

CHILTERNS CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

MEETING 4TH FEBRUARY 2016

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

COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS 2015

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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 2015 from the 3,552 questionnaires sent out 165 were returned from people who were satisfied (some with added compliments) and 20 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 reply from the Superintendent. A summary of the questionnaire analysis is included as **Appendix 1**.

Changes proposed/made as result of comments

- 2 The issue of car parking has been discussed at previous Joint Committee meetings. It has been decided to wait until Aylesbury Crematorium opens 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 relieve the parking situation.
- 3 The main cause of lack of booking slots during busy periods is the result of the Crematorium Joint Committee being frustrated in its efforts to build a new crematorium in Aylesbury which would help relieve this situation. Also, on some occasions funeral directors use the excuse that there are no booking slots available when in fact it is their workload which is the real issue. The new computerised crematorium administration system currently being installed will enable the public to see the booking diary for themselves in the future.

Actions taken in response to substantial complaints

- 4 The following substantial complaints were received:-

Complaint 1: A family requested to see the coffin placed in the cremator (a witness charge) and considered the length of time between the end of the funeral service and this happening was unacceptably long. The funeral was on a Saturday morning.
Response: It is unusual for a cremator to be ready to receive the next coffin exactly coinciding with the end of a funeral service. On this occasion the funeral service lasted much less time than anticipated. Also, being a Saturday morning only one crematorium attendant was on duty and being in the chapel meant he was unable to attend to the cremator to make sure it was ready as quickly as possible.

This resulted in a longer delay than usual. The Superintendent sent a letter of apology and since then a second crematorium attendant is on duty if there are more than two funerals on a Saturday morning.

Complaint 2: The webcast camera in Hampden chapel failed to work for a recording meaning only the sound was recorded. This was unfortunate as the camera was less than a year old (the original also failed) and had been routinely tested by the supplier two weeks earlier.

Response: A letter of explanation and apology was sent to the applicant and no charge was made for the recording. The camera and power pack were replaced again without charge.

Complaint 3: One month later the new replacement camera failed again, this time for a webcast meaning only the sound was broadcast.

Response: The Superintendent had a telephone conversation with the applicant and followed this up with a letter of apology. No charge was made for the recording. Wesley Media (the service provider) attended site again to replace the camera and check the whole system over.

Complaint 4: A complaint was received about some missing flowers from the Hampden floral tribute court and the 'insensitive' way the person had been spoken to by the crematorium attendant who helped search for them.

Response: The Superintendent investigated the complaint and discovered that the crematorium attendant did find the flowers later in the day in the Milton floral tribute court where the funeral had taken place – the family were looking in the wrong place. As to the 'insensitive' remarks, he agreed that the conversation had gone along the lines reported but he thought he was just chatting in a friendly way whilst he was trying to help find the flowers and apologised if anything he said was construed as being disrespectful. This is a timely reminder about the need for care in conversation with bereaved people when something said in all innocence can so easily be misunderstood and cause distress. A letter of explanation along these lines was sent apologising for any unintended distress caused.

Complaint 5: An applicant complained on the service provision questionnaire that the wrong music had been played at the funeral.

Response: The Superintendent investigated but these issues are not always easy to pin down several weeks after the event. The crematorium played what was on the music sheet supplied by the funeral director. The minister said this was simply a repeat of the music played in the church and was not what the family had requested for the short committal service afterwards at the Crematorium. The funeral director insisted that he 'phoned the Crematorium on the day of the service and changed the requirements but no one could remember receiving this call. The Superintendent had a 'phone conversation with the applicant apologising if the Crematorium was at fault when the applicant said he thought it probably wasn't!

Complaint 6: A person complained about the 'rude and peremptory tone' of the reminder letter sent inviting renewal of the lease on a commemorative shrubbery plaque.

Response: The issue seems to be the change from rose bed to shrubbery. Members may recall that initially families are given the option to retain their commemorative plaque on a rose bed rather than be transferred to a shrubbery, but

only until the current lease expires. In this case the person had opted to have the plaque moved (as most have) even though she was not happy about it. The Superintendent sent an explanatory letter and also made some changes to the wording of the reminder letter.

Complaint 7: The webcast camera in Hampden failed (again) towards the end of a broadcast. (We were also unaware of the loss of picture and so proceeded to record another service in the afternoon with sound only. Wesley Media are meant to monitor all webcasts, but didn't, so the first we were aware of the problem was when the applicant complained to the funeral director who in turn complained to us).

Response: A letter of explanation and apology was sent to both applicants and no charge was made for the webcast or recordings. Wesley Media attended site, replaced the camera again and all components connected with it and checked all the wiring, and also (at no charge) installed monitors in both music rooms to enable the chapel attendants to monitor the cameras when in use.

Complaint 8: The newly installed audio visual system in the Milton chapel (an integral part of the Wesley Media music system) inexplicably would not work when it was needed for a service, even though it had worked when tested first thing in the morning.

Response: The Superintendent sent a letter of apology and also had a number of DVD copies made (at no charge) of the audio visual tribute so that the family could circulate them amongst family and close friends who hadn't been able to see it (because of the equipment failure) on the day. At the time of writing the problem with the equipment is still not fully resolved.

Complaint 9: A person wrote to complain they had difficulty hearing in the Milton chapel.

Response: Members may recall that in the past this was a significant problem which has been largely overcome. We now only receive a few comments and this was the only written complaint in 2015. The acoustics are not good in the Milton chapel meaning there is heavy reliance on the sound system compared to the Hampden chapel, but even the best sound system cannot compensate for someone speaking quickly and quietly and not projecting their voice towards the microphone. The Superintendent responded with a letter of explanation and apology.

- 5 Members will note that half the complaints are about problems with technology associated with the Wesley Media systems providing webcasts and audio visual tributes in the chapels.

By way of explanation, when Wesley Music was first installed at Chilterns Crematorium in 2005 it was unique. Its installation immediately provided the opportunity to 'personalise' a funeral by including more meaningful music. With the increasing secularisation of funerals this has become even more significant. In recent years webcasting and audio visual capability has been developed. Another company has emerged providing a similar service, but less comprehensive as far as music is concerned, and it would be impractical to have the service provided by different companies.

Wesley Media are co-operating in trying to ensure these recurring issues are permanently resolved, but at the same time experience shows that technical

computerised equipment can be inexplicably fickle. With the growing reliance on technology providing significant elements of a funeral service this is potentially an increasing problem.

- 5 This report is included for information.

Background Papers: None