

**REPORT TO: PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –  
23 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**REPORT BY: CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE,  
in consultation with the Manager and Registrar,  
Treasurer, and the Engineer and Surveyor**

**PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM –  
DEVELOPING AND ENHANCING OUR SERVICE**

**1. Purpose**

1.1 To set out a range of initiatives which the Joint Committee is asked to consider with the aim of developing further and enhancing the established quality of the services provided at the Crematorium.

**2. Recommendation**

**Members are asked to consider and approve the individual recommendations set out under each section of this report.**

**3. Introduction**

3.1 The Joint Committee in March 2013 approved an updated Development Plan, which sets out to guide the Committee on policies and priorities for the next few years. As part of this the officers have taken the opportunity to review what improvements and changes the Joint Committee may wish to consider introducing now or in the reasonably near future.

3.2 This report sets out the result of the officers' consideration.

**4. Timing and Length of Services**

4.1 Services in each of the chapels are timed at 30 minute intervals; those in the South Chapel taking place on the hour and half hour, and those in the North Chapel timed at a quarter past and a quarter to each hour.

4.2 The Crematorium can accommodate some 27 funerals a day (9am to 3.30pm) using both chapels. The average number of daily funerals is 16.

4.3 Most services last about 20 minutes, and a half hour time slot generally provides sufficient time to enable mourners to enter and leave within the half hour period. Occasionally there are over runs, for example a large gathering, or the officiate taking

longer to conduct the service than the time available. This then leads to the following and possibly subsequent services starting late. In turn this can place additional pressure upon car parking, with mourners not having left the crematorium whilst others are arriving for a service that will be starting late.

4.4 On those occasions when a funeral director has indicated that there may be an especially large attendance the Manager and Registrar has discretion to permit a double slot to be used, thereby extending the period for the service (including entering and leaving) to one hour.

4.5 It has been suggested that possibly 40 minutes should be allocated for each service, not with the intention for officiates to extend the length of the service, but simply to provide a little extra 'buffer' room between services. Moving to a 40 minute slot would mean that it would no longer be possible to time all services to start on the hour/half hour in the South Chapel and on the quarter hour in the North Chapel.

4.6 Extending the period available for a service might also ease occasional pressure on car parking as and when a service, for whatever reason, overruns or starts late.

4.7 It is important to emphasise that any change to the timing of services needs to be simple and easily understood, both by funeral directors and mourners.

**Recommended that the Manager and Registrar brings forward for consideration timetable options to develop 40 minute timeslots.**

## **5. Cremation Fee**

5.1 The current cremation fee (from April 2013) is £520, and by way of comparison the fees at other nearby crematoria are -

Chichester - £786

Southampton - £625

Wessex Vale (Eastleigh/Hedge End) - £650

Guildford - £610

5.2 The Joint Committee reviews the fee annually, having set the current fee level at its meeting in December 2012. Unless circumstances require otherwise, the fee level will next be reviewed in December 2013.

5.3 At this stage the officers do not consider it necessary to make any recommendation for change.

## **6. The Chapels - general decor**

6.1 The two chapels are redecorated and refreshed periodically as part of the general maintenance programme.

6.2 The suggestion has been made that on the next occasion it might be helpful to engage the services of a design consultant to consider and make recommendations as to what changes may be appropriate to update each chapel's appearance.

6.3 The Manager and Registrar is considering whether a brief to a design consultant should include seeking to provide the interiors of both chapels with a more modern image. They are of course currently decorated in keeping with the Crematorium's external design style.

6.4 It is important to ensure that each chapel has an ambience that is welcoming and to provide those attending with a feeling that they are at ease in a comfortable environment. Although decor can play an important role it is of course the officiate conducting the funeral who sets the tone of a service.

6.5 Fixed pews have been a feature of the crematorium since it was first opened in 1958. Although there is a trend at some crematoria to have moveable individual seating the Manager and Registrar is of the view that this would not increase (and could well decrease) each chapel's capacity. There would also be a need to reposition chairs after each service, thereby increasing the time staff spend on tidying a chapel at the conclusion of each service, in readiness for the next funeral. Fixed pews can also seat more people than chairs.

6.6 Floral arrangements can play a large part in providing a welcoming appearance. The officers feel that it would be appropriate for some indoor displays of varying scales and colour to be introduced to enhance the appearance behind and around the catafalque in each chapel. These would replace the existing dried flower displays. This proposal is now being pursued and the Manager and Registrar will be consulting with funeral directors and officiates as appropriate.

**Recommended (1) that the services of a design consultant be sought to advise on what changes could be considered taking account of current trends in the design and decoration of crematoria chapels.**

**(2) that the action being taken to enhance the floral arrangements behind and around the catafalque in each chapel be supported.**

## **7. Video Streaming of Services through the Internet**

7.1 Interest was expressed in the past by a company wishing to video stream services through the internet to families and friends who were unable to attend a service in person. Unfortunately at the time it did not prove possible, mainly due to certain technical aspects, to take the proposal through to implementation. The Joint Committee agreed to review the initiative as and when technical or other matters could be met.

7.2 The Crematorium has recently had its CCTV management systems upgraded. The Crematorium's electrical contractor undertaking this work has confirmed that the system can be used to provide a video stream (in both picture and sound) through the internet. Access to restrict the viewing of a service to those family and friends who have requested it would be by way of a password. A successful trial has been undertaken. As a result an order has been placed with the electrical contractor responsible for the Crematorium's electrical works to provide this facility on a permanent basis.

7.3 The Manager and Registrar will now be making arrangements to develop the necessary security safeguards and to promote the availability of this service.

**Recommended that that the action taken be endorsed, and arrangements now be made to offer video streaming through the internet to any family requesting it, and the Manager and Registrar, in consultation with the Clerk to the Joint Committee, be authorised to finalise the arrangements including the necessary security safeguards for the provision of this service.**

## **8. Video Screens and family tributes**

8.1 Occasionally families bring to the crematorium a screen and projector to show a personal tribute during a service. This has usually been by prior arrangement.

8.2 With advances in technology the possibility presents itself to install a couple of large video screens linked to a DVD player so that requests for family tribute facilities can be more easily accommodated. The installation of video screens would also enable the actual service to be relayed (using the already installed CCTV management system) to an additional screen in the foyer area for those occasions when there is a large congregation. At present loudspeakers are available to relay the sound of the service to the foyer area when there are large gatherings at a funeral overflowing outside the South Chapel area.

**Recommended that this suggestion be pursued.**

## **9. On Line Book of Remembrance**

9.1 There are at present 15 Books of Remembrance. The 7 most recent Books (covering about the last 15 years) have been digitised, which would facilitate them being available to view through the Internet, accessible from the Crematorium's web site.

9.2 A number of crematoria already have their Books of Remembrance available to view on line. An example of the way in which entries can be accessed and viewed can be seen on the Mortlake Crematorium web site.

9.3 At present the Books of Remembrance are only available to be seen in the Book of Remembrance Room. Enabling those who wish to view an entry (for any day of the year) on line would add greatly to this service, especially for those perhaps unable to travel to the Crematorium on an anniversary date.

9.4 It is estimated that it would cost £20,000 to digitise the remaining 8 Books of Remembrance. The Manager and Registrar strongly supports this initiative, which would bring Portchester into line with many other crematoria. Estimate provision is available to undertake this work.

9.5 Coupled with this proposal could be the installation of a discreet video screen and keyboard console within the garden of contemplation. This would enable families and friends visiting the crematorium on a day other than an anniversary to view an entry in the Book of Remembrance.

**Recommended that the initiative to proceed with digitising the remaining Books of Remembrance and arranging for all the Books to be available on line through the internet including the installation of a video console within the garden of contemplation or near vicinity be progressed.**

## **10. Portchester Crematorium Web Site**

10.1 The Portchester Crematorium web site has now been in use for about 10 years and updated regularly. Whilst the site is easy to follow and has links to other appropriate sites, the time may have come to refresh the web site with possibly a new design.

10.2 Discussion is taking place with Portsmouth City Council's web team to consider what changes might be required, including the type of management system to be used to enable easy updating of the web site.

**Recommended that the services of Portsmouth City Council's Web Design team be approved for the Portchester Crematorium Web site to be refreshed.**

## **11. Crematorium - Reception and internal direction and signage arrangements**

11.1 Although the Crematorium has a policy of keeping signage to a minimum, there may be a need for some additional discreet directional signs. Coupled with this, although there is a daily list of funeral services displayed on the external waiting room wall, it is felt that the list should be more prominently displayed.

11.2 With the large number of cremations taking place each day, there is a constant flow of mourners to and from the car parks and the crematorium waiting rooms and

chapels. To improve and assist each visitors experience of attending the Crematorium the suggestion has been made that an attendant could be available at a strategic point - say in the general area leading from the car parks to the waiting rooms, to 'welcome' and guide mourners to the correct location.

**Recommended that these suggestions be developed and a further report with detailed costs be brought forward for consideration by the Joint Committee, with priority being given to improved signage.**

## **12. Customer Survey**

12.1 Within the Development Plan the Joint Committee has agreed that a customer survey should be undertaken, the aim of which would be to seek to establish an improved understanding of the public's thoughts regarding the crematorium and the service that is provided.

12.2 To undertake this survey the intention would be to involve the services of one of the local authority's communications team to assist in formulation of the survey questionnaire and its distribution, collation of responses and analysis of the replies. A survey of this kind would need to be undertaken in a discreet manner with sensitively framed questions and careful thought given to how the survey forms should be distributed, and how the outcomes of a survey should be used.

**Recommended that the arrangements outlined be pursued.**

## **13. Crematorium Publicity**

13.1 With the impending opening of a new crematorium on the Havant/East Hants border it is important to ensure that the outstanding service provided at Portchester for more than half a century to the residents of south east Hampshire remains foremost in the public's mind. This can be achieved in a variety of ways - including through leaflets that are readily available in local authority offices, items appearing in each of the local authority magazines and by greater use of the web site.

**Recommended that enhanced publicity supporting Portchester Crematorium's services be arranged, as described above.**

*John Haskell*  
Clerk to the Joint Committee

JH/me  
11 September 2013

*Background Documents - Nil*

## APPENDIX

### Financial Appraisal

Set out below is an initial estimate of the possible cost of each of the items identified within this report.

Chapels - General Decor - upgrading £25,000

Video screens - £4,000

Internet Streaming - £1,000

On Line Book of Remembrance - £20,000

Web Site Upgrading - £3,000

Customer Survey - £3,000

Crematorium Publicity - £2,000

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