

PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL REMOTE MEETING of the Joint Committee held on Monday 28 September 2020 at 2.00 pm.

Present

Fareham Borough Council

Councillor Keith Evans (present for part of the meeting)
Councillor Simon Martin (present for part of the meeting)

Gosport Borough Council

Councillor June Cully
Councillor Kathleen Jones

Havant Borough Council

Councillor Leah Turner
Councillor Michael Wilson

Portsmouth City Council

Councillor Dave Ashmore
Councillor Lee Hunt

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Clerk to the Joint Committee explained the arrangements for the holding of this virtual remote meeting. This was taking place in accordance with the regulations issued by government to allow local authority meetings to take place remotely using video or telephone conferencing technology.

The Clerk explained that it had not been possible to hold the regular joint committee meetings in March and June.

Miss Victoria Hatton, the Crematorium Manager and Registrar, who took up the post on 3 February 2020, was welcomed to the meeting.

Councillors Dave Ashmore (Portsmouth CC) and Michael Wilson (Havant BC), recently appointed to the committee were also welcomed.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (AI 1)

Ashley Humphrey (Horticultural Consultant)

855. Appointment of Chairman (AI 2)

RESOLVED that Councillor June Cully (Gosport BC) be appointed Chairman for the 2020/21 municipal year.

(Councillor June Cully in the Chair)

856. Appointment of Vice-Chairman (AI 3)

RESOLVED that Councillor Lee Hunt (Portsmouth CC) be appointed Vice Chairman for the 2020/21 municipal year.

857. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 4)

None

858. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 December 2019 (AI 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 9 December 2019 be signed as a correct record.

859. Matters Arising from the Minutes not specifically referred to on the Agenda (AI 6)

Minute 840 – Recycling of Metals Charitable Scheme – It was confirmed that a suicide prevention charity could be nominated for an award, on a future occasion when nominations are next sought.

860. Clerk's Items (AI 7)

The Clerk to the Joint Committee reported on the following matters –

(a) Competition and Markets Authority Funerals Investigation

(TAKE IN CMA SUMMARY OF ITS PRELIMINARY DECISION REPORT)

The Clerk reported that the CMA had commenced its investigation into funeral directors and crematoria services during 2019. At that time Portchester Crematorium submitted to the CMA, as part of its fact finding, a raft of financial and statistical information.

In mid-August 2020 the CMA published its Preliminary Decision Report, which ran to some 470 pages plus appendices. Much of the focus of the recommendations, which had already been reported in the national media, had been on the role and practices of funeral directors, the overall cost of funerals, and the way in which the public engage with purchasing a funeral.

The provisional decisions of the CMA included –

- Ensuring that pricing and commercial activities of funeral directors and crematoria are exposed to greater public and regulatory scrutiny.
- Requiring funeral directors to make price information readily available.

- Requiring crematorium operators to provide detailed price information and a breakdown of costs for basic and additional optional services. At Portchester this is already provided.
- Recommending the government to establish an inspection and registration regime to monitor the quality of funeral director services.
- Requiring funeral directors with 5 or more branches to provide quarterly to the CMA the number of funerals provided and the revenue costs.
- Requiring all crematoria to provide quarterly to the CMA the number of funerals provided and the revenue costs.

NOTED

(b) Portchester Crematorium – Lease extension

The Crematorium is built on land leased from Fareham BC. The current lease expires on the 31 December 2020 and Portsmouth's Legal & Estates Services have been appointed to deal with renewal of the lease on behalf of the Joint Committee.

RESOLVED (1) that the Clerk be authorised in consultation with the Chairman to agree the terms of the Crematorium lease extension when those terms are settled on the Joint Committee's behalf by Portsmouth's Legal and Estates Services;

(2) that each member of the Joint Committee be informed of the lease extension terms;

(3) that the approval of each constituent authority to the form of lease be sought and each authority be asked to authorise the lease to be signed on its behalf.

861. Portchester Crematorium Coronavirus Covid-19 Response & Revised Budget 2020/21 (AI 8)

(TAKE IN ATTACHED REPORT FROM THE CLERK, TREASURER, AND THE MANAGER & REGISTRAR)

In presenting the report, the Manager and Register amplified the action taken by the Crematorium to respond to the impact of the Coronavirus emergency regulations on crematoria and their operating arrangements, and the need to continually adapt to changing circumstances. Throughout the focus had been on the safety of staff and the bereaved.

In particular attention was drawn to –

- Restrictions on the numbers attending funerals to allow for social distancing;

- During services no singing or chanting allowed,;
- The current requirement for the wearing of face masks;
- Close liaison with funeral directors;
- Test and trace recording, and the recently introduced QR signage to allow mourners to 'log' their attendance at the crematorium;
- The web casting of services remained at a high level of take up;
- The small garden clearance room could not be kept Covid safe, and paragraph 5.17 explained the provision of a small fenced compound area was now being used for the temporary storage of items removed from the grounds. The Joint Committee, under minute 852, had agreed that these items be kept for 6 months. There had been ground clearances during March and August and it was now considered the period should be reduced to 3 months, to ease issues of storage space and identifying the length of time items had been kept. Members expressed clear support for this approach and that items be retained only for 3 months.

The Deputy Treasurer introduced the revised budget for 2020/21 and drew specific attention to those items mentioned within the report which were the main reasons for the revisions now proposed. Particular mention was made of two staff from Fareham BC being re-deployed temporarily to the crematorium to meet increased operational demands. Although these staff had now returned to their original posts their contribution had been much appreciated by colleagues at the crematorium.

The Deputy Treasurer also mentioned the arrangements that had been made to use FBC's contract cleaning as an additional resource, and its future continued use would be kept under review.

Members expressed their thanks to staff for the way in which they and the crematorium had coped since the pandemic started.

RESOLVED (1) that the grateful thanks of the Joint Committee be placed on record for the action taken by staff in responding to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

(2) that the revised budget account estimates, set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

(3) that the period for keeping items removed from the Crematorium grounds be reduced to 3 months, after which they be disposed of if not claimed.

862. Provision of Multi Media System & Music Rooms Improvements (AI 9)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER
AND THE MANAGER & REGISTRAR)

In submitting this report, the Property Manager reminded the Joint Committee that during June 2020 members were consulted and agreed to proceed with the purchase of the Obitus Multi Media System. Detailed investigations had now been carried out into the preferred way in which the equipment would be installed, which would involve work to both of the music rooms. Quotations had been obtained, and the works awarded to the best value contractor at a cost of £34,392.10 ex VAT.

Adequate monies were held within the capital works fund to meet the expenditure, with provision being made within the budget approved last December for the ongoing revenue cost.

In response to questions about the cost to families of the service to be offered by the Obitus system, the Manager explained that there were separate fees for each type of service requested. Examples included £30 for a live web cast (the same as that charged for Portchester's own system, although reduced to 'at cost' during the pandemic); and a simple slide show - £38. The fees to be charged were a matter for members to determine, and a report would be brought back to the Joint Committee.

RESOLVED that the Joint Committee notes the report.

(Councillor Simon Martin joined the meeting)

863. Building Repairs and Renewal Programme (AI 10)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER)

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

864. Manager and Registrar's Report (AI 11)

General Statistical Reports for March – May, and June – August 2020

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE MANAGER AND REGISTRAR)

In response to a question from Councillor Martin, the Manager explained that she was not aware of any work having been undertaken to compare carbon emissions at Portchester with other crematoria, and that all relevant information was provided to Fareham's Environmental Health Officer, who was responsible for monitoring. The Manager undertook to speak to the EHO and report back to a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the reports be received and noted.

(Councillor Keith Evans left the meeting during the following item)

865. Horticultural Consultant's Report (AI 12)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE HORTICULTURAL CONSULTANT)

In the absence of the Horticultural Consultant, Dave Stribling presented the general update on the Crematorium grounds, and drew specific attention to –

- The grounds had again received a gold award in the South and South East in Bloom, with the crematorium achieving the highest points tally it had ever received;
- Winter bedding was due for delivery on the 14 October.

Arising from questions and comments from members regarding the cultivation of bedding plants, use of environmentally friendly planting, and concern about use of peat, it was explained that less peat was now used. The comments made about the use of peat and alternatives were noted and would be brought to the attention of the Horticultural Consultant.

Mention was made that the frontage bedding looked stunning. It was still flowering and had been very long lasting having been planted in the spring.

Members agreed that a congratulatory letter be sent to Brighstone Landscapes for their excellent work in contributing to the Crematorium receiving the gold award.

RESOLVED that the report be received and approved.

866. Portchester Crematorium – Staffing and Job Evaluation Reviews (AI 13)

The Joint Committee was reminded that in March 2014 it was agreed that a pay and grading review be undertaken for all Crematorium employees using a recognised analytical job evaluation scheme. The outcome of the review process was reported to and approved by the Joint Committee in December 2014, and subsequently implemented.

As part of the crematorium's operational arrangements it was now recommended that, with the exception of the Manager and Registrar's post, the outcome of any further individual staffing and pay and grading reviews that are undertaken be dealt with under delegated authority.

RESOLVED that, with the exception of the post of Manager and Registrar, the Treasurer and the Clerk to the Joint Committee be delegated authority to approve implementation or otherwise deal with any recommendation arising from staffing and pay and grading reviews.

867. Authority to deal with Urgent Joint Committee Business (AI 14)

The Clerk reported that whilst the government had introduced temporary arrangements to enable virtual remote meetings to be held by teleconference, this had highlighted that there might be an occasion when an urgent decision was required on a matter that could not wait until the next scheduled Joint Committee meeting.

In the circumstances the officers proposed that authority be delegated to the Treasurer and the Clerk, to make such urgent decisions as they consider necessary on any matter not already delegated to an officer. In each case members would be advised by email in advance of a proposed decision where circumstances allowed, and any comments members might wish to make would be taken into account after which they would be advised of the outcome. The Crematorium Manager already had full authority to operate and manage the crematorium.

Members discussed this recommendation and noted that with the government allowing meetings by teleconference it should be possible to arrange a special meeting, although some members felt there might still be a need for recourse to use delegated powers during the pandemic.

Upon a vote is was -

**RESOLVED (1) that the following delegation be approved –
Decisions on any of the powers of the Joint Committee may be taken as a matter of urgency by the Clerk and Treasurer if they consider it necessary to do so in the interests of the efficient administration of the Joint Committee and its responsibilities;**

Prior to exercising this provision the Clerk and Treasurer must, where circumstances allow, consult with and take into account the views of members of the joint committee;

In the absence of the Clerk or Treasurer their respective deputies may act.

(2) that this delegation be reviewed at the conclusion of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

868. Reports previously sent to members (AI 15)

The Clerk explained that the following reports were sent to members during March, and June (in the absence of a meeting), and were now re-circulated for information and to place them in the public domain –

(a) Annual Return for the Financial Year Ended 31 March 2020

(b) Portchester Crematorium Joint Committee – Annual Report 2019/20

(The Clerk referred to a typographical error in the annual report, in that Councillor June Cully was appointed vice chairman for the 2019/20 municipal year).

(c) Report of the inspection by the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (sent to members in March)

The Manager and Registrar updated members on action taken in respect of the following recommendations in the FBCA report –

3 – works to improve crematory security during working hours had now been completed;

4 – Ensuring that ashes are kept in a secure storeroom had been addressed immediately, and the works had now been completed;

5 – Staff had now been briefed and changes made to the procedures for the release of cremated remains;

6 – the provision of further taps was now being included in the improvement works to the Book of Remembrance Room.

NOTED

869. Dates of Future Meetings (AI 16)

RESOLVED that the Joint Committee meets at 2pm on the following dates in 2020/21, at Portchester Crematorium or by Virtual Remote Meeting, as circumstances allow –

- Monday 14 December 2020**
- Monday 22 March 2021**
- Monday 21 June 2021**
- Monday 20 September 2021**

The meeting concluded at 3.26 pm.

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Chairman