

**AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL
CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL
WYCOMBE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

MINUTES of the Meeting of the
**AYLESBURY VALE, CHILTERN AND WYCOMBE DISTRICTS CREMATORIA
JOINT COMMITTEE**
held on **23 JANUARY 2019**

PRESENT: Councillor M Smith - Chairman
H Mordue - Vice Chairman

Councillors: D Barnes

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillors P Martin, G Peart and J Ward

74 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

75 MINUTES

The minutes of the Joint Committee held on 26 September 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

76 FEES AND CHARGES

The Joint Committee received a report which asked Members to determine the fees and charges to come into effect from 1 April 2019. The Director of Resources reported that an across the board increase of 3% (other than the recommended cremation fee increase of 5.8%) had been applied and rounded up to 50p for most other fees where relevant and dependent on size. It was proposed that the cremation fees for Chilterns and Bierton were the same for administration efficiency. The table in the report illustrated that Chilterns Crematorium basic fee was lower than most of the surrounding crematoria. The Amersham Crematorium was also one of the busiest in the Country. Members needed to be mindful of the long term funding requirements of the Capital Programme and future strategic developments when agreeing the fee level.

Members supported the recommendation including increasing the cremation fee to £630 as the fee was still likely to remain lower than most of the surrounding crematoria and represented good value for money.

RESOLVED:

That the fees and charges as shown in Appendix 1 and in particular the level of the main adult cremation fee of £630 for both crematoria be approved.

77 CREMATORIUM STAFFING

The Joint Committee considered a report which sought approval for an additional full time clerical assistant. The Superintendent and Registrar reported that the office was the most sensitive part of the business in terms of the direct impact of increases in workload and that staffing levels had not changed over a decade, during which time customer service demand had continued to increase. Workloads were expected to decrease with the new death certification system which would have resulted in the end of the Crematorium Medical Referees, however this had been delayed by the Ministry of Justice. Workloads would also be impacted with the opening of the new Birtton Crematorium. Members were informed that, with the exception of the Senior Administrator, all office staff were part time to provide maximum flexibility. However, with the increase in workload it would be an advantage to the full running of the business to have a full time presence in the main Chiltern office in addition to the Senior Administrator.

In response to a question, the Superintendent and Registrar reported that there were 2 part time clerical assistants at Birtton amounting to 1 FTE. However, it was the Chiltern Office which was currently understaffed, and which was expected to be the main centre of the Crematoria service. The current additional cost was £24,308.

RESOLVED:

That approval be given to appoint an additional full time clerical assistant.

78 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Joint Committee received a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy on the maintenance and operation of the existing facility at Amersham and the impact of the new crematorium being opened at Birtton. The Director of Resources reported that income figures had been calculated assuming 3,000 cremations, despite the new crematorium opening at Watermead in 2019. At Birtton income figures had been calculated assuming 650 cremations which was a prudent projection and less than the business case assumed with an increase expected after two years of operation. The combined net operating surplus from the two crematoria once Birtton had been fully operational for a full year was estimated to be as a minimum in the order of £1m per annum.

Members were referred to Table 5 which showed the accumulated reserves. Allowing for a minimum level of reserves, £750,000 would be released in April 2019 ensuring that there was sufficient held back for the capital programme requirements. Based on the Medium Term Financial Plan there should be scope in future years to distribute surpluses.

RESOLVED that the Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast be noted.

79 REVENUE BUDGET REPORT

The Joint Committee received the report which informed them of the forecast outturn for the current year and set out the proposed Revenue Budgets for 2019/20. The Director of Resources referred to the forecast outturn for 2018/19 and the budget for 2019/20 which included the main expenditure such as building repairs and maintenance.

The budget was summarised as follows:-

- The overall changes described in the report had reduced by 13% on the operating surplus before contributions to capital expenditure compared to last year's budget.
- Overall expenditure had increased by 39% compared to last year's budget mainly as a result of the new Birtton operation, overtime payments, additional clerical assistant, building maintenance work at Amersham and new volumes of Books of Remembrance.
- In terms of the surplus £750,000 was proposed to be distributed between each constituent authority in April 2019 based on the number of cremations per district over the past five years.

Members supported the proposals, and in response to a question it was noted that there had been no redistribution of funds for many years. Members congratulated Officers, in particular the Superintendent and Registrar for the efficient running of the business.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Revenue Budget for the start up of the Birtton operation for 2018/19 of £160,770 be approved**
- 2. That the Crematoria Revenue Budgets for 2019/20 to yield a revenue surplus of £884,370 be approved**
- 3. That the distribution of £750,000 of accumulated surpluses in 2019/20 in the proportions set out in paragraph 6.3 of the report be approved.**

80 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2018/19 TO 2022/23

The Joint Committee received a report on the proposed 5 year capital programme with an overview of the major projects in the coming year.

The Director of Resources outlined the table on the capital programme, including forthcoming schemes. At present, no cremators were being replaced. However, the cremators at Chilterns Crematorium were coming towards the end of their useful working life, and it was noted that provision had been made in the capital programme to replace the cremators in 2021/22 by which time they will be 25 years old. A budget was required to complete the construction of Bierton but these costs were being carefully reviewed and where appropriate challenged to minimise expenditure as much as possible.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the capital expenditure for Bierton for 2018/19 of £38k for Wesley System and Fencing plus additional capital expenditure of £971k (including VAT) required to complete the overall Bierton Crematorium Project be approved.**
- 2. That the proposed Capital Programme as detailed in paragraph 2.1 of the report which made allowances in the 2019/20 revenue budget for capital expenditure of £133,880 be approved.**

The meeting became quorate at 4.25pm when Cllr Barnes arrived and previous items were agreed with all three Members present.

81 SERVICE PLAN 2019/20

The Joint Committee received the Crematorium Service Plan for 2019/20 which was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The Superintendent and Registrar reported that one of the key objectives was to ensure that the Bierton Crematorium was ready to open when construction was completed, hopefully in April 2019 and to monitor the impact of the new crematorium at Watermead which was expected to open shortly.

Other objectives included:-

- Tender for the Book of Remembrance at Bierton and the ongoing service at both sites – this was an important memorial which they would provide at both sites. They had the same supplier for a number of years but were required to re tender.
- Redecoration and repair of existing buildings and ground works
- Installation of an updated sewage system at Chilterns Crematorium.

The Superintendent and Registrar was thanked for his high standard of service.

RESOLVED:

That the Crematorium Service Plan for 2019/20 attached at Appendix 1 of the report be approved.

82 COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS 2018

The Joint Committee received a report on complaints received in 2018 and how they were resolved. The Superintendent and Registrar reported that there had been no major complaints but there had been 9 substantial complaints which were defined as having been submitted in writing or if verbal, considered to have been of sufficient gravity to warrant a written reply. The Service provision questionnaires were also a good tool to provide feedback. Reference was made to the complaints made about audio-visual issues and the Superintendent and Registrar reported that they were looking to upgrade the music and media system in the early financial year.

In response to the complaints the following actions were noted:-

- Literature/website had been updated advising that 48 hours notice was required for audio-visual tributes and any later requests would incur an additional charge.
- Enquiries were ongoing with Wesley Media about the possibility of all services being recorded automatically and retained for a temporary period.
- Changes have been made to the way the flower display space was used in the chapel of remembrance making more room to place tributes at busy times.
- Reference was made to the lack of car parking spaces and the fact that once the new crematorium was opened this should relieve pressure on the Chiltern Crematorium.

Members thanked the Superintendent for the sensitive and quick handling of complaints and also commented that feedback from funeral directors on the level of service had been very complimentary.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

83 HS2 - POTENTIAL IMPACT ON CHILTERN'S CREMATORIUM

The Joint Committee was advised of the potential adverse impact on funerals by the construction of an HS2 vent shaft adjacent to Corns Bridge (where the A413 crosses Whielden Street) less than 200 yards from the Crematorium

entrance on the A404. HS2 had been made aware of the Crematorium but there was a concern that there was no appreciation of the potential for serious disruption to funeral services. However, once completed it was very unlikely to affect the Crematorium with the railway line buried deep in a tunnel. The main overriding concern was the traffic flow during the construction works which would last for a significant period.

Following questions, Members noted that HS2 would not affect the Bierton Crematorium. They commented that it was important for HS2 to mitigate this risk, looking at options such as traffic lights. It was agreed that a formal letter should be written to HS2 expressing concern which should be copied to the local MP.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that a letter should be sent to HS2 and the local MP expressing concern about the impact on the Chilterns Crematorium.

84 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED –

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Note: the relevant paragraph number and description is indicated under the Minute heading.

85 BIERTON UPDATE REPORT

The Joint Committee were informed that 80% of the works have been completed. The original completion date for the building was anticipated to be mid-January 2019 but due to delays this is now expected to be late March 2019. The main original delays were due to the very wet weather experienced early in 2018 and meeting revised planning conditions. The additional delays since September have been due to matters that have arisen as the work has progressed including finalising the planning material amendment application. The mobilisation project to deliver the new service was currently on time and was being adapted to help ensure the new Crematorium opens in April 2019. The Head of Environment reported that new equipment had been delivered, the gas works had been completed and the gas was now connected and the footpath had also been completed.

In response to questions it was noted that the new cremator was installed and would be tested. In terms of landscaping works the planning issue had been

resolved. The Head of Environment reported that they were currently waiting for a licence to operate the facility. There had been an impact on project costs due to the delay which was being managed. An opening ceremony would be held once the works were complete and it was hoped that an eminent figure would lead the ceremony. Members were welcome to visit the site and to contact the Head of Environment.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm