

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of North Devon Crematorium Joint Committee held in the Crematorium Meeting Room - North Devon Crematorium on Friday, 3rd February 2023 at 2.30 pm

PRESENT: Representing North Devon District Council

Councillors Bulled, Cann, Davis, Y. Gubb, Phillips and Walker (Chair)

Representing Torridge District Council

Councillors J. Gubb, Hurley and Pennington

Officers:

J Mann Head of Planning, Housing and Health and Bereavement (Crematorium) Manager, Secretary, Treasurer and Accountant

**25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies were received.

**26. TO APPROVE THE CORRECT RECORD OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4TH NOVEMBER 2022**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2022 (previously circulated) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**27. MATTERS ARISING**

Matters Arising. There were no matters arising.

**28. ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE CHAIR**

There were no items of urgency.

**29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest declared.

**30. CREMATORIUM MATTERS**

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

i) Metals Recycling Charity Award

It was noted:

That Over and Above had been nominated for a 'one-off award' in accordance with the Joint Committee's decision in November 2022. Thereafter, North Devon Hospice would be the next nominee in line with the current rota:

North Devon Hospice  
Cruse  
Children's Hospice SW  
Families in Grief

ii) Crematorium Figures

The Cremation figures were noted. It was also noted that the January figure was 179 and that to date 165 had been booked for February.

It was also noted that the current increase in the death rate, which had been nationally reported, had resulted in North Devon Crematorium temporarily offering additional service times (lunchtime and 8am), together with the ability to change the type of direct and short services to full services.

iii) Vandalism Damage (including additional incidents)

It was noted that Devon & Cornwall Police had been unable to progress the roofing/skylight damage investigation to a prosecution due to conflicting accounts from those interviewed.

Burglary & theft – Overnight Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2022. A suspect smashed the reception side door and entered the offices. This triggered the alarm and on the arrival of the security company the suspect made off with a stolen coat, first aid kit and a laptop. He was arrested nearby by police and all property was recovered unharmed. He has been referred to the Crown prosecution Service (CPS) to consider whether to prosecute.

Theft of £4,000 of plastic boards - Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The manager saw two suspects with a pick-up who had almost completed loading the crematorium property. He challenged them, recording the incident on a mobile phone, seized their vehicle keys, made the suspects unload their vehicle and called the police. One suspect made off before their arrival but the other (van driver) was arrested and has been referred to the CPS for consideration whether to charge. All property recovered.

The Joint Committee recorded its thanks to the Crematorium Manager for his efforts and diligence in going over and above his duties to reduce the consequences of these incidents.

iv) Phase B Works (Garage/Memorial Room)

It was noted that three compliant tenders had been received, none of which were accepted. Two appeared to be speculative as they were over double the pre-tender estimate and one failed on competence (evidence only of low value, simple projects). The project was put out for tenders again and 4 tenders received. The lowest tender received was however, over budget (report tabled). Changes had however been identified to reduce the cost – reduced scope for the car park works and anticipated drainage savings. The revised project cost was £546,450. The projected shortfall was £162,183.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the lowest revised compliant tender quote of be accepted.
- b) That the shortfall be funded from the Budget Management Reserve and Equipment Replacement Reserve.

v) Medical Referee

It was noted that the National implementation of the Medical Examiner role had been set for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. No further information had been provided.

vi) Direct Cremations

It was noted that due to the increase in funeral costs, together with the impact of the pandemic, had led to a significant increase in the use of ‘direct cremations’, a low-cost cremation where traditionally there is no service and no mourners attend. Specialist ‘direct cremation’ companies had seen their businesses grow and it was now common for deceased to be collected in large ambulances from the South West to be cremated at a site in Andover. Ashes are then returned weeks later. This was a very industrial process.

In response several South West crematoria had reportedly reacted by operating as a collective, offering low-cost direct cremations, sometimes below their published prices. North Devon Crematorium’s current direct cremation fee was £550 and enquiries indicated that the service was available for as little as £275 elsewhere in the South West, half our fee. This had led to deceased being transported away from this area to be cremated elsewhere.

Two neighbouring crematoria had published their 2023 direct-cremation fees with significant published reductions to £450 & £475.

In 2022 we had carried out 133 direct cremations – 8% of our total cremations.

Surrounding crematoria’s figures showed they all carried out 15 – 23% direct cremations, with those numbers likely to increase.

In view of the above the joint committee views were sought regarding reducing the published cost of a ‘direct cremation’ to just below surrounding crematoria’s published fee, but with a £100 reduction for North Devon and Torridge residents. It was suggested that the fees be £450 & £350 (residents) respectively.

The benefits and risks were outlined.

It was RESOLVED that the cost of a direct cremation be reduced to £450 with a discount of £100 for residents of North Devon and Torrington to £350.

vii) Memorial Sales On-Line

It was noted that Nationally sales of memorials had steadily declined, a trend that had not slowed despite significant upgrades to the memorial gardens.

Currently all sales were conducted face-to-face or via email with no option to view, process and purchase completely on-line. We have been offered the option to trial a system of on-line memorials to individuals which incorporated bereavement support, viewing the service media and also purchasing memorials directly through a website.

The trial would be for one year and at a reduced cost (as below) which would allow an evaluation of the potential.

Trial (the first 12 months):

- **A one-off setup cost** - Waived
- **An annual service charge** – £1,800
- **A per-service charge** - Waived
- **A marketing commission** - 10% of average sale value
- **A sales commission** - 5% of actual sale value
- **A credit card transaction fee** – merchant fee at cost

Thereafter:

- **A one-off setup cost** (est. £1,500 to £3,000) – to cover or contribute to the cost of professional photography and configuration of your personalised website
- **An annual service charge** (est. £1,800) – to cover the overhead of running a maintaining the core software and services
- **A per-service charge** (est. £2.50 per deceased) – to cover the cost of hosting the personalised website for each deceased person for 3 years
- **A marketing commission** (est. 10% of average sale value) – a ‘success fee’ for us when someone makes an enquiry (but may do rest of transaction offline in-person) and/or buys something through the website
- **A sales commission** (est. 5% of actual sale value) – a ‘success fee’ for us when someone buys something through the website
- **A credit card transaction fee** - but this only replaces a transaction cost that already exists)

This would represent a significant enhancement to the existing service and bring the ability to purchase memorials via a website, making the service more accessible. It was hoped that the website would grow to enable personal tributes and access to other supporting services.

Access to the facility would be via a scannable QR code printed on the ashes casket making it optional and extremely easy to view.

RESOLVED that an online Memorial Sales Service be trialled for 1 year at the reduced costs outlined above.

**31. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 3 2022/23**

The Joint Committee noted a report by the Treasurer (previously circulated) regarding the performance for quarter 3 April to December 2022/2023.

It was noted that the predicted deficit maybe due to the increase in cremations become a surplus at the end of the year.

**32. 2023/24 BUDGET, FEES AND CHARGES**

The Joint Committee considered and noted a report by the Treasurer (previously circulated) regarding the budget, fees and charges for 2023/2024.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the basic Cremation charge for 2023/24 of £810 be approved as detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report.
- (ii) That the 2023/24 budget as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report be approved.
- (iii) That the fees and charges for 2023/24 as detailed in paragraph 4.6 and appendix 2 be approved.
- (iv) That the distribution of surpluses for 2022/23 of £416,230 to the constituent authorities: £249,740 to North Devon Council and £166,490 to Torridge District Council be approve.
- (v) That the transfer of £100,000 to the Equipment Replacement Reserve be approved.

Chair

The meeting ended at 3.40 pm