



**REPORT TO: THE PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
27 JUNE 2022**

REPORT BY: CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

**PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT – 2021/22**

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to place on record and inform members of the principal work of the Joint Committee during the 2021/22 financial year.

2. Recommended that this Annual Report for the 2021/22 financial year be received and noted and that it be sent for information to each constituent authority.

3. Background

3.1 The Joint Committee operates under a Memorandum of Agreement between Fareham Borough Council, Portsmouth City Council, Gosport Borough Council and Havant Borough Council. Two members from each of the constituent authorities make up the 8 person Joint Committee. The constituent councils have delegated to the Joint Committee all the powers of the constituent authorities with respect to the provision and maintenance of the crematorium.

3.2. The agreement sets out the constitution of the Joint Committee; the objectives of the crematorium and relationships between the constituent authorities. The agreement also sets out the minimum number of meetings (three) to be held annually for the general business of the Joint Committee, although in practice to meet various statutory reporting deadlines four meetings are held.

3.3 The membership of the Committee in the 2021/22 financial year was –

Councillor Ian Bastable (Fareham BC) Vice Chairman

Councillor Simon Martin (Fareham BC)

Councillor Kathleen Jones (Gosport BC)

Councillor Alan Scard (Gosport BC)

Councillor Lulu Bowerman (Havant BC)

Councillor Tim Pike (Havant BC)

Councillor Hugh Mason (Portsmouth CC) Chairman

Councillor Dave Ashworth (Portsmouth CC)

The chair and vice-chairmanship rotates between authorities annually.

3.4 The Joint Committee met on the following 4 occasions during the 2021/22 financial year; and were once again able to hold these in person (socially distanced) in the North Chapel at Portchester Crematorium:

21 June 2021 20 September 2021 13 December 2021 21 March 2022

3.5 Minutes of each meeting and the reports considered are available for viewing on the Portchester Crematorium Web Site, which has a direct link to the Portsmouth City Council website where the documents are stored. Meetings are usually held at the Crematorium, with full public notice and access.

3.6 The meetings of the Joint Committee have been supported by the Clerk (John Haskell), Treasurer (Andy Wannell), Ian Cousins, Fareham BC's Property Manager, and their respective deputies, together with the Horticultural Consultant (Ashley Humphrey) and the Manager and Registrar (Victoria Hatton). They report to the committee on financial and procedural matters including the operation of the crematorium and the quality of the service provided, which includes the grounds, buildings and plant to ensure the highest standards continue to be maintained.

4. The Joint Committee's Role and Responsibilities

4.1 The Joint Committee decides the overall policies to be adopted including approving a capital and maintenance works programme, consideration of and approval of accounts, and setting the scale of fees and charges. These could effectively be described as the Joint Committee's core functions.

5. Coronavirus Pandemic

5.1 During the financial year the work of the Joint Committee and the Crematorium continued to be affected by the need to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. Most legal restrictions to control Covid-19 were lifted from the 19th July 2021. Until then the emergency legislation introduced in March 2020 had placed a limit upon the number of mourners at each service and initially, except for funerals, the crematorium grounds were closed to visitors and for the scattering of ashes. Waiting rooms were closed. Social distancing was practised at services and in the working arrangements. From August 2020 attendees had been required to wear face coverings, and singing, chanting and playing blown instruments was prohibited. Although these restrictions had been lifted funeral directors and families were asked to consider and follow government advice to exercise caution and consider risks over gatherings.

5.2 To assist families, web casting services was offered at cost for each funeral. Resources at the crematorium were enhanced with the temporary secondment of administrative staff from Fareham BC. Additional cleaning and sanitisation was undertaken.

5.3 The Joint Committee at its September 2021 meeting received a comprehensive update on the crematorium's continuing response.

6. Crematorium Development Plan 2021 - 2026

6.1 The purpose of the Development Plan is to look at medium term developments in the period to 2026, and in the longer term beyond 2026, and to set out the Joint Committee's intended course of action. The plan seeks to cover the principal strategic and operational issues relating to the crematorium's functions. The Development Plan is reviewed biennially; the current plan being approved in March 2021.

7. Activities in respect of the Joint Committee's Core functions

7.1 Action taken in respect of each of the core functions can be briefly summarised as follows:

(a) Financial Policies including Fees and Charges

The Joint Committee, at its meeting on the 13 December 2021, approved a comprehensive Finance Strategy for 2022/23, providing a clear overview of the Joint Committee's financial framework. It is also aimed at providing added assurance to the Committee and to the constituent authorities that sound and effective arrangements are in place to manage the Crematorium's finances. This strategy built on similar strategies approved annually by the Joint Committee since 2008. The current strategy continues to recognise that since December 2013 the operating environment of Portchester Crematorium has significantly changed with the opening of the private Oaks Crematorium on the East Hampshire/Havant border. (See also (f) below – monitoring the levels of service).

The Joint Committee at its December 2021 meeting also approved the revenue budget for 2022/23 together with a revised capital works programme, and the repairs and renewals programme for 2021/22 & 2022/23. In approving the budget, the Joint Committee also set the levels of fees and charges operable from the 1 April 2022.

The Committee's actual income and revenue expenditure (for the financial year ending 31 March 2021) was reviewed and noted by the Joint Committee in June 2021.

(b) Annual Financial Return for 2020/21

During June 2021 Joint Committee members received and subsequently published the annual financial return for 2020/21.

The Annual Return also includes an annual governance statement (AGS). In summary the purpose of the AGS is to set out the Joint Committee's responsibilities and explain the system of governance that exists for the effective exercise of the committee's functions, including internal control, preparation of accounting statements, management of risk and the arrangements for review.

(c) Risk Management

At the meeting on 21 March 2022 the Joint Committee approved updated Risk Management Framework and Policy documents, which have built on previous documents and policies agreed and reviewed annually. The form and presentation of the strategic and operational risk registers has again been reviewed taking into account current good practice.

Matters identified include –

- The development of an Action Plan to mitigate and adapt to impacts of climate change and reduce the crematorium's carbon footprint ;
- Reviewing the Business Continuity Plan taking into account changing working practices identified through the Covid Pandemic;

(d) Developing and Enhancing the Crematorium's Services

In recent years a number of initiatives to develop and enhance the established quality of the services provided by the Crematorium have been implemented (and monitored when appropriate by the Joint Committee). These have included extensive upgrading of the South and North Chapels. The most recent major enhancement was during the autumn of 2020 when the Obitus 'Maestro' multimedia audio and video system became operational at the Crematorium. This has been much appreciated by families and funeral directors. It delivers in both chapels music, screens for visual tributes, and webcast for families – all a necessity in a modern-day service, and replaces and enhances the previously used system. Installation of the system required building work to reconfigure the two existing music rooms.

(e) Repairs and Renewals Programme

Various minor items of work were undertaken during the year. A range of other work has been on going from previous years, or authorised during 2021/22, and this includes -

- Book of Remembrance Room Refurbishment
- External redecoration – rolling programme
- South Chapel Conservatory redecoration
- New curtains in the South Chapel
- North Chapel enhancement programme
- Cremator area security works
- Surfacing and paving repairs
- Groundsman building repairs

Other works authorised include –

- Waiting rooms improvement
- Office extension and staff area improvements
- Signage updating
- Roof repairs and improvements
- Lighting upgrade with energy efficient fittings
- Cremators replacement feasibility programme

The continued operation of the water feature in the Garden of Contemplation, close to the South Chapel, is being re-assessed and consideration given to options for inviting and undertaking the possible re-modelling of the area.

(f) Monitoring the Levels of Service

The Joint Committee continued to receive at each meeting relevant reports from the officers on their specific areas of responsibility thus enabling members to monitor and discuss as appropriate with officers any particular aspects of the crematorium's operations. The reports included a monitoring statement from the Manager and Registrar on the levels of cremation and other statistical information for the preceding period, which showed at the end of the financial year a total of 3033 registered cremations (a decrease of 576 from the 3609 cremations undertaken in 2020/21 during the height of the pandemic).

(g) The Crematorium Gardens – Maintenance Programme

The annual horticultural maintenance programme continued to be implemented and this included –

- Shrub and bulb planting including the replacement of dead or dying plants;
- Tree pruning, including felling and replacement where appropriate;
- Shrub pruning;
- Maintaining the magnificent floral displays and the lawns;
- Approving in December 2021 designs for further tree sculptures making use of trees that had reached the end of their life.

The Crematorium received the prestigious Gold Award in the 2021 South and South East Britain in Bloom Awards. This is the fifth consecutive year the Crematorium has received the award. The criteria for the award includes not only the quality of the grounds but also the appearance of buildings together with environmental and related matters.

Brighstone Landscapes (the grounds maintenance contractor) has continued to carry out, including during the Pandemic, a very high standard of work, which regularly receives public acclaim. The Joint Committee meeting on 21 March 2022 agreed the 5 year extension option (until 1 January 2028) in the company's present contract.

(h) The Crematorium Garden of Remembrance – Grounds Clearance

The Joint Committee has a very long standing policy (to preserve the simple beauty of the gardens) against the provision of memorials and similar items in the crematorium grounds. This policy has been re-affirmed on a number of occasions, the most recent being in December 2019 and March 2021 (as part of the Development Management Plan review).

Items removed from the grounds are now being kept for a period of 3 months in the new open air storage facility, after which they are disposed of if not claimed.

(i) Recycling of Metals Scheme – Charitable Payments

During last year the Joint Committee approved the submission of an application for the Rowans Hospice under the metals recycling scheme operated by the Institute of Cemetery and Cremation Management. The application was successful and resulted in the Rowans receiving £10,000 from the scheme.

The ICCM criteria requires that nominations have to be for local or national death related charities which have as their core function bereavement related support or service. The Joint Committee has had a long standing policy of supporting locally based charities, and members have recently agreed to support a nomination for the Teenage Cancer Trust.

(j) Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Funeral Directors and Crematoria Services Market Investigation

The CMA issued a Funerals Order on the 16 June 2021 arising from its investigation into funeral directors and crematoria. The effect of the Order is to ensure that pricing and commercial activities of funeral directors and crematoria are exposed to greater public and regulatory scrutiny and require –

- Funeral directors to make price information readily available.
- Crematorium operators to provide detailed price information and a breakdown of costs for basic and additional optional services. At Portchester this is already provided.
- All crematoria to provide quarterly to the CMA the number of funerals provided and the revenue costs.
- Funeral directors with 5 or more branches to provide quarterly to the CMA the number of funerals provided and the revenue costs.

(k) Governance and related matters

The Crematorium is built on land owned by Fareham Borough Council and leased to the 4 local authorities. The current lease ran until December 2020 (with the joint committee now holding over) and arrangements are in hand for the grant of a new 20 year lease. At the meeting of the Joint Committee in September 2020 Portsmouth's legal and estates services were appointed to act on behalf of the Joint Committee in finalising the new lease with Fareham.

Also, at the September 2020 meeting, members agreed (especially in light of the pandemic) that decisions on any of the powers of the joint committee may be taken as a matter of urgency by the Clerk and the Treasurer if they consider it necessary to do so in the interests of the efficient administration of the Joint Committee and its responsibilities, subject, where circumstances allow, to consultation with and taking into account the views of members.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The Joint Committee continues to function effectively and to keep oversight of the management and operation of the Crematorium through the members appointed to serve on it by their respective authorities. Much of the Joint Committee's work continues to be of a recurring but important nature.

8.2 From March 2020 the work of the Joint Committee and the Crematorium was affected significantly by the need to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. This brought about many changes in working practices and the way in which funerals are conducted. From September 2020 public meetings of the Joint Committee were held with members joining remotely using video technology. This arrangement continued successfully until June 2021 when it was again possible to meet in person at the Crematorium.

8.3 This year, as in the past, attention has continued to focus upon the environment in which the crematorium operates to ensure that the very high standards of service continue to be maintained in the most cost effective and efficient way. As restrictions imposed by the Pandemic have been eased, so it has gradually become possible to accelerate the rate of the repairs and renewals programme and to continue to improve the crematorium's much valued facilities and services.

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John Haskell
Clerk to the Joint Committee

Background List of Documents –
Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972: *None*

JH/me
June 2022