



**REPORT TO: MEMBERS OF THE PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM
JOINT COMMITTEE – 22 JUNE 2020**

REPORT BY: CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

**PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT – 2019/20**

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 2019/20 financial year.

2. Recommended that this Annual Report for the 2019/20 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 2019/20 financial year was –

Councillor Simon Martin (Fareham BC)	
Councillor Keith Evans (Fareham BC)	
Councillor Kathleen Jones (Gosport BC)	Vice Chairman
Councillor June Cully (Gosport BC)	
Councillor Tim Pike (Havant BC)	Chairman
Councillor Leah Turner (Havant BC)	
Councillor Lee Hunt (Portsmouth CC)	
Councillor Steve Pitt (Portsmouth CC)	

The chair and vice-chairmanship rotates between authorities annually.

3.4 The Joint Committee met on 3 occasions during the 2019/20 financial year:

24 June 2019

16 September 2019

9 December 2019

The Joint Committee was also due to meet on the 23 March 2020, but was cancelled following government advice issued in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic. Business due to be considered was held over until meetings could be reconvened.

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. Meetings are held at the Crematorium, with full public notice and access.

3.5 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 (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, buildings and plant to ensure the highest standards continue to be maintained.

3.6 Mr Clark retired in February 2020, having served the Crematorium for 31 Years, with Miss Victoria Hatton being appointed Manager and Registrar from that date.

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. Crematorium Development Plan 2019 - 2024

5.1 The purpose of the Development Plan is to look at medium term developments in the period to 2024, and in the longer term beyond 2024, 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 2019.

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

6.1 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 9 December 2019, approved a comprehensive Finance Strategy for 2020/21, 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 (xxx) below – monitoring the levels of service).

The Joint Committee at its December 2019 meeting also approved the revenue budget for 2020/21 together with a revised capital works programme, and the repairs and renewals programme for 2019/20 & 2020/21. In approving the budget, the Joint Committee also set the levels of fees and charges operable from the 1 April 2020.

The Committee’s actual income and revenue expenditure (for the financial year ending 31 March 2019) was reviewed and noted by the Joint Committee at its meeting on the 24 June 2019.

(b) Annual Financial Return for 2018/19

In June 2019 the Joint Committee approved and published its annual financial return for 2018/19.

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) Internal Audit Plan from 2018/19 Onwards

In June 2018 the Joint Committee approved an internal audit report that moved to a 3 yearly cycle, with the next year of audit being 2020/21. Audit coverage will include the high and medium risk systems within each control area below, and the low risk systems on a cyclical basis.

Type of Coverage	Meaning
Operational controls	Testing of operational systems of control specific to the crematorium
Governance controls	Partnership governance work in relation to the operation of the Joint Committee

(d) Risk Management

At the meeting on 23 September 2019 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 been reviewed taking into account current good practice.

(e) Developing and Enhancing the Crematorium's Services

Since September 2013 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) and these include -

- South and North Chapels – Extensive upgrading and refurbishment.
- Provision of video screens in each chapel for family tributes.
- Video streaming of services through the internet – *An increasing take up of this valuable sound and vision service for family and friends.*
- Extending the length of two morning and two afternoon services.
- Books of Remembrance available on line.
- Crematorium Web-site refreshed and updated.
- Crematorium logo introduced to improve image and web site theme.

(f) 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 2019/20, and this includes -

- Glazing repairs
- Vestry Refurbishment
- Paving & Stone works cleaning and re-pointing
- Fencing repairs
- External redecoration – rolling programme
- Provision of multi-media system in the chapels
- South Chapel Conservatory redecoration
- New curtains in the south chapel
- Surfacing and paving repairs

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.

(g) 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 3,299 registered cremations (an increase of 150 from the 3,149 cremations undertaken in 2018/19).

A public comments register was introduced in September 2016, the details of which are reported to the Joint Committee for monitoring at each meeting.

(h) 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 where appropriate;
- Shrub pruning;
- Maintaining the magnificent floral displays and the lawns;
- Extensive replanting of roses was carried out during January 2020.

The Crematorium received the prestigious Gold Award in the 2019 South and South East Britain in Bloom Awards. This is the fourth 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 a very high standard of work, which regularly receives public acclaim.

(i) The Crematorium Garden of Remembrance – Grounds Clearance

The Joint Committee at its meeting on Monday 9 December 2019 considered a comprehensive report on options for dealing with the recurring problems that arise from memorials and other items being placed in the grounds in contravention of the Crematorium Regulations, which are designed to preserve the simple beauty of the gardens.

The options set out in the report were either to -

- Abandon the current long standing ‘no memorials’ policy;
- Continue to enforce the policy, & ensure clearance takes place at 3 monthly intervals, thereby reducing the amount of material to be removed at each clearance;
- Relax the policy to allow only a very simple form of tribute to be placed;
- Provide a Memorial wall or similar means for memorials upon which family names could be inscribed.

The Joint Committee decided –

- That the long standing policy (to preserve the simple beauty of the gardens) against the provision of memorials and similar items in the crematorium grounds be re-affirmed;
- That families be allowed to place temporarily one plastic vase supplied by the crematorium in the area where its family ashes have been interred to hold cut flowers, and that as and when flowers have finished blooming, staff will remove the flowers and place the vase into store for collection and re-use;
- That grounds clearances be undertaken at 3 monthly intervals mid-way between Christmas, Easter, Mothering Sunday and Father's Day;
- That items removed from the grounds be kept for a period of 6 months, after which they be disposed of if not claimed, and that improved arrangements be made for storing removed items;
- That the Book of Remembrance continues to be promoted as the primary means of memorial, but officers investigate a proposal for an alternative means of memorial in more detail, for the Joint Committee to consider at a future meeting.

(j) Recycling of Metals Scheme – Charitable Payments

During the year the Joint Committee approved the submission of an applications for the Naomi House Children's Hospice under the metals recycling scheme operated by the Institute of Cemetery and Cremation Management.

The application was successful and resulted in a significant payment 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.

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

The CMA commenced its investigation into funeral directors and crematoria services during 2019, and this was reported to the June meeting. In mid-February 2020 the CMA published a number of working papers, in connection with its investigation, and invited comments. Further work on the investigation has been suspended in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic.

(l) Inspection by the FBCA (Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities)

The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA) undertook an inspection of the Crematorium on Thursday 12 December 2019, as part of its new inspection scheme to ensure standards of quality are maintained by crematoria.

The purpose of the scheme is to provide the operator of the crematorium with confidence that it met the national standards laid down by the Federation through its Code of Cremation Practice. As part of this new Inspection Scheme, all 290 crematoria across the UK will be inspected once every 5 years.

The FBCA's inspection report was received in February and whilst the vast majority of the national recommendations and guidance are being met a small number of items were identified for action, which have now been implemented or identified for future action.

7. Coronavirus Pandemic

7.1 In the latter part of the financial year the work of the Joint Committee and the Crematorium was affected significantly by the national need to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. In accordance with emergency legislation, limitations were placed upon the number of mourners at each service, and that initially the crematorium grounds were closed to visitors, except for funerals. Social distancing was practised at services and in the working arrangements. To assist families, web casting services was offered at cost for each funeral. Resources at the crematorium were enhanced with the secondment of administrative staff from Fareham BC. Additional cleaning and sanitisation was undertaken.

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. Although much of the Joint Committee's work continues to be of a recurring but important nature, during 2019/20 members have been involved in one area of particular importance – making decisions to resolve the recurring problems arising from the unauthorised placing of memorials in the grounds. During the year particular attention has again focussed 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. During March 2020 the work of the Joint Committee and the Crematorium was affected significantly by the national need to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic, which brought about many changes in working practices and way in which funerals are conducted.

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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
May 2020