

## **COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS 2012**

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1 Service provision questionnaires are sent to the applicant for cremation for all cremations carried out. The majority of compliments, comments and complaints received come from this source. In 2012 from the 3,178 questionnaires sent out 226 were returned from people who were satisfied (some with added compliments) and 22 from people who were mostly satisfied but including comments about matters they thought could be improved. During the year 11 substantial complaints were received (compared to 21 the previous year). **‘Substantial’** is defined as either having been submitted in writing or, if verbal, considered being of sufficient gravity to warrant a reply from the Superintendent.

### **Changes proposed/made as result of comments**

2 A public address system was installed in the Hampden chapel and further improvements were carried out to the loop and sound system in the Milton chapel.

3 A record is kept of the actual date that a coffin is cremated (in case there are retrospective queries about when this happened).

### **Actions taken in response to substantial complaints**

4 The following substantial complaints were received:-

*Complaint 1:* A person wrote in with “normal hearing” complaining that they and some of their friends had trouble hearing the funeral service in the Hampden chapel.

*Response:* The Superintendent wrote to say he was sorry they couldn’t hear. He explained there was not a public address system in the Hampden chapel and this had not been a problem until recently when similar comments had been received about hearing difficulties. The Superintendent also explained that in the light of these comments the Crematorium Management Committee had recently instructed that a public address system should be installed. *Since receiving this complaint the public address system has been installed.*

*Complaint 2:* A person returned a service provision questionnaire stating how upset they were to find the flowers for a funeral on a Friday had been disposed of when they came back to look at them on Monday.

*Response:* The Superintendent wrote to say he was sorry this had happened, but also tactfully explained that the information about the Crematorium’s policy on disposing of floral tributes is written on the application forms for a cremation and there are also signs displayed in the floral tribute courts. *In fact this is information that is included in the ‘Statement of Understanding’ signed by the applicant when arranging a funeral, but to be effective this relies on the funeral director explaining it at the time and the person it is being explained to taking it in whilst often in a very emotional state.*

*Complaint 3:* A person returned a service provision questionnaire commenting that they would have found it more reassuring to have direct contact with a member of the

Crematorium staff at the time of the funeral and they also wanted to know the date of the actual cremation.

*Response:* The Superintendent wrote a letter explaining that a chapel attendant would have been present but is expected to stay in the background and liaise with the funeral director and person taking the service rather than directly with the chief mourners. The letter also advised when the cremation had been carried out. *Since this request was made a record is kept of the date of the actual cremation (which may be different from the day of the funeral service).*

*Complaint 4:* A person returned a service provision questionnaire complaining that the wrong music was played at the beginning of the funeral service and also that at the end they didn't have time to hear the exit music properly and felt pushed out.

*Response:* The Superintendent was unable to throw any light on this complaint because there was a two week gap between the funeral and receiving it and neither the chapel attendant nor funeral director could remember there being any problems. However he wrote and apologised for any potential error on the Crematorium's part. He also explained that the Crematorium Management Committee are very sensitive to time issues which was why they built the Milton chapel in 2005 to enable the funeral time slots to be extended from 30 to 45 minutes, but because the Crematorium currently carries out a relatively large number of funerals extending the time to an hour was unfortunately not an option. *Sometimes it is funeral directors at the end of the service who rush the family out more quickly than is necessary – even though there is plenty of spare time before the next funeral is due to start – instead of giving them a short time of reflection listening to the exit music. This matter was raised later in the year at the annual Liaison Meeting.*

*Complaint 5:* A person sent an email complaining that they had been sent a letter from the Crematorium without a stamp which cost them £1.36 to retrieve from the Post Office, and that by the time it was delivered it was too late to act on its contents and change their decision about the final disposal of the cremation ashes if they had wanted to (although fortunately they didn't).

*Response:* The Superintendent telephoned and apologised.

*Complaint 6:* A person returned a service provision questionnaire expressing dissatisfaction with a number of aspects of the service they had received, including difficulty getting through to the office on the telephone, insufficient car parking space, the waiting room too far away from the chapel and deficient information on the website about the chapel seating.

*Response:* These sorts of complaints are difficult to respond to without sounding too defensive. Clearly the complainer had a bad experience of the Crematorium service, but for a mixture of reasons. Putting additional information on the website is easily remedied. Not getting through on the telephone is unfortunate; the Superintendent acknowledges that sometimes the office is so busy there is no one available to answer, although most of the time this is not a problem. There is a car parking issue (although, it should be stressed, on occasions rather than most of the time) of which the Joint Committee is aware, and it was a subject of discussion at the last liaison meeting – the conclusion being that there is little more that can be done. As for the waiting rooms, they are clearly labelled with the chapel names 'Hampden Waiting Room' and 'Milton Waiting Room' but unfortunately sometimes people still wait in the wrong one.

*Complaint 7:* A person wrote a letter complaining that they could not hear the funeral service properly in the Milton chapel.

*Response:* The Superintendent wrote to apologise and advise that he would look into it - please see paragraph 3.2 above for action taken.

*Complaint 8:* Another person wrote complaining about not being able to hear in the Milton chapel – please see complaint 7 above for the response.

*Complaint 9:* A person returned a service provision questionnaire complaining that they had been told by the funeral director that they had to ‘purchase’ music from the Crematorium which had caused a last minute panic, although “it all went well on the day.”

*Response:* The Superintendent wrote and apologised if there had been any misunderstanding about accessing the Crematorium’s facilities. The funeral director in question is from London and so may not be too familiar with the services available at Chilterns Crematorium. The Superintendent did however stress in his reply that the only additional fee for music was if an organist was used, but not for the Wesley Music System which was used in this case.

*Complaint 10:* A person wrote a letter complaining that the organist had played the wrong tune at the beginning of the service and about the poor quality of the organist’s playing.

*Response:* The entry voluntary should have been played on the Wesley Music system but before the chapel attendant could switch it on the organist had started playing. As the bearers were already coming into the chapel and the organist is ‘out of easy reach’ (up in the balcony) in the Hampden chapel there was nothing the chapel attendant could do to rectify the situation. Worse still, once the organist realised he had made a mistake he decided all he could do was carry on playing, but he got in such a fluster about what he’d done his playing went to pieces! The Superintendent wrote a letter of explanation and apology.

*Complaint 11:* A person wrote a letter complaining that their funeral service was delayed because the previous service overran, but they received no explanation or apology.

*Response:* The Superintendent wrote a letter apologising and explaining about the limited options for the chapel attendants to act at the time a service is overrunning. *As far as the family not being advised is concerned normally we would expect the funeral director to speak to his mourners about any reasons for a delay – some would even consider our doing so as interfering! However, following this incident the Superintendent has asked the chapel attendants to check with the funeral director that when there are delays any mourners kept waiting are informed of the reasons why and the likely duration.*

5 This item is included for information.

***Background Papers:*** None