

West Herts Crematorium Joint Committee

10 January 2022

Minutes

Present

Cllr David Major (Chair)	Three Rivers District Council Councillor
Cllr Terry Douris (Vice Chair)	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr Aga Dychton	Watford Borough Council
Cllr Anthony Rowlands	St Albans District Council
Cllr Anne Swerling	Hertsmere Borough Council

In attendance

Jo Wagstaffe	Treasurer (virtually)
Donna Nolan	Clerk
Jane Thomas	Crematorium Manager
Stephen Farrer	Assistant Finance Manager, Three Rivers District Council

Part A

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Joyce Pollaya, Project Manager and David Bass, Surveyor.

2. Minutes of previous meeting of 6 July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 were submitted and signed.

3. Matters arising

It was noted that the agenda sheet did not include the officers' names alongside their job titles.

4. Manager's report

The Manager's report was received by the meeting.

There were a number of questions raised by the members regarding the death rates reported and the impact on the new crematorium. The Manager provided additional context and advised there were no reasons for concern.

Members were pleased to note that the crematorium continued to receive positive customer feedback. The Manager confirmed that the bereaved were still provided with face to face support.

It was noted that fees and charges would be considered as part of the Treasurer's report.

RESOLVED –

that the Joint Committee:

1. notes the crematoria statistical information
2. notes the feedback from users
3. determines that the level of increase in charges for 2022/23 be reviewed as part of the Treasurer's report
4. notes the information on the Annual Open-Air Service of Remembrance and Christmas Trees
5. notes the date of the annual emissions testing and agrees to review the results at its next meeting.

5. Treasurer's report – Audit outcomes

The Joint Committee received the report of the Treasurer which set out the Audited 2020/21 Annual Return, the issues raised in the 2020/21 external and internal audits and the proposed actions to be taken, and the future arrangements for external and internal audit.

During discussions, it was clarified that there was no statutory requirement for an external auditor. Following questions, the Treasurer confirmed that the market for external auditors operating in this area of practice was limited and the continued engagement of BDO's services represented the best interests of all councils.

RESOLVED –

that the Joint Committee:

1. approves and accepts the audited 2020/21 Annual Return, including the "Section 3 – External Report 2020/21 Certificate", attached as Appendix A to the agenda
2. notes the updated Audit Action Plan (attached as Appendix B to the agenda), showing the previous years' audit recommendations, and the progress in implementing them
3. approves the continued engagement of BDO to provide the external audit
4. appoints the Hertfordshire Shared Internal Audit Service as the Joint Committee's internal auditor for 2021, as recommended by the Treasurer.

5.1 Treasurer's report – Revenue Budget 2022-23

The Joint Committee received the Treasurer's report on the long-term budget strategy (2022/23 to 2031/32) and revenue budget for 2022/23. The Treasurer thanked Stephen Farrer, Assistant Finance Manager at Three Rivers District Council, for his support in completing the detail.

The members noted that the future budget model identified there was no immediate issue for the crematorium; that the model had been prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice in Local Authority accounting; and that a minimum service provision was recommended.

There followed a discussion about the fees and charges for direct cremation. The Treasurer confirmed that not increasing the direct cremation cost would have minimal impact on the overall financial position.

After debating the issue, the members concluded that retaining direct cremation fees at the current level was appropriate. It was agreed that more detailed work would be undertaken by the Manager and Treasurer with a report presented to the next meeting in June if required.

The committee discussed increasing inflation and fuel costs. It was agreed that the position would be monitored, with a report provided to the committee in June should that prove necessary.

Following discussions, the Manager clarified that Funeral Directors had recently been required by law to publish their rates online.

RESOLVED –

that the Joint Committee approves the:

1. minimum level of reserves of £300K required
2. fees and charges increases for 2022/23
3. strategy for fees and charges for the medium term financial strategy
4. revenue and capital budget for 2022/23
5. medium term revenue and capital proposals from 2022/23 – 2030/31; and
6. continuation of the payment of £50K to each constituent council in 2022/23, and the strategy of the payment going forwards, subject to an annual review by the Joint Committee.

6. AOB

No items were raised

Chair _____