

CHILTERNS CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

MEETING 12TH FEBRUARY 2014

OPEN REPORT OF THE CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

3. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS 2013

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3.1 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 2013 from the 3,114 questionnaires sent out 175 were returned from people who were satisfied (some with added compliments) and 23 from people who were mostly satisfied but including comments about matters they thought could be improved. During the year 7 substantial complaints were received (compared to 11 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

3.2 The rose bed memorial plaque scheme is the subject of a report to this meeting.

3.3 The BT Broadband line for the Wesley Music system has been put on a 4 hour response for repair for a relatively modest increase in the quarterly fee.

3.4 ‘Provisional’ funeral bookings are now confirmed by email as well as ‘definite’ funeral bookings which have been confirmed by email for some time.

Actions taken in response to substantial complaints

3.5 The following substantial complaints were received:-

Complaint 1: A complaint was received about the poor fixing of a rose bed memorial plaque and the “poor” maintenance of the plaque.

Response: The plaque was re-fixed securely. The Superintendent wrote apologising for the perceived poor maintenance and also took the opportunity to explain that the Joint Committee recognised that the plaque fixing method on the concrete kerbing had deteriorated with age and was no longer satisfactory and because of this and a number of other problems relating to the scheme (poor growth of the roses due to surrounding woodland and being eaten by deer) it was going to be reviewed to consider how it might be improved. *The rose bed memorial scheme is the subject of a separate report to this meeting.*

Complaint 2: A letter was received from a person stating that on two separate occasions he had attended a large funeral when there was standing room only and he

couldn't hear at the back of the chapel. He emphasised that his letter was an observation rather than a criticism.

Response: The Superintendent wrote apologising but also asked the person to telephone or email with more details because the letter didn't say in which chapel or where the person was standing. Unfortunately no reply was received. *Complaints about not being able to hear in the chapel(s) have, by comparison with the number previously being received, all but ceased since the modifications to the sound systems in both chapels in early 2013, but the occasional comment is still made.*

Complaint 3: The Broadband line which connects with the Wesley Music system was down for several days despite repeated 'phone call to BT. During this time no new music requests could be downloaded but the office staff were contacting funeral directors and/or families in advance asking them to either bring a CD or choose an alternative.

Unfortunately one piece of music was missed until the morning of the funeral and the family, who were travelling from the south coast, had left home before they could be contacted. On arrival at the Crematorium they were extremely annoyed about the situation and very 'underwhelmed' at what they considered to be our poor attitude in trying to help them. In the event, thanks to the initiative of a member of the office staff and assistance from CDC IT department, the music they required was downloaded onto the system (from a memory stick) in time for the service.

Response: The Superintendent wrote apologising for the incident, acknowledging that we should have contacted them sooner and also known that there was an alternative method of loading music onto the system, but ten days later a two page complaint-letter was received culminating in a demand for the £640 cremation fee to be refunded (it was a double funeral slot).

In view of the refund demand the matter was referred to the Clerk. The Clerk also wrote apologising for the incident and, whilst stating that he did not accept all the points made in the complaint-letter, acceded to the refund on the basis of the claimed additional emotional distress caused to the family members concerned. *Since this incident the BT Broadband line has been put on a 4 hour response for repair. The extra quarterly fee for this is relatively modest.*

Complaint 4: A service provision questionnaire was returned with a comment about how upsetting it was that the Medical Referee had requested a post mortem examination of the deceased a few days before the actual funeral – although the comment when on to thank the Medical Referee for his "sensitive, thoughtfully worded letter" (advising of the results of the post-mortem) which helped to relieve the family's stress.

Response: The Superintendent replied saying he was sorry for the additional distress caused but explained that in accordance with the current procedures (under the legislative framework which dates back to 1930) the medical forms sometimes reach the crematorium as late as the day before the funeral (funeral directors are asked to ensure forms are delivered to the office at the latest by 9am on the working day before the funeral). *Following the exploits of Dr Harold Shipman, now over ten years ago, the death certification process has been thoroughly reviewed and a radically revised system is proposed which will result in the post of medical referee being discontinued and a more stringent but at the same time streamlined process introduced. Currently the implementation date is scheduled for 'autumn 2014' but there have already been several delays.*

Complaint 5: A service provision questionnaire was returned with a comment that the Crematorium had changed a funeral booking by sending an email to the funeral director that the funeral director had not received.

Response: The Superintendent wrote a letter apologising “for any part we may have played in the mistake that was made” but also explaining how the email booking confirmation system works and that since its introduction the incidents of ‘double bookings’ have been all but eliminated. *An email confirmation is generated whenever a booking is made. This gives the opportunity for the funeral director to check that the date and time of a booking is correct. Conversely, if the email confirmation is not sent (or not received) then the funeral director can contact the Crematorium to check if the booking has actually been made. On investigation it was discovered in this instance that a booking had been made on another date and a confirmatory email had been sent.*

Complaint 6: Another letter was received complaining about not being able to hear in the chapel, although again it didn’t say which chapel.

Response: The Superintendent wrote apologising, etc, but by the time this complaint was received he had spent some time covering chapel duty which had given him the opportunity to assess the situation himself. An extract of his reply is as follows:- *“In order to assess the situation I have recently spent some time in the chapel and have observed that the main problem now seems to be when, as you say, people do not speak clearly. I have noticed the same thing in the church I attend, that particularly if people speak very quickly and quietly then however good the system is the words just seem to merge into each other. It is also important for them to stay reasonably close to the microphone. There is a notice on the lectern politely pointing this out but I’m afraid it is not always adhered to. The only thing we haven’t tried are lapel radio-microphones which I have been resisting because of the practical issues involved e.g. several different people speaking one after the other, or someone accidentally going off with it still attached to their person.”*

Complaint 7: A service provision questionnaire was received commenting that the family couldn’t have the funeral time they had originally been booked for them as the funeral director had informed them that the Crematorium had double-booked and “there should be some kind of system on your computer that prevents double bookings at the Crematorium.”

Response: The Superintendent wrote and apologised “for any error on our part” but also explained that there is a system on our computer which is designed to reduce such incidents to a minimum (unfortunately human error always finds a way of prevailing and can’t be eliminated altogether!). *Please see complaint 5 above. Since this complaint was made email confirmations are now also sent out confirming and cancelling ‘provisional’ bookings as well as ‘definite’ ones. ‘Provisional’ bookings are when a funeral director telephones and asks for a number of times to be temporarily held in the diary while they speak with the family/contact the minister, etc, before contacting us again to confirm which time is actually required i.e. the confirmed booking. On investigation it was not possible to tell on this occasion if the error was with the Crematorium or the funeral director but it involved a number of provisional bookings.*

3.6 This report is included for information.

Background Papers: None