



**REPORT TO: THE PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
26 JUNE 2023**

REPORT BY: CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

**PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT – 2022/23**

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 2022/23 financial year.

2. Recommended that this Annual Report for the 2022/23 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 2022/23 financial year was –

Councillor Joanne Burton (Fareham BC) Chairman

Councillor Susan Walker (Fareham BC)

Councillor Alan Durrant (Gosport BC)

Councillor Alan Scard (Gosport BC)

Councillor Lulu Bowerman (Havant BC)

Councillor Tim Pike (Havant BC) Vice Chairman

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 the following 4 occasions during the 2022/23 financial year in the North Chapel at Portchester Crematorium:

27 June 2022 26 September 2022 12 December 2022 20 March 2023

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. Crematorium Development Management Plan 2023 - 2028

5.1 The purpose of the Development Management Plan is to look at medium term developments in the period to 2028, and in the longer term beyond 2028, and to set out the Joint Committee's intended course of action. The Plan is reviewed biennially; the current plan being approved in March 2023. The Plan seeks to cover the principal strategic and operational issues relating to the crematorium's functions, including cremation trends and population trends.

5.2 During 2022 Joint Committee became aware of a private proposal to develop a crematorium on a site at Brune Lane, (currently forming part of Lee-on-the-Solent golf course) at Stubbington, with the aim of serving the Gosport and surrounding area. A planning application has been submitted to Fareham BC as the local planning authority and is yet to be determined. If and when developed the facility would impact on the number of services currently held at Portchester, even with a gradually rising population.

6. Cremators Replacement Programme

6.1 At the September 2022 meeting the Joint Committee considered a report on the need to replace the existing cremators which are now some 34 years old, and whilst they had been well maintained they had now reached the end of their useful life. The Joint Committee considered a detailed report from consultants (appointed by the Joint Committee) on the various options available which included a comparison of proven technologies being natural gas, Bio LPG gas, and electric.

6.2 The Joint Committee decided unanimously to approve the recommended option to install 4 natural gas cremators. The new cremators will include provision for bariatric cremations. The Joint Committee in March 2023 authorised negotiations with a specific company to supply replacement cremators and associated equipment and has allocated a budget of between £3m and £4.5m for these works. In reaching this decision full account was taken of population projections.

6.3 The programme envisages that work to facilitate and install the new cremators will be undertaken during 2024.

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 12 December 2022, approved a comprehensive Finance Strategy for 2023/24, 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 Joint Committee at its December 2022 meeting also approved the revenue budget for 2023/24 together with a revised capital works programme, and the repairs and renewals programme for 2022/23 & 2023/24. In considering the revenue budget full note was taken of utility costs, with CPI being at 11.1% for November 2022, and global factors affecting the cost of gas and electricity supply having a direct impact on one of the largest costs associated with the delivery of cremation services. In approving the budget, the Joint Committee considered it prudent to set the levels of fees and charges to be operable from the 1 January 2023, rather than the start of the 2023/24 financial year.

The Committee's actual income and revenue expenditure (for the financial year ending 31 March 2022) was reviewed and noted by the Joint Committee in June 2022.

(b) Annual Financial Return for 2021/22

During June 2022 Joint Committee members received and subsequently published the annual financial return for 2020/21.

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) Environmental and Climate Change Action Plan

At its meeting on the 12 December 2022 the Joint Committee approved a set of plans to reduce carbon emissions at the crematorium. Various key elements have been identified, some of which could be taken in the short term (some 12-18 months), with medium term initiatives being taken within 3 years. The aim is to review the Plan document during the 2025.26 financial year.

At an earlier meeting in September 2022 the Joint Committee received a report that provided a carbon footprint base line to compare with future years to monitor progress in reducing carbon emissions.

(d) Developing and Enhancing the Crematorium's Services

In recent years 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 and provision of the Obitus 'Maestro' multimedia audio and video system. These changes have been much appreciated by families and funeral directors.

Since June 2022 all service times at the crematorium have been extended from 30 to 45 minutes in both chapels; previously only four 45 minute time slots were available in the South Chapel.

(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 2022/23, and this includes -

- Chapel entrance resurfacing
- Book of Remembrance Room Refurbishment
- External redecoration – rolling programme
- North Chapel enhancement programme
- Crematory area security works

Other works authorised include –

- Waiting rooms improvement
- Signage updating
- Bulk store for grounds maintenance
- Garden shelter maintenance
- Garden memorial installation
- Roof repairs and improvements*
- Lighting upgrade with energy efficient fittings*

- Staff area improvements*

* On hold whilst cremator replacement scheme is developed.

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 3,177 registered cremations (an increase of 144 from the 3,033 cremations undertaken in 2021/22).

(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;
- Designs for further tree sculptures making use of trees that had reached the end of their life.

The Crematorium received the prestigious Gold Award in the 2022 South and South East Britain in Bloom Awards. This is the sixth 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. The contract runs until 1 January 2028.

(h) Provision of a Memorial Tree

At the September 2022 meeting the Joint Committee considered options for various forms of memorial in addition to the long established Book of Remembrance. The Joint Committee, whilst approving the option for provision of a memorial tree in the area close to the Book of Remembrance Room, also agreed that future budget provision be made for metal wall art and post box memorials. The memorial tree includes 240 leaves that can be sold as plaques for engraving.

(i) 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 left in the crematorium grounds. This policy has been re-affirmed on a number of occasions, the most recent being in March 2023 (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.

(j) Recycling of Metals Scheme – Charitable Payments

During last 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 £12,000 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.

(k) 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. Portsmouth's legal and estates services will act on behalf of the Joint Committee in finalising the new lease with Fareham.

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.

8.2 The Joint Committee has been faced with perhaps its biggest decision for many years – the strategy to replace the ageing cremators with new equipment, against a background of rising fuel costs, new technologies, concern for the environment and a carbon reduction strategy. The Joint Committee has unanimously agreed a replacement strategy using natural gas, with the programme seeing on-site works and the new cremators brought into operation during 2024.

8.3 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, including now a move to 45 minute service time slots and increased use of web casting.

8.4 This year, as in the past, attention has continued to focus 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. Although since the pandemic it has gradually become possible to accelerate the rate of the repairs and renewals programme some items have now had to be put on hold until works to accommodate the new cremators have been completed. It has been a challenging period. Looking forward the Crematorium will need to meet new challenges that have been identified and to develop the opportunities to ensure that Portchester's much valued facilities and services continue to serve successfully the residents of the four local authorities and beyond.

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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 2023