident.

RESOLVED, that there be no restricted access to the Crematorium along Old Torrington Road or through the Industrial Estate.

It was noted that the future development of Larkbear would give the opportunity to provide additional access points.

Councillor Pennington wished it recorded that he abstained from voting
Councillor Langmead wished it recorded that he voted against the above resolution.

Councillor Lane declared an interest as a Member of NDC Planning Committee.

Councillor Yabley declared an interest as a Member of NDC Planning Committee and NDC Executive and as a DCC Member of the Highways and Traffic Orders Committee

Councillor Edgell declared an interest as a DCC Member of the Highways and Traffic Orders Committee

Councillor Pennington declared an interest as his son worked at ND College.

v) Crematorium Figures

The Cremation figures were noted.

vi Refurbishment of Aspen Chapel

It was noted that due to the demands on officer time the refurbishment had been set to commence on 2nd January for 10 weeks. The contract was currently out to tender.

vii) Staffing

The Crematorium Manager reported that the last 6 years had seen an increase in services of 24% with a commensurate increase in workload. The trend seems likely to continue with an increasing population, continually improving facilities and the crematorium's unrivalled value compared to others surrounding.

The administration staff had reached the point that they were struggling to cope with the workload, a situation that was difficult now and would become risky in the event that services continue to increase as expected. The whole service relied on the efficient and proper administration of the process and maintenance of records. A failure in this regard would cause great distress to

the family involved, and could damage the reputation of the Crematorium and could lead to sanction by the Ministry of Justice.

The continuing workload increase would best be met by employing an additional part-time staff member in the administration role for 3-days a week. The additional costs of the post would be between £13,041 - £15,260 (SCP 14-21) depending on experience.

He further reported that the technical staff were better positioned to manage the growing workload by reducing the gardening aspect of their role. This in turn has reduced the time they had spent working in the memorial gardens. The burden has therefore increased on the garden staff (one full time, one 3-days a week) at a time of increased uptake of memorials due to the increase of services. There were also some potential garden area increases which would also require more staff hours.

The gardens of remembrance are an essential part of the service and their upkeep was a high-priority. An additional 2-days of support (a second part-time gardener) would amount to would cost £8,633 p.a. (SCP18).

RESOLVED:

- A) That North Devon Council be requested to increase its establishment at the Crematorium by 1 part time administration post (3 days per week) and 1 part time gardener post (2 days per week – on a fixed term contract (12 months)) and that the Head of Operational Services prepare and present a report to North Devon Council Management Team for approval.
- B) That the 2 posts be funded from the Crematorium budget.

viii) Christmas Working Days

It was noted that it was intended to close on Monday 24th & Monday 31st December and open normally on 27th & 28th December. This would provide maximum service time availability whilst ensuring operating efficiency of the cremators.

ix) No Service Cremation Service Option (Direct Cremation)

The Crematorium Manager reported that the number of early short services over recent months had dropped slightly after a period of steady rises, possibly indicating a move of services to other crematoria who offer 'direct cremation' (where there is no service and no mourners attend), typically at low-cost.

| April-Sept | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total | 37 | 40 | 47 | 45 |

In the last 3 months three new funeral directors who offered low-cost internet booked services (one based in Lincolnshire, two based in South West) had started to use our daytime services on the basis that we offered excellent value. However, they had not used our early morning short service which 'competed' against crematoria offering even lower cost direct cremations. The 'Sun Life Cost of Dying Report 2018' was an in-depth report into the cost of funeral services and also looks at regional variances in cost. Despite our excellent value, the South West remained the most expensive region in the country at an average cost of £4365 against a national average of £3744. The cost of 'direct cremation' in the South West was £1823, much closer to the national average of £1712. The reduction in costs were very striking with a direct cremation averaging £2542 less than a 'conventional service' in the South West. North Devon Crematorium does not currently offer such a service.

The report also identified that currently only 2% of services were direct cremations. It identified that 44% of people would consider the option for their own service, 98% stated they don't want a lavish funeral and 31% want the funeral to be as cheap as possible.

The low uptake suggested a lack of current knowledge about the availability of direct cremations, but the demand seemed to be increasing as people sought savings.

RESOLVED that in principle a 'direct cremation' service be provided to meet the developing demand and be considered at the Joint Committee meeting in February 2019 when fees/charges are considered.

(e) PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 2 2018/19

The Joint Committee considered and noted a report by the Treasurer (previously circulated) regarding the performance for April to September 2018/19.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.