

SUBJECT:	Complaints and Compliments 2018
REPORT OF:	Clerk of the Crematoria 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 2018 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 all the applicants for cremation and it is also available on the Crematorium website. The majority of compliments, comments and complaints received come from this source. In 2018, 419 were returned from people who were satisfied (some with added compliments) and 69 from people who were mostly satisfied but including comments about matters they thought could be improved. During the year 9 '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 In response to complaint 2 our literature/website has been updated advising that ideally 48 hours are needed for audio-visual tributes and requests made later than this will incur an additional charge.

2.3 In response to complaints 4 and 5 enquires are ongoing with Wesley Media about the possibility of all services being recorded automatically and retained for a temporary period before being automatically wiped to overcome the recurring problem of chapel attendants forgetting to press the record button. In discussions with Wesley this is also an issue at other sites.

2.3 In response to complaint 6 changes have been made to the way flower display space is used in the chapel of remembrance making more room to place tributes at busy times.

Actions taken in response to substantial complaints

2.4 The following substantial complaints were received:-

Complaint 1: A visitor complained that on two occasions when she returned a few days after leaving flowers by a tree in the garden of remembrance they had been removed.

Response: It was explained that every Thursday flowers left in this way are transferred to the paved area beside the chapel of remembrance in order to keep the gardens looking well maintained. Also the flowers in question were roses which are particularly attractive food for deer and another possible explanation for their disappearance.

Complaint 2: A funeral director complained about the lack of sound and extra cost of an audio visual tribute which was requested after our recommended 48 hours ordering deadline.

Response: After we had declined the late request Wesley Media then accepted it when the client contacted them directly, although they did advise it would be at extra cost. On enquiring we discovered that Wesley Media had recently introduced this change as an improvement to their service, but it left us somewhat on the back foot! The difficulty was compounded by the fact that the client was then slow in sending the sound content to Wesley Media, hence in the short time available Wesley Media were not able to include it. We did not charge for the service but we discovered in the event the client had played the music through an iPod alongside the visual tribute and was content.

Complaints 3: A mother complained that her 15 months old daughter had managed to pull a small table over in the entrance lobby of the Hampden chapel, fortunately with no lasting injury beyond superficial bruising her leg.

Response: A letter was sent thanking the person for bringing the matter to our attention and the table (which has been there for about 30 years) was moved to a different location.

Complaint 4&5: A family who had requested a recording of the funeral service complained that it didn't start until halfway through the welcome and introduction. On another occasion an entire service which should have been recorded wasn't. Unfortunately on both occasions the chapel attendant had forgotten to press the record button, which has happened to different attendants before.

Response: Letters of apology were sent and no charge was made for the DVD with the incomplete introduction.

Complaint 6: A visitor to the chapel of remembrance on Father's Day complained about a number of aspects which they said showed lack of compassion on our part, including the state of the flower vases, the untidiness of the flower arranging room, the towel dispenser not working and not enough room to place flowers in the designated area.

Response: It is a busy day and unfortunately the chapel can get untidy very quickly between visits from the duty attendant which is what must have happened. The matter was brought to the attention of the attendant for future reference and a letter of apology was sent to the visitor.

Complaint 7: We received a copy of a letter sent to Wesley Media complaining that some of the music played at the funeral was not what had been selected.

Response: On making enquires it was discovered that the error was not made by Wesley Media but our chapel attendant. Music is not scheduled automatically on the system but has to be entered manually. The music was relatively unusual and the attendant not long in post, although obviously these latter points were not made to the family in a letter of apology.

Complaint 8: An applicant collected ashes from the Crematorium only to receive a letter a few days later advising them that the ashes were ready for collection. Obviously the person was then concerned that they hadn't got the right ashes.

Response: When ashes are placed on temporary deposit, as in this case, they can only be retained for a limited time and so standard letters are sent to the applicant at intervals until a decision is made about their final disposal. Just after such a letter had been sent the applicant came to the office asking for the ashes. Even if the clerical assistant realised this there would be no reason to assume it was other than in response to the letter. However, in the event it turned out to be a coincidence. When this was explained the applicant was satisfied they had the correct ashes.

Complaint 9: An applicant complained the wrong version of the music requested was played at the funeral service.

Response: On making enquires it was discovered that the version requested was not on our database and the funeral director had forgotten to order it from Wesley Media. However, although this only came to light when the chapel attendant was loading the music for the day onto the system they could have attempted to obtain it even if Wesley Media were unable to load it down in time. All the chapel attendants were reminded about this. A letter of apology was sent to the family.

Constructive comments

2.5 The majority of these comments concern insufficient chapel times or related issues and lack of car parking spaces. It is anticipated both these issues will improve once the new crematoria open in Aylesbury, although there is little the CJC can do about available chapel times if the bookings at Chilterns don't reduce as expected. Concerning car parking, the CJC has already resolved at a previous meeting to look at car parking once the new crematoria have opened, although again the options are relatively limited as most of the suitable and available space for parking is already being used and creating a dozen or so extra spaces will have no impact.

2.6 Of the remaining comments a number relate to music and media issues in the chapels which are also the subject of 5 out of the 9 complaints detailed in paragraph 2.4. This is unsurprising because as far as users are concerned the funeral is the most important service we are facilitating on the site; in a way the cremation is incidental. Whilst the introduction in technology, firstly to the music facility and since other media services like recordings and webcasts and audio visual tributes, has helped to personalise funeral services in a significant way which wasn't previously possible, it has in the process introduced new possibilities for things to go wrong.

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 the Crematoria 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.

Background Papers:	None
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