

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the NORTH DEVON CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE held on Friday 5th February 2021 at 2.30 p.m.

Present: Representing North Devon District Council

Councillors Bulled, Cann, Davis, Y.Gubb, Lovering, Phillips and Walker.

Representing Torridge District Council

Councillors Christie, J.Gubb, Harding, Inch (Chairman) and Pennington

Officers

Crematorium Manager, Treasurer, Secretary and Accountant.

(a) APOLOGIES

There were no Apologies.

(b) MINUTES

- (i) RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6th November 2020 (previously circulated) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- (ii) Matters Arising – There were no matters arising

The Chairman and Committee expressed thanks to the Crematorium Manager and staff for their continued work during the current difficult times.

(c) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared.

(d) CREMATORIUM MATTERS

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

i) Covid Crisis Update

It was noted:

That the number of mourners permitted remained at 30, unchanged by the lockdown. Post-funeral events were now limited to 6 people (from 15).

The crematorium although extremely busy has continued to operate without the need for any measures to provide additional service times. Since the end of November there had been 29 deaths that had listed Covid as the primary cause of death.

ii) Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) Funerals Market Investigation.

It was noted that the CMA had produced their final report regarding both funeral directors and crematoria. The report stated that local authority crematoria fees were higher than should be expected (£80-£170) due to an average 6% increase over the last 10 years. Privately run crematoria fees were higher still.

The annual review of surrounding crematoria's pricing demonstrated that, despite significant upgrading of facilities, North Devon's fees were about £285 lower than nearby privately run crematoria and over £100 lower than the nearest local authority Crematorium (no organist).

The report encouraged Local Authorities to enter into a tendering process with local funeral providers to offer a fixed (reduced) cost funeral service.

The Crematorium Manager stated that he would investigate the tendering process and whether it could be undertaken on a Crematorium basis only on behalf of both authorities or whether each authority would have to undertake its own tendering process.

iii) Achievements

That the Car park had been re-covered in new stone and the bulk materials area cleared.

iv) Metals Recycling Charity Award

That Clarity had been awarded £10,000 (paid direct December 2020). The 'formal cheque presentation' had not yet taken place.

The Calvert Trust (Exmoor) had been proposed for the next award (due June 2021).

Subsequent nomination list:

Over and Above (Cancer & Wellbeing Centre)

Families in Grief

North Devon Children's Holiday Foundation

North Devon Hospice

Cruse

Children's Hospice SW

Over and Above (North Devon Hospital – Maternity Unit Bereavement Suite)

Clarity

Calvert Trust

No further additions to be considered prior to February 2022.

v) Crematorium Figures

The Cremation figures were noted.

vi) Garden Improvements 2020/21

It was noted:

That the Path work's, half the hedge had been removed and fencing had been completed.

That the following had been ordered: ground preparation & metal supports for the 'sail' weather protection outside Rowan Chapel.

That the following had not yet been ordered: Remainder hedge works, sails, new hedges. It is anticipated these will be ordered shortly.

That the Lead Gardener has had some serious personal issues, which had put pressure on the gardening team and therefore a limited programme of improvements (linking resin paths, bulk material area fence and hedge replacement work's) was proposed for 2021/22.

It was agreed that a card be sent to the Lead Gardener on behalf of the joint committee expressing the Committee's thoughts at this very difficult time.

vii) Larkbear Development – Traffic Management

It was noted that the Traffic order was being drafted to move the bus gate to Old Torrington Road and enable it to be signed for camera-enforcement rather than relying on physical restrictions. There did not seem to be any intention to exempt any funeral related traffic or restrict times of operation. If implemented in that form all crematorium traffic will have to use Gratton Way and the mini roundabout at Sainsbury together with the additional residential and construction traffic. The consequences of this were of significant concern. Once published there would be a consultation process which it is intended to participate in.

(f) PERFORMANCE QUARTER 3 2020/2021

The Joint Committee considered and noted a report by the Treasurer (previously circulated) regarding the performance for Quarter 3 April to December 2020/2021.

(g) 2021/2022 BUDGET, FEES AND CHARGES

Councillor Pennington expressed concern at the proposed Cremation fee increase especially in view of the CMA report which stated that that fees were higher than expected, as a result of an average 6% increase over the last 10 years. Last year the Cremation fee was increased from £680 to £715 and a further increase this year to £730 represented a 7% increase.

The Crematorium Manager stated that last year's increase included the charge for a casket that had previously been charged separately. The actual Cremation Fee increase was in line with inflation. The CMA report suggested that the increase was 6% each year.

The Chairman stated that the Cremation fee was significantly lower than any other Crematoria in the region.

Councillor Christie stated that whilst figures were compared with other areas Torridge had the lowest wages In England and North Devon had two areas of deprivation. North Devon and Torridge were not rich areas, and he was unsure that we should just look to compare charges with other areas and any increase, could have an effect, on people. He would like to re-look at the Cremation fee in the future.

RESOLVED that on consideration of a report by the Treasurer (previously circulated) regarding the budget, and charges 2021/2022.

- (i) That the basic Cremation charge for 2021/22 of £730 be approved as detailed in paragraph 6.1 of the report
- (ii) That the 2021/22 budget as set out in paragraph 3 of the report be approved.
- (iii) That the fees and charges for 2021/22 as detailed in paragraph 6.2 and appendix 2 be approved.
- (iv) That the distribution of surpluses for 2020/21 of £347,680 to the constituent authorities: £208,608 to North Devon Council and £139,072 to Torridge District Council be approve.
- (v) That the transfer of £95,480 to the Equipment Replacement Reserve be approved

(h) DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meeting would be on Friday 11th June 2021 @ 2.30 p.m.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 3.20 p.m.