

PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Joint Committee held in the South Chapel, Portchester Crematorium on Monday 11 December 2023 at 2.00 pm.

Present

Fareham Borough Council

Councillor Joanne Burton
Councillor Susan Walker

Gosport Borough Council

Councillor June Cully
Councillor Alan Scard

Havant Borough Council

Councillor Lulu Bowerman (Chairman)

Portsmouth City Council

Apologies submitted

Apologies for Absence – Councillor Liz Fairhurst (Havant BC); Councillors Hugh Mason and Lee Hunt (Portsmouth CC) & Andy Wannell (Treasurer) all engaged on other Council business, and Ian Cousins (Property Manager) indisposed.

1011 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2) – None

1012 Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 September 2023 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 25 September 2023 be signed as a correct record.

1013 Matters Arising from the Minutes not specifically referred to on the Agenda (AI 4) - None

1014 Clerk's Items - Proposed Crematorium at Stubbington (AI 5)

The Clerk reminded members that at the September meeting it was reported, the proposed crematorium at Stubbington had received planning permission and the developer, Mercia Developments Ltd, was focussed on moving the project forward into construction.

Officers had continued dialogue with the developer to explore the opportunities for the new facility to come within the remit of the Joint Committee, and work had been undertaken to develop an outline business case for the Joint Committee to consider at the December meeting. However, in that time, the developer had made it clear that there was a need to secure an operator urgently and had now entered into contract with a private operator – The London Cremation Company who had publicised that it had reached agreement to purchase the land at Brune Lane.

The focus of attention for officers had now moved to understanding the impact of a second privately operated facility within the geographical catchment of the Joint Committee, and the potential mitigating measures that could be pursued to ensure that Portchester Crematorium remained as attractive as possible to the community it served and as the “crematorium of choice” when arranging a funeral.

Members had previously been advised of opportunities to undertake improvements to the South Chapel, redevelopment of the fountain area and other physical improvements. Officers were also revisiting opportunities to enhance and improve the services available to customers, including memorial facilities. While the intention was to phase in the changes gradually, Officers were considering whether there is scope to accelerate the changes, so that they are largely complete before the new facility opens. A report would be presented to the March meeting of the Joint Committee to set out the options for Members, which would include, as suggested during discussion current statistical information relating to population forecasts and death projections.

NOTED

1015 Finance Strategy and Budget for 2024/25 (AI 6)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE TREASURER)

The Deputy Treasurer presented the report and drew specific attention to the effects of inflation, utility prices, the long standing fundamental policies upon which the Financial Strategy was based, the assumptions made following grant of planning permission for a new private crematorium and the need to ensure the capital programme financing remained robust.

In response to discussion and questions the point was made that now and in the years ahead it was essential to ensure there was a sufficient capital fund and to maintain the Finance Strategy’s fundamental policies.

RESOLVED (1) that the Finance Strategy 2024/25, attached as Appendix A to the report, be approved;

(2) that the Finance Strategy 2024/25 be sent to the four constituent authorities to note for their information.

1016 Revenue Budget Report - 2024/25 (AI 7)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE TREASURER)

In submitting the report the Deputy Treasurer explained the rationale in preparation of the budget and drew specific attention to key areas within the report including funding of the capital programme, the increased costs of the cremators replacement programme, the expected future number of cremations, and the proposed cremation fee increase of £75 equating to 10% from 1 April 2024.

Arising from discussion and questions mention was made of the memorial tree which should be ready to receive memorial leaves at the end of January/February 2024; the staffing and employees budget; improved efficiency had enabled a reduction in gas usage; and that although small changes may be necessary in the future with some individual items overall the report presented a balanced budget.

RESOLVED (a) That the capital works programme as detailed in Appendix D to the report be approved;

(b) That the Joint Committee approves the proposed cremation fees and other charges as set out in Appendices B & C from 1 April 2024;

(c) That the proposed revenue account estimates as set out in Appendix A to the report be approved;

(d) That the Joint Committee writes to the Leader and the Chief Financial Officer (the Section 151 Officer) of each constituent authority to advise them of the annual payment to be received from the Portchester Crematorium Joint Committee in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

1017 Replacement of Cremators – Update Report (AI 8)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER)

RESOLVED that the Joint Committee notes the progress report for the period September to November 2023.

1018 Manager and Registrar's Report (AI 9) -

(a) General Statistical Report for September – November 2023

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE MANAGER AND REGISTRAR)

Arising from the report mention was made of the developing trend for cremation services provided by 'direct' suppliers including Pure Cremation operating a facility at Andover at which it had carried out some 12,000 cremations during 2022. The Manager outlined the arrangements that were followed in this 'one stop' service. Members were reminded of the 'walk through' service offered at Portchester Crematorium at the start of each day.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**(b) Other items of topical interest –
(i) Metals Recycling Charitable Scheme**

The Joint Committee was advised that having sounded out members, on this occasion there had been a majority view to again support nominating the Rowans Hospice to be a recipient under the charitable scheme, the result of which would be known in the new year.

(ii) South & South East in Bloom Competition 2023

RESOLVED that the Joint Committee place on record its thanks to all the staff involved in Portchester Crematorium receiving a gold award in the South and South East in Bloom competition and also being recognised as the overall winner in the cemetery/crematorium category.

1019 Building Repairs and Renewal Programme (AI 10)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER)

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

1020 Carbon Reduction – Update Report (AI 11)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER)

In the Property Manager's absence the Manager and Registrar highlighted some of the key points in the report and in response to questions mention was also made of solar power/lighting, which would require appropriate infrastructure.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

1021 Crematorium Grounds – General Update (AI 12)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Members were advised that work on the Fawn sculpture would be completed by the end of the week.

RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

1022 Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED that the Joint Committee next meets at 2pm on Monday 18 March 2024 at Portchester Crematorium.

The Meeting concluded at 3.10 pm

Chairman

JH/me
12 December 2023
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