

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Portchester Crematorium Joint Committee

Date: 15 December 2014

Report of: Treasurer to the Joint Committee

Subject: FINANCE STRATEGY AND BUDGET FOR 2015/16

SUMMARY

At its meeting on 9 December 2013, the Joint Committee approved the Finance Strategy and the revenue budget for 2014/15.

The Finance Strategy for 2015/16 has been prepared and is attached as appendix A of this report, for the Joint Committee's consideration.

The updated Finance Strategy provides a clear overview of the Joint Committee's financial framework and provides added assurance to the Committee and to the constituent authorities that sound and effective arrangements are in place to manage the Crematorium's finances.

Subject to approval, the Finance Strategy will be sent to the constituent authorities. Any comments received from them in response to the strategy will be brought back to the Joint Committee and, if appropriate, incorporated into the strategy when it is reviewed again.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) That the Finance Strategy 2015/16, attached as Appendix A to this report, be approved;
- (b) That the Finance Strategy 2015/16 be sent to the constituent authorities to note.

PORTCHESTER CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

FINANCE STRATEGY AND BUDGET FOR 2015/16

INTRODUCTION

1. The Portchester Crematorium was opened on 27 September 1958 and is the busiest crematorium in south-east Hampshire. It is managed by a Joint Committee of eight councillors, two from each of the constituent authorities of Fareham, Gosport, Havant and Portsmouth.
2. The key financial policies of the Joint Committee are set out in the Portchester Crematorium Development Plan – a document that is revisited and reviewed approximately every two years, supported by approved Financial Regulations.
3. The current Development Plan was approved by the Joint Committee on 11 March 2013 and covers the period from 2013 to 2018.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

4. The main focus of prudent financial management is the Joint Committee's Finance Strategy, the overall objective of which is to structure and manage the Joint Committee's financial resources to ensure that they match and support the achievement of the Joint Committee's objectives.
5. At the same time the strategy must ensure that the requirement to set a balanced budget is fully met and that the Joint Committee is able to respond to year-on-year changes and short-term service delivery issues.
6. This can be difficult to achieve when faced with increasing expenditure and one main source of income that is directly affected by fluctuations in the mortality rate and increased local competition.
7. To overcome these difficulties there are a number of fundamental principles that are followed by the Joint Committee and which form the basis of the Finance Strategy.

THE FUNDAMENTAL POLICIES

8. These fundamental and long-standing policies (set out in the following paragraph) on which the Joint Committee's Finance Strategy is based are subject to annual review as part of the budget process:
 - (i) Sufficient reserves and provisions will continue to be made to ensure that:
 - (a) no precept will be required from the constituent authorities within the foreseeable future and;
 - (b) all anticipated capital works can be funded from revenue income.

(ii) That subject to (i) above, an optimum annual contribution be available for re-distribution to each of the constituent authorities.

9. The distribution of the annual contribution in this way is effectively recognition of the significant original investment by each of the authorities in the Crematorium. These payments also assist them indirectly to support their own cemeteries and bereavement services.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT

10. The function of treasury management is to support the funding of the Joint Committee's planned capital works, which should be funded from revenue income. To earmark resources for this purpose any surplus funds are invested with Fareham Borough Council at 0.5% below base rate.

FINANCIAL PLANNING

11. The financial planning process supports the preparation of this Finance Strategy and gives the necessary flexibility to allow the Joint Committee to consider objectives and priorities, as well as the maintenance of service standards and the scope for improvements where necessary, but at the same time seeking to minimise the increase in the overall net budget and the fees and charges for cremation.
12. The Finance Strategy, revenue budget and capital programme are the subject of a report to the Joint Committee by the Treasurer each December.

BUDGETARY CONTROL AND REPORTING

13. An essential pre-requisite of good financial management is to ensure that everyone with responsibility for the control of budgets has access to up to date information on the budgets for which they are responsible to inform their decision making and ensure that strict control of budgets is maintained.
14. Budgets are monitored by the Finance staff on a weekly basis and significant variances are brought to the attention of the appropriate officer and to the Treasurer.
15. Budgetary control information is provided to the Treasurer on a daily basis in respect of revenue expenditure and monthly in respect of capital expenditure.

BUDGET RESPONSIBILITIES

16. Responsibility for budgets rests formally with the Joint Committee but there are arrangements in place as part of the Constitution that delegates certain responsibilities to the officers.

Joint Committee

17. The Joint Committee has the general responsibility for setting the policy and budget framework and must ensure the following:

- Spending plans are approved in accordance with the projected resources of the Joint Committee;
- Approved revenue budgets, capital programmes and the level of fees and charges are in accordance with the Finance Strategy;
- Supplementary estimates are only approved after consideration of the Joint Committee's overall financial position.

The Appointed Officers

18. The Appointed Officers have general responsibility for the preparation of the detailed estimates of expenditure and income and the proposed fees and charges are prepared within the context of the Finance Strategy for approval by the Joint Committee.
19. They must also ensure that expenditure is only incurred if it forms part of the revenue budget or capital programme and that the overall revenue budget and capital programme are not exceeded.
20. Any decision to reallocate revenue or capital budgets from one service to another should not exceed the virement rules.

THE OVERALL FINANCIAL POSITION

21. Adherence to these fundamental policies means that the Joint Committee is in a strong financial position and able to meet all planned expenditure from income. Since 1999-2000 the Joint Committee has achieved sufficient surpluses to allow an amount to be distributed to each of the constituent authorities.
22. During 2013/14, however, the operating environment of Portchester Crematorium has significantly changed, with the opening of 'The Oaks', a private crematorium facility in the district of East Hampshire, very close to the border with the borough of Havant. The risk that this facility poses to the operation at Portchester has been fully evaluated and a report detailing measures to develop and enhance our service was presented to the Joint Committee in September 2013 when all of the recommendations were approved.
23. Considered reductions in revenue were allowed for in the budget for 2014/15, based on a 30% annual reduction in the number of cremations at Portchester once the new crematorium opened. The impact on revenue income to the crematorium has been closely monitored throughout the 2014/15 financial year to date and compared with a ten year average of cremation numbers it is hoped that the reduction will not be as high as 30% in the opening year of the new crematorium. In the first half of 2014/15 the reduction against the ten year average figure is approximately 15%, although it is likely that this figure will increase over time as the new crematorium becomes more established.
24. In December 2014 a decision was made to maintain the 2014/15 payment to each authority at the same level as for 2013/14 at £150,000 whilst the impact of on actual revenue levels could be monitored. In order to preserve the payment to each authority the budgeted contribution to the Capital Works Fund was

reduced in 2013/14 and in 2014/15 no budget provision for this contribution was made. It was acknowledged that this situation would be reviewed in order to provide a sustainable level of investment in the capital works fund to meet future demand for the crematorium, whilst taking into account the need to keep the constituent authorities informed of the impact of proposed reductions in the payment made to them.

25. In light of the level of reduced cremations and related income it is proposed that the payment to the constituent authorities is reduced over a two year period, initially to £125,000 in 2015/16 and to £100,000 in 2016/17.

THE CAPITAL POSITION

26. To ensure that sufficient resources are in place to finance all anticipated capital works, an annual contribution is made out of revenue income to the Committee's Capital Works Fund.
27. The Capital Works Fund as at 1 April 2014 was £830,000. In order to preserve the payment to each authority in 2014/15 there was no budgeted contribution to the Capital Works Fund. In view of the reduction in cremation numbers not being as high as initially anticipated and a reduced programme of repairs and renewal it will be possible to include a budgeted contribution of £230,000 for 2014/15 as part of the revised budget. In order to replenish the Capital Works Fund to levels that will meet future demands of the crematorium a budget of £330,000 will be included in the budget for 2015/16.
28. The Joint Committee also approves annually a programme of repairs and renewal work. To finance this expenditure an annual contribution is made from revenue income to the Repairs and Renewals Fund to ensure that these works are fully funded. The Repairs and Renewals Fund as at 1 April 2014 was £120,000. The programme of works has been reduced for 2014/15 and therefore the budgeted contribution will be reduced by £30,000 to supplement the contribution to be made to the Capital Works Fund. The budgeted contribution for 2014/15 will remain at £80,000.

THE REVENUE POSITION

29. It is the Joint Committee's policy to maintain a significant Revenue Reserve in order to deal with fluctuations in revenue income and expenditure that are outside of the Joint Committee's control.
30. The principal fluctuations are variations in the number of cremations, external competition and the significant variations in energy costs.
31. The Revenue Reserve is an accumulation of budget surpluses from previous years and was approximately £141,402 as at 1 April 2014, being 5.35% of gross expenditure for 2013/14.
32. It is prudent to maintain the level of this reserve at over £100,000.

FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT

33. Each year the revenue budget is prepared on a going-concern basis, taking account of current and previous year's activity as well as changes that are known to occur in the future that will have a bearing on the forecast for the financial year ahead. Changes in the crematorium's operating environment that impact on the current revenue budget are taken into account as part of the revised budget preparation.
34. The revenue reserve provides a small retained resource to meet unforeseen costs or changes in activity. Measures are also considered throughout the year in order to preserve the Joint Committee's income streams and keep costs to a minimum.

SUMMARY

35. Historically, Portchester Crematorium has always strived to provide the best quality of service that it can and to achieve this, the Joint Committee is committed to the maintenance of high standards in relation to both staff performance and to the maintenance, repair and improvement of the Crematorium infrastructure.
36. In addition increases in cremation charges have been kept to a minimum with the current charge being the lowest in Hampshire and well below the national average.
37. The principles of financial management set out in the Finance Strategy continue to support the achievement of these aims and objectives by ensuring that the Joint Committee remains in a strong financial position, able to meet all planned expenditure from income.