

PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Joint Committee held in the Collingwood Room, Civic Offices, Fareham on Monday 24 June 2024 at 2.00 pm.

Present

Fareham Borough Council

Councillor Ian Bastable
Councillor Joanne Burton

Gosport Borough Council

Councillor June Cully
Councillor Tony Jessop

Havant Borough Council

Councillor Grainne Rason
Councillor Amy Restull

Portsmouth City Council

Councillor Hugh Mason

Welcome and Introductions

New members were welcomed to the meeting and officers serving the Joint Committee and members were introduced.

Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Councillor Suzy Horton (Portsmouth City Council), and Andy Wannell (Treasurer)

1032 Appointment of Chairman (AI 2)

RESOLVED that Councillor June Cully (Gosport Borough Council) be appointed Chairman for the municipal year 2024/25.

(Councillor June Cully in the Chair)

1033 Appointment of Vice-Chairman (AI 3)

RESOLVED that Councillor Hugh Mason (Portsmouth City Council) be appointed vice-chairman for the municipal year 2024/25.

1034 Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 4) – None

1035 Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 March 2024 (AI 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 18 March 2024 be signed as a correct record.

1036 Matters Arising from the Minutes not specifically referred to on the Agenda (AI 6)

Minute 1028 – Memorial Tree and Memorial Frieze

The Manager and Registrar circulated a leaflet promoting the memorial plaques now available at the Crematorium, which would also be advertised on the crematorium website.

1037 Clerk's Items (AI 7) - None

1038 Annual Return for the Financial Year Ended 31 March 2024 (AI 8)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE TREASURER)

In submitting her report the Deputy Treasurer amplified its key points, explaining in particular that it together with the Annual Governance Statement was an integral part of the Joint Committee's governance arrangements.

In response to questions arising from members the Deputy Treasurer highlighted the following main points –

- Pensions Reserve – an amendment to the 2022/23 column figures in respect of the following two entries –

Actuarial gain/loss	£864,000
Contributions to liabilities	- £244,000

- Although staff costs mentioned in section 4 of the accounting statement had increased over 2022/23 by a very small amount this was as a result of various of factors that had increased the previous year's usual costs including absence cover and severance;
- The cremation figure of 2,881 related to the financial year 2023/24, whereas for industry wide reporting purposes a calendar year figure would be quoted, and although this would exceed 3,000, overall the number of cremations undertaken at Portchester had fallen;
- The crematorium's fixed asset value is undertaken by an external valuer periodically with the next valuation likely to take account of the new replacement cremators having been installed or installed in part, with existing fixed assets having been removed. Year-end accounting will reflect these changes including the most recent relining of cremators to ensure resilience of the service during the cremators' replacement programme which is being depreciated over a two year rather than 10 year period;

- Whilst gas prices continue to be unstable the Crematorium has had in place for many years procurement arrangements through the local authority Crown Commercial Service framework to ensure purchase at the best price available.

RESOLVED that the Annual Return for the financial year ending 31 March 2024 be approved and signed as appropriate, as follows -

- (a) Section 1 - Accounting Statements for Portchester Crematorium Joint Committee be approved and signed;**
- (b) Section 2 - Annual Governance Statement be approved and signed;**
- (c) That the Income and Expenditure Statement for the Year ended 31 March 2024 and Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2024 be noted.**

1039 Portchester Crematorium Joint Committee – Annual Report – 2023/24 (AI 9)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE CLERK TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE)

In respect of Item 7(d) the Fountain area and Garden of Contemplation, members were advised that the short-term option for the fountain area had now been undertaken, with the fountain’s removal having taken place and planned planting. Officers would be meeting to consider options and costings that could be brought forward for a staged implementation of the result of the feasibility study previously considered in June 2023.

RESOLVED that the annual report for the 2023/24 financial year be received and approved and it be sent for information to each constituent authority.

1040 Building Repairs and Renewal Programme (AI 10)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER)

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

1041 Replacement of Cremators – Update Report (AI 11)

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER)

In submitting his report the Property Manager highlighted its main points, and in response to members questions the Joint Committee was advised that –

- The work being undertaken was not having any direct effect upon those attending services at the crematorium, nor the number of services taking place. A ‘heather border’ large vinyl picture was being used to screen a working area at the northern end of the site, and a builders’ compound had been established in part of the external car park;

- Although a holdover facility was being provided this would not be used for any funeral where there had been an advance request to use the viewing room;
- Members were reminded of the careful calculations and modelling that had been undertaken based on existing and projected cremation numbers that had determined a need for 4 cremators and how the work on removal of existing cremators and replacement could be achieved with minimal risk;
- The risk assessment that had been undertaken to ensure resilience of the crematorium operation throughout the entirety of the cremators' replacement works, which had included for example the previous relining of one of the soon to be decommissioned cremators, and cremator engineers working on site.

RESOLVED that the Joint Committee notes the written progress report for the period March 2024 – May 2024 and the verbal update.

**1042 Manager and Registrar's Report (AI 12) -
(a) General Statistical Report for March 2024 – May 2024**

(TAKE IN REPORT OF THE MANAGER AND REGISTRAR)

In submitting her report the Manager mentioned that –

- the slight fall in cremations was in line with industry figures reported by funeral directors.
- although the statistical information showed a figure of some 72% of ashes being removed, this was a figure derived at the time of cremation, with many sets of ashes being subsequently brought back to the crematorium for scattering;
- the average gas consumption for each cremation had now fallen from 70cu.m to 55cu.m;
- the Obitus web casting and visual tributes service was continuing to be very popular.

NOTED

(b) Other items of topical interest – Statutory Medical Examiner Scheme – Implementation from September 2024

The Manager explained that the Medical Examiner Scheme would commence nationally on the 9 September, whereby every death would be considered by a medical examiner or the coroner irrespective of whether the deceased was to be cremated or buried. The Medical Referee role (in respect of all cremations) would continue for a transitional period, still to be determined, but with a 6 months' notice period when the role was to end, after which the medical referee fee would no longer apply. The medical examiner service would be part of the NHS but there was no indication whether in future a fee might be introduced. **NOTED**

1043 Crematorium Grounds – General Update (AI 13)

(TAKE IN REPORT)

Steve Uden from Portsmouth City Council's Parks and Leisure Service was introduced, who had now been appointed Horticultural Consultant for the Crematorium, as part of his duties with the Council.

In response to questions, members were advised that the Crematorium Manager had requested the use of sustainable planting in the former water feature area, which could be moved elsewhere in due course.

The tree inspection and condition survey was likely to be undertaken in the next 6/7 months. This would reveal whether any trees required felling. At present tree work was needed in respect of removing some deadwood and possibly in the future planting some smaller light native trees.

RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

1044 Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED that the Joint Committee next meets at 2pm on the following dates at the Civic Offices, Fareham -

**Monday 23 September 2024,
Monday 9 December 2024,
Monday 17 March 2025,
Monday 23 June 2025**

The Meeting concluded at 3.04pm

Chairman

JH/me
26 June 2024
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