

Friday 3rd February 2023

Crematorium Matters – Manager’s Report

Metals Recycling Charity Award

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

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

Cremation Figures

	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
April	161	125	139	163	117	150	121	174	124	133
May	117	135	118	126	138	136	137	136	103	146
June	102	123	143	125	129	127	127	126	110	134
July	121	106	111	126	142	133	128	136	123	110
Aug	117	100	109	114	120	106	118	118	116	133
Sept	107	122	127	121	127	106	114	121	131	138
Oct	98	125	140	127	137	132	129	120	119	122
Nov	96	120	108	157	135	127	115	149	131	132
Dec	98	120	128	123	131	119	113	141	128	135
Jan	164	142	131	158	182	169	147	176	140	180E
Feb	116	154	136	137	175	143	133	136	123	
Mar	127	157	151	162	164	145	143	141	159	
Total	1424	1529	1541	1639	1697	1593	1525	1674	1507	

The current increase in the death rate, which has been nationally reported, has resulted in North Devon Crematorium temporarily offering additional service times (lunch-time and 8am), together with the ability to change the type of direct and short services to full-services.

Damage to Crematorium (plus additional incidents)

Devon & Cornwall Police have been unable to progress the roofing/skylight damage investigation to a prosecution due to conflicting accounts from those interviewed.

Burglary & theft – Overnight Thursday 8th 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 9th January 2023. The manager saw two suspects with a pick-up who has 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.

Phase B Works (Garage Store/Memorial Room)

Three compliant tenders were received, none of which were accepted. Two appear 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. It is hoped to be able to report the result of the latest tender process at this meeting

Medical Referee

National implementation of the Medical Examiner role has been set for 1st April 2023. No further information has been provided.

Direct Cremations

Background:

Increased funeral costs, together with the impact of the pandemic, has led to a significant increase in the use of 'direct cremation', a low-cost cremation where traditionally there is no service and no mourners attend. Specialist 'direct-cremation' companies have seen their businesses grow and it is 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 is a very industrial process.

In response several South West crematoria have 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 is £550 and enquiries indicate that the service is available for as little as £275 elsewhere in the South West, half our fee. This has led to deceased being transported away from this area to be cremated elsewhere.

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

In 2022 we carried 133 direct cremations – 8% of our total cremations. Surrounding crematoria's figures show they all carried out 15 – 23% direct cremations, with those numbers likely to increase.

Proposal:

The view of the joint committee is 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.

The fees suggested would be £450 & £350 (residents) respectively.

Risks:

- Income loss through full services become direct cremations. Unlikely, if cost is important the switch would occur anyway, possibly to another crematorium.
- Income loss due to reduced fee (£200 from 2022/3). To offset the 'loss' would require about 76 additional cremations (direct). This represents a performance at the lowest level of surrounding crematoria who operate a low-cost direct cremation. This is achievable and likely to be exceeded.
- Non-independent Funeral Directors may be contract-tied to 'in-house' crematoria for a time. Possible but our service being very competitive makes it far more likely they will move direct cremations than a non-competitive fee. Likely to be offset by independent local Funeral Directors being able to compete more effectively through access to local reduced fee cremation service.

Benefits:

- Lower cost for local residents.
- A local, 'non-industrial' service.
- Environmentally sound - reduced transportation of deceased/ashes.
- Next day ashes available for families.
- Published date & time (allowing mourners to see deceased carried into chapel).
- More likely to encourage National Funeral Directors to use local crematorium once not 'contract-tied' rather than 'in-house'.
- Enable local independent Funeral Directors to compete directly on costs – supports local businesses as a result.
- Ability to provide service-recording of funeral to family.
- Probably financially positive - likely to retain local services currently leaving area. No significant drop in full services anticipated.
- Increase in service numbers makes more efficient use of equipment/staff time.
- Increase in service numbers improves energy efficiency and reduces equipment service costs (reduced heat cycling).

Memorial Sales On-Line

Nationally the sales of memorials has steadily declined, a trend that has not slowed here despite significant upgrades to the memorial gardens.

It is important to the funding of the service that memorials are seen as desirable and relevant in a changing society – we need to improve and change. Currently all sales are 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 incorporates 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 our existing service and bring the ability to purchase memorials via a website, making our service more accessible. It is hoped that the website will 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.

The costs are hard to determine as the percentage of web sales vs direct sales is hard to predict but it is hoped to offset those costs with increased sales and it will be in the interests of the provider to support their business through the quality of their service demonstrating memorials as a desirable and more relevant method of remembering a loved one.

Whilst it is a fledgling service both in its development and it being familiar to our customers, the trial does offer the opportunity to gauge whether it will positively impact sales and hopefully stop the decline uptake – all with a much reduced financial cost. It is intended that the success or otherwise would be reported next year with a view to extending, stopping or adopting the service.