



**REPORT TO: THE PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
24 JUNE 2024**

REPORT BY: CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

**PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE –
ANNUAL REPORT – 2023/24**

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 2023/24 financial year.

2. Recommended that this Annual Report for the 2023/24 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 2023/24 financial year was –

Councillor Joanne Burton (Fareham BC)
Councillor Susan Walker (Fareham BC)
Councillor June Cully (Gosport BC) Vice Chairman
Councillor Alan Scard (Gosport BC)
Councillor Lulu Bowerman (Havant BC) Chairman
Councillor Liz Fairhurst (Havant BC)
Councillor Lee Hunt (Portsmouth CC)
Councillor Hugh Mason (Portsmouth CC)

The chair and vice-chairmanship rotates between authorities annually.

3.4 The Joint Committee met on the following 4 occasions during the 2023/24 financial year in the North Chapel at Portchester Crematorium, and at the Civic Offices, Fareham:

26 June 2023 25 September 2023 11 December 2023 18 March 2024

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, although during cremators replacement work the committee will be recommended to meet at the Civic Offices, Fareham.

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 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 2023 a private proposal to develop a crematorium on a site at Brune Lane, (currently owned by Lee-on-the-Solent golf course) at Stubbington, with the aim of serving the Gosport and surrounding area was granted planning permission. It is acknowledged that this facility when developed and operational 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 six cremators which at that time were some 34 years

old, and whilst they had been well maintained they had now reached the end of their useful life.

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

6.3 Following procurement, Facultatieve Technologies Ltd (FT) has been appointed to supply and install the four new gas cremators and associated equipment. Vale Southern has been appointed to carry out the building works and alterations to facilitate installation of the new equipment. Reports on progress with planning the project and financial monitoring have been submitted to each Joint Committee meeting. Costs currently remain within the allocated budget of £4.5m.

6.4 The programme envisages that work to facilitate and install the new cremators will be undertaken in two phases. Phase 1 (that will include structural works, removal of four cremators and provision of two new cremators, abatement equipment and hold over facilities) was due to commence on 3 May 2024 and would continue until late Autumn/December 2024. Phase 2 comprising removal of the remaining two old cremators, provision of the remaining two new cremators and abatement equipment, and associated structural works, is programmed to commence in April 2025 and be completed by October 2025.

6.5 Work will be taking place when necessary outside of funeral service hours to ensure minimal impact on those attending the crematorium.

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 11 December 2023, approved a comprehensive Finance Strategy for 2024/25, 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 2023 meeting also approved the revenue budget for 2024/25 together with a revised capital works programme, and the repairs and renewals programme for 2023/24 & 2024/25. In considering the revenue budget full note was taken of utility costs, with CPI being at 6.7% for September 2023, 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 set the levels of fees and charges to be operable from the 1 April 2024 being the start of the 2024/25 financial year.

The Committee's actual income and revenue expenditure (for the financial year ending 31 March 2023) was reviewed and noted by the Joint Committee in June 2023.

(b) Annual Financial Return for 2022/23

During June 2023 Joint Committee members received and subsequently published the annual financial return for 2022/23.

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

The Joint Committee in December 2022 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.

(d) The Fountain Area and the Garden of Contemplation – Feasibility Study

An option to remove the fountain and replace with planting to significantly improve the appearance of the area in the short term, at an estimated cost of £75,000, was agreed on 26 June 2023. At that Joint Committee meeting members had been advised on the results of a feasibility study into options to develop the existing fountain area, including proposals for a new Garden of Contemplation and related works including the opportunity for further tree memorials or frieze arrangement. Other works would include new exit arrangements for the South and North chapels. The scheme would give a significant improvement to the facilities provided at the crematorium for those attending services and for acts of remembrance. The proposals include the creation of a new courtyard garden designed to encourage wildlife in place of the existing conservatory in the South Chapel thus providing a large picture window viewing area onto a natural environment for those attending services.

The early costings showed the scheme at between £1.5m and £3m at 2023 construction costs. There are currently insufficient funds within the capital budget for a scheme of this magnitude due to existing commitments, primarily the cremators replacement programme. Apart from agreeing the short term

fountain option, the Joint Committee has also asked for an update report on a review of the proposals with revised costs and an update on the funding.

(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 2023/24, and this includes -

- Chapel entrance resurfacing
- Waiting rooms improvement
- Bulk store for grounds maintenance
- Garden memorial installation
- External redecoration – rolling programme

Other works authorised include –

- Signage updating
- Garden shelter maintenance
- Roof repairs and improvements
- Lighting upgrade with energy efficient fittings*
- Staff area improvements*

* On hold whilst cremator replacement scheme is undertaken.

(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 2881 registered cremations (a decrease of 296 from the 3,177 cremations undertaken in 2022/23).

(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 2023 South and South East Britain in Bloom Awards. This is the seventh 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. Portchester was also recognised as the overall winner in the cemetery/crematorium category.

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

During the year a memorial tree comprising 240 maple leaves that can be sold as plaques for engraving has been installed in the grounds. In addition to the tree we have installed 2 friezes on the floral tribute stand to the side of the book room, with plaques for engraving, and are now able to start memorial sales in the new financial year. At the September 2023 the Joint Committee approved the fees and charges payable.

Future budget provision is being made for additional friezes and a post box memorial. These forms of memorial are in addition to the long-established Book of Remembrance.

(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 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 continuing to hold 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.

At the meeting in September 2023 the Joint Committee approved and adopted a revision of the Contract Procedure Rules that had been updated to reflect current best practice. Also at this meeting the Joint Committee approved, as part of its annual review, a revised Risk Management Framework and Policy Statement.

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 During the year the Joint Committee has been faced with overseeing implementation of the detailed scheme approved in September 2022 to replace the ageing cremators with new natural gas equipment. This monitoring and oversight will continue as the programme will see on-site works and the new cremators brought into operation in two phases during 2024 and 2025.

8.3 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 continue to be put on hold until works to accommodate the new cremators have been completed. It will continue to be 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
31 May 2024