

**REPORT TO: PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
28 SEPTEMBER 2009**

REPORT BY: CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

**PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT – 2008/09**

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 2008/09 financial year.

2. Recommended that this Annual Report for the 2008/09 financial year be noted and received 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 2008/09 financial year was –

Councillor Dennis Wright (Gosport BC)	Chairman
Councillor Hugh Mason (Portsmouth CC)	Vice Chairman
Councillor Brian Bayford (Fareham BC)	
Councillor Anthony Briggs (Havant BC) ¹	
Councillor Dave Collins (Havant BC)	
Councillor Peter Edgar (Gosport BC)	
Councillor Jason Fazackarley (Portsmouth CC)	
Councillor Connie Hockley (Fareham BC)	

The chair and vice-chairmanship rotates between authorities annually.

¹ Councillor Anthony Briggs chaired the Joint Committee during the 2007/08 municipal year

3.4 The Joint Committee met on 4 occasions during the 2008/09 financial year:

23 June 2008
29 September 2008
1 December 2008
2 March 2009

Minutes of each of these meetings 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.

3.5 The meetings of the Joint Committee have been supported by the Clerk (John Haskell), Treasurer (Andy Wannell), Engineer and Surveyor (Terry Garvey), and their respective deputies, together with the Horticultural Consultant (Roger Young), and the Manager and Registrar (James Clark). 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 and buildings and plant to ensure the highest standards continue to be maintained.

3.6 Meetings are held on a rotational basis at each of the authorities principal offices, with full public notice of and access to these meetings.

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

5.1 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 2 March 2009, approved a comprehensive Finance Strategy for 2009/10, providing a clear overview of the Joint Committee's financial framework. It 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 a similar strategy approved by the Joint Committee in March 2008 for the 2008/09 financial year. The new strategy document was sent to each authority to note as evidence for their 2009 'Use of Resources' assessment. No comments of substance were received from any of the authorities. The strategy will be reviewed by the Joint Committee each December for incorporation into the budget setting process.

The Joint Committee at its December 2008 meeting approved the revenue budget, a revised capital works programme, and the repairs and renewals

programme for 2008/09 & 2009/10. In approving the budget, the Joint Committee also set the levels of fees and charges operable from the 1 April 2009.

The Committee's actual revenue expenditure (for the financial year ending 31 March 2008) was reviewed and noted by the Joint Committee at its meeting on the 23 June 2008.

(b) Risk Management

The Joint Committee introduced comprehensive risk management arrangements in a formalised way in 2006. This included the publication of a set of strategic and operational risk registers and adoption of an action plan to mitigate the higher risks. The registers and the action plan are periodically reviewed by the officers.

(c) Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was approved by the Joint Committee at its meeting on the 29 September 2008. In summary the purpose of this document 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 management of risk and the arrangements for review.

Arising from preparation of the Annual Governance Statement a number of matters were identified for further action to enhance the governance arrangements. During the course of the year action has therefore been taken in respect of –

- The development of an anti-fraud and corruption policy;
- The development of a whistle blowing policy;
- The preparation of a crematorium business continuity plan.

(d) Crematorium Development Plan 2008-2014

In September 2008 the Joint Committee reviewed its previous Development Plan (agreed in 2006) and updated it for the period until 2014.

The purpose of the Development Plan is to look at medium term developments in the period to 2014, and in the longer term beyond 2014, 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.

(e) Annual Audit and Inspection Letter to Members

The Joint Committee is advised each December that the accounts for the preceding financial year have been audited. At the December 2008 meeting members received the Statement of Accounts in a report from the Treasurer. This was accompanied by the annual audit and inspection letter from the Joint

Committee's external auditors (Mazars) in which it was concluded that in all significant respects the Joint Committee had made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2008.

Mazars had earlier submitted to the Joint Committee at the meeting in September 2008 its 'report to those charged with governance', which the Joint Committee was asked to note. There were no matters which the auditors needed to draw to the Joint Committee's attention.

Previously, in June 2008 the Joint Committee had approved and published its annual statement of accounts for 2007/08 which it then submitted to its external auditors.

(f) Mercury Abatement

At its meeting on the 29 September 2008 the Joint Committee received and approved a comprehensive report on the project for the installation of mercury abatement equipment on all cremators at the Crematorium. The Joint Committee's decisions include –

- Authorising the project to proceed at an indicative cost of up to £2million in accordance with a project brief approved by the Joint Committee;
- Approving funding arrangements;
- Establishing a project board to oversee and control the project.

The decision to proceed with the project was taken in the knowledge of a government requirement that the overall level of mercury emitted from crematoria, taken as a whole, should be reduced by 50% by the end of December 2012. If this target is not met the government has indicated that it would legislate to compel a number of crematoria to meet the criteria. Given that Portchester is one of the largest crematoria in the country, the Joint Committee considers it prudent to proceed with the works required. The anticipated level of expenditure is such that it represents one of the largest capital projects undertaken at the Crematorium.

The chairman of the Project Board is Councillor Hugh Mason. Progress reports from the Project Board are submitted to the Joint Committee at each meeting. As at the end of March 2009 arrangements were still being pursued for the appointment of a consultant to undertake the provision of professional building services and project management. This followed decisions by the Joint Committee on 2 March 2009 regarding the preferred way forward in respect of tender preparation for the consultancy work.

The timetable for this project now envisages that commissioning of the completed works could place in December 2011.

(g) Capital Works Programme

During the year the following main work has been undertaken –

- Cremator Furnace Relining (Phase 2)

(h) Repairs and Renewals Programme

An extensive programme of works was undertaken during the year, and this included –

- Fire precautions installation work;
- Replacement of North Chapel Catafalque doors;
- Installation of portico to vestry door;
- Work on provision of granite covers to wreath bays;
- North border timber fence treatment;
- Roof insulation to north and south chapels;
- Internal and external re-decoration.

(i) 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 4215 registered cremations.

(j) The Crematorium Grounds

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 where appropriate;
- Shrub pruning;
- Maintaining the magnificent floral displays and the lawns.

(k) Cremation Regulations

On the 1 January 2009 the Cremation (England and Wales) Regulations 2008 came into force. This was a response to the Shipman Enquiry and the recommendations that followed. The new regulations consolidated the 1930 regulations and all subsequent amendments.

The major changes contained in the new regulations are –

- the introduction of completely new forms replacing the old forms used under the 1930 regulations, and
- the right by the applicant for cremation (or their nominated representative – usually a family member) to inspect the medical certificates.

6. Conclusion

6.1 It will be seen from this report that the Joint Committee continues to function effectively 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. However, during the year the Joint Committee faced a new and unique challenge with the commencement of the initial stages of the project for the installation of mercury abatement equipment. This large capital project will be likely to run until December 2011 and monitoring reports on progress will continue to be submitted to each Joint Committee meeting.

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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
14 September 2009