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| SUBJECT | Complaints and Compliments 2017 |
| REPORT OF | Clerk of the Chilterns Crematorium Joint Committee – Bob Smith |
| RESPONSIBLE OFFICER | Head of Environment – Chris Marchant |
| REPORT AUTHOR | Superintendent and Registrar – Charles Howlett |
| WARD/S AFFECTED | All |

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The main purpose of this report is to give outline details of the complaints received in 2017 and how they were resolved.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Members are asked to note the report which is included for information.**

2. Content of Report

2.1 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 2017 from the 3,772 questionnaires sent out 178 were returned from people who were satisfied (some with added compliments) and 36 from people who were mostly satisfied but including comments about matters they thought could be improved. During the year 10 'substantial' complaints were received (compared to 9 the previous year). **'Substantial'** is defined as either having been submitted in writing or, if verbal, considered being of sufficient gravity to warrant a written reply from the Superintendent. A summary of the questionnaire analysis is included as **Appendix 1**.

Changes proposed/made as result of comments

- 2.2 As reported before, building the new crematorium at Bierton has been delayed by several years because of the challenges to planning by the Westerleigh Group. This has had a negative impact at Amersham, which is now too busy at times, which is what the CCJC were trying to avoid in the first place by providing the new facility of the Aylesbury area.
- 2.3 This is almost certainly the main reason for the complaints received about **car parking** and also the long waiting time for booking a funeral and more time needed between services. When this was last discussed by the Joint Committee it was decided to wait until a crematorium opens in the Aylesbury area to see if the consequent decrease in the number of funerals taking place at Amersham relieves the congestion before considering what (if any) substantive action could be taken to improve the parking situation. Although Westerleigh's crematorium at Watermead was expected to open in 2017, in the event its own planning permission was quashed in the Court of Appeal. However it is likely to regain planning consent in 2018 and the CCJC's crematorium at Bierton is now under construction and also expected to open in November 2018.

2.3 In response to the complaints about the quality of DVD recordings we now make sure anybody ordering a DVD is told that the reproduction might not be what they expect, especially if trying to view it on a TV instead of a computer monitor (see complaint 1 below).

2.4 Concerning further complaints about not being able to hear in the chapels, the hearing loop amplifiers have been refurbished in the Milton chapel and renewed in the Hampden chapel (see complaints 3, 4 & 5 below).

Actions taken in response to substantial complaints

2.5 The following substantial complaints were received:-

Complaint 1: Another complaint was received about the quality of the picture and sound of a DVD recording (a similar complaint was received in 2016).

Response: Wesleymedia (the service provider) has explained that the need to optimise the ability of as many computer connections as possible to accept the webcast feed takes priority over the opportunity which arises from it of a recording; but the variable quality is something Wesley are aware of and are looking to improve (although there would be a cost). In discussion with another crematorium they have also experienced this problem and now make sure anybody ordering a DVD is told that the reproduction might not be what they expect, especially if trying to view it on a TV instead of a computer monitor. This practice has been adopted at Chilterns.

Complaint 2: A comment was received about the crematorium's 'uncooperative' policy of not playing music from CDs on its own equipment (but families can bring their own CD player if they wish).

Response: CDs are notoriously fickle – they worked when tested first thing in the morning (if we received them in time for testing) but not when it came to the service. It was also not uncommon for the case to be empty when we opened it. There are also all sorts of potential copyright issues, especially for self-recorded discs. Using the Wesley system overcomes all these issues and problems. We continued to play CDs under sufferance until about three years ago when both CD players needed replacing. Concerning this complaint the problem appeared to be a misunderstanding between the family and the funeral director about what could and couldn't be provided by the crematorium.

Complaints 3, 4 & 5: Three complaints were received during the year about not being able to hear; one relating to the Hampden chapel and two to the Milton chapel.

Response: Whilst it is of concern that some people are still having difficulty hearing in the chapels, the number of complaints has reduced each year as changes and adjustments to the public address system have been made which have improved it. In the last year the loop amplifiers have been refurbished in Milton and replaced in Hampden. The Superintendent has spent more time than usual in the chapels training new staff and has observed problems when the minister/celebrant moves away from the microphone (despite a polite notice asking them not to), and when family and friends get up to speak who are emotional and/or not used to public speaking.

Complaint 6: A letter was received by the Clerk from the local member of parliament, Cheryl Gillan, asking for a response to a constituent who had raised a number of issues about what they considered to be poor facilities at Chilterns Crematorium, in particular lack of car parking space,

having to leave the chapel by a side door instead of the main entrance and then having to 'queue' in the unenclosed floral tribute court in inclement weather.

Response: In reply it was explained that the CCJC recognized the need to take action several years ago to help prevent the quality of service being compromised during busy periods but unfortunately a complicated planning situation had led to repeated delays in getting a new crematorium built and open at Aylesbury. This situation was also exacerbated during the winter of 2016/17 by the partial closure of neighbouring Slough Crematorium for a major refurbishment. With regards to the floral tribute court, even if it was desirable for it to be enclosed this would require a relatively substantial alteration to the building.

Complaint 7: A family who came to see an entry in the Book of Remembrance on the anniversary of the death found it hadn't been inscribed and unfortunately it transpired this was because the application had not been forwarded to the calligraphers.

Response: An apology was given to the family and the application fee reimbursed. The volume was returned to the calligraphers at the earliest opportunity to be inscribed and a private viewing arranged with the family on its return to the Crematorium. The family indicated their satisfaction with what was done to rectify the situation.

Complaint 8: Another family came to see an entry in the Book of Remembrance which also wasn't inscribed but in this instance it transpired they had only made an application for an entry in a personal miniature book of remembrance and not the main book as well.

Response: In correspondence with the family it appears they visited the office to order the commemoration and it seems there may have been a misunderstanding about what was required. The applicant considered this was partly due to the office staff being inadequately trained. The Superintendent apologized for the situation which had arisen and any part the Crematorium had played in it. This was accepted and the applicant subsequently paid for an inscription which will be inscribed in accordance with the normal timetable and able to be viewed on the second anniversary of the death in 2018.

Complaint 9: An application was received for a 'non-standard' memorial which, after careful consideration, the Superintendent felt he couldn't allow. A compromise was reached for a personal memorial but the applicant then raised a number of objections about the ordering process and the length of time it takes for the commemoration to be produced. In the event the applicant then cancelled the commemoration just a few days before it was ready and the fee was fully reimbursed, but then complained to the Clerk that there was no letter of contrition accompanying the reimbursement.

Response: The Clerk responded with a letter explaining that it was considered the applicant's requests had been dealt with in a sympathetic and reasonable manner without any intention to cause upset but apologised for the extent to which it obviously had.

Complaint 10: The right to have a stone memorial in the gardens was not renewed and in due course, in line with procedure, the plaque was removed but unfortunately the record was not updated. Later in response to a telephone enquiry the applicant was advised the plaque was still in place and the right to keep it in the gardens for a further period could be renewed. A remittance was sent but before it was processed the person had visited and found the plaque missing.

Response: The plaque was replaced the next day and a photograph and letter of apology sent to the applicant.

2.6 There were a number of relatively minor incidents, which were reported verbally but did not result in written complaints or responses, largely arising as a consequence of the retirement of four out of five chapel attendants and the relative inexperience of their replacements. Most of these were things not happening in quite the right order or at the right time and incorrect music or hymn tunes being played, and the most serious involved floral tributes being disposed of before a funeral had taken place. Whilst all these incidents are regretted the Superintendent considers in the circumstances they are relatively minor and the new staff have worked hard to get up to speed as quickly as possible and prevent any major mishaps occurring.

3. Corporate Implications

3.1 Prompt attention and appropriate action taken in response to complaints is important to help ensure a satisfactory resolution for those affected as well as maintaining the Crematorium's good reputation. Monitoring complaints assists in identifying issues which could potentially lead to a more serious incident if not addressed at an early stage.

4. Links to Chilterns Crematorium Joint Committee Objectives and Service Plan

4.1 This report links to the Joint Committee's objective of providing an indiscriminate, excellent customer-friendly service and good quality facilities creating an appropriate environment and ambiance in which a funeral service can take place.

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| Background Papers: | None |
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