



**REPORT TO: THE PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
21 JUNE 2021**

REPORT BY: CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

**PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT – 2020/21**

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 2020/21 financial year.

2. Recommended that this Annual Report for the 2020/21 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 2020/21 financial year was –

Councillor Simon Martin (Fareham BC)
Councillor Keith Evans (Fareham BC) †
Councillor Mike Ford (Fareham BC) (from February 2021)
Councillor Kathleen Jones (Gosport BC)
Councillor June Cully (Gosport BC) Chairman
Councillor Michael Wilson (Havant BC)
Councillor Leah Turner (Havant BC)
Councillor Lee Hunt (Portsmouth CC) Vice Chairman
Councillor Dave Ashworth (Portsmouth CC)

The chair and vice-chairmanship rotates between authorities annually.

3.4 The Joint Committee met virtually on 3 occasions during the 2020/21 financial year:

22 September 2020

14 December 2020

22 March 2021

The Joint Committee was also due to meet on the 23 March and during June 2020, but these were cancelled following government advice issued in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic.

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 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, initially except for funerals, the crematorium grounds were closed to visitors and for the scattering of ashes. The waiting rooms were closed. Social distancing was practised at services and in the working arrangements. Following a risk assessment this meant the chapels could accommodate a maximum of 20 mourners in the South Chapel and 15 in the North Chapel. From August 2020 attendees were required to wear face coverings, and there was a prohibition on singing and chanting or the playing of instruments that are blown. There was an overall increase in the number of funerals during the year.

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 2020 meeting received a comprehensive report from the officers updating members on the response of the Crematorium to the pandemic, including advising on the financial implications and recommending a revised budget for the 2020/21 financial year, which was approved.

5.4 Members expressed and placed on record their grateful thanks to staff for their action and way in which they and the crematorium had coped and responded to the pandemic.

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 14 December 2020, approved a comprehensive Finance Strategy for 2021/22, 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 2020 meeting also approved the revenue budget for 2021/22 together with a revised capital works programme, and the repairs and renewals programme for 2020/21 & 2021/22. In approving the budget, the Joint Committee also set the levels of fees and charges operable from the 1 April 2021.

The Committee's actual income and revenue expenditure (for the financial year ending 31 March 2020) was reviewed and noted by the Joint Committee during 2020, and formally reported in September 2020.

(b) Annual Financial Return for 2019/20

During June 2020 Joint Committee members received and subsequently published the annual financial return for 2019/20.

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 14 December 2020 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.

(d) 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). These have included extensive upgrading of the South and North Chapels. During the autumn of 2020 the Obitus 'Maestro' multimedia audio and video system became operational at the Crematorium, which has been much appreciated by families and funeral directors. This 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 2020/21, and this includes -

- Book of Remembrance Room Refurbishment
- Garden Clearance Storage Facility
- Glazing repairs
- Vestry Refurbishment
- Paving & Stone works cleaning and re-pointing
- Fencing repairs
- External redecoration – rolling programme
- South Chapel Conservatory redecoration - delayed
- New curtains in the south chapel - delayed
- 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.

(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 3,608 registered cremations (an increase of 309 from the 3,299 cremations undertaken in 2019/20).

(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.

The Crematorium received the prestigious Gold Award in the 2020 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, including during the Pandemic, a very high standard of work, which regularly receives public acclaim.

(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 the 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.

(j) 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. The Joint Committee was updated at the September 2020 meeting on the CMA's draft provisional decisions, with the final decisions being published in December 2020. These include –

- 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.
- Requiring all crematoria to provide quarterly to the CMA the number of funerals provided and the revenue costs.
- 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.

The next steps will be for the CMA to issue a Funerals Order giving effect to its decisions.

(k) 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 sent to members in March 2020. Whilst the vast majority of the national recommendations and guidance were already being met at Portchester a small number of items were identified for action, which have now been implemented.

(I) 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 meeting, members agreed (especially in the 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. During the year members revisited and updated the Development Management Plan, including focussing once more on the recurring problems arising from the unauthorised placing of memorials in the grounds.

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. Scheduled meetings of the Joint Committee in March and June were unable to take place, with members being kept fully informed with periodic reports. From September 2020 public meetings of the Joint Committee were held with members joining remotely using video technology. During the year 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. This has included introduction of a new multimedia audio and video system, which has been well received by families and funeral directors.

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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 2021