

# Minutes



## Gwent Cremation Joint Committee

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Date: 24 May 2023

Time: 10am

**Present:** Councillors Y. Forsey (Chair), L. Lacey (NCC), S Evans (Torfaen) Lane (Monmouthshire), Elizabeth Bryant (Head of Law and Standards), Phillip Toms, Joanne Hazelwood (Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities), Joanne Gossage (The Service Manager Environment & Leisure) Karl Donavon (Newport Norse), Meirion Rushworth (Head of Finance), Councillor J Taylor (Caerphilly).

Apologies:

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### 1. Apologies

### 2. Declarations of Interest

N/A

### 3. Minutes

The Head of Law and Standards noted some accuracy corrections but informed the committee that this would be dealt with outside the meeting.

### 4. Draft Accounts Report 2022-23

Presented by Joanne Hazlewood (Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities)

#### Key Points

The purpose of bringing the report to the committee was to have the draft accounts approved as well as the annual returns approved in preparation for the audit.

It has also been proposed to the committee to approve a 1 of distribution payment of £450,000.

The Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities would like any decision to be made after the Managers Report agenda item is presented.

The draft outcome was expected to be £478,000 at the last committee meeting, however the draft outturn position is now £678,000.

The reserve balance brought over into 2022/23 was just over 1 million, the agreed budget took the balance down to £832,000, although with the outturn it has resulted in a 1.2 million budget.

1.2m balance- expenditure – reduced staff cost due to agency staff covering a vacancy

The Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities noted that repair works such as relining 2 cremators that cost a total of £118,000 and the replacement of filter bags and filter bases at the cost of £20000, also it was highlighted that future repairs and renewals would be brought to the committee when they occur.

Capital financing showed an underspend due to proposed works not taking place during the financial year.

The Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities noted that 6 was average cremation a day with the max being around 7 a day.

Towards the end of the year there was an increase in cremation with it levelling out at the end of the year.

Time slots were increased to an hour and fees were also reduced.

Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities highlighted that once the maximum level of services provided is reached there wouldn't be a high increase in revenue.

Finance Business Partner - Systems with Finance IT Project responsibilities raised the options presented to the committee was to agree the reserve balance, agree an additional £450,000 to reduce the balance to £800,000.

The Head of Finance noted there was some unexpected costs and options were brought to their attention.

The Head of Finance noted the additional one-off payment could be brought back to the committee at a later date in the year.

The Committee proposed looking at the one-off payment once more information could be provided on it.

The Committee approved the Annual Return.

The Head of Finance noted recently there was some extra costs.

Councillor Evans agreed to look at the one-off payment at a later date.

Councillor Taylor felt it was sensible to keep things as they were until it was clear of the costs that the work may require.

The Chair highlighted all the members' agreement and noted to the Officers the desire to defer the decision until a later date.

## **5. Facilities Management**

Presented by Karl Donavon (Newport Norse Representative)

### Key Points

K. Donavon highlighted repairs to the fencing and fire alarms, as well as noting that work was underway for the new toilets and waiting area.

Phase two will commence once phase one has been completed.

K. Donavon noted that in the next meeting he would encourage members to see the finished works.

The Chair asked when the works would be completed?

- K. Donavon informed the committee that he was unsure of the specific date however he was aware that they are working on schedule.

The chair followed up by asking if the building was still running?

- K. Donavon noted there was no clear disruption.
- J. Gossage (the service manager Environment & Leisure) informed the committee the first service starts at 11:30am.

## **6. Funeral Directors Report**

Phil Tom wanted to defer this agenda item until a policy on the splitting of remains has been looked into.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure would like this to be taken away looked at and brought to the next meeting.

Phil Tom noted that there had been no negative feedback in relation to the building works that were occurring.

## **7. Managers' report**

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure noted a drop in attendance once other crematoriums began to open, with the 2021-22 figures referred back to.

With the time of the cremations increasing to 1 hour time slot this led to an increase in attendance.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure highlighted that the recent inspection by the Burial and Cremation Authority had been very positive, with full compliance achieved as well as complimentary comments being made towards the staff and the crematorium.

The Chair asked about the report in which it stated the crematorium doesn't offer a longer service.

- The Service Manager Environment & Leisure informed the committee that this would be in reference to the crematorium not offering 2-hour slots.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure informed the committee of the several staffing matters, that include the replacement of an Administrative Support role and a Cremator Operator.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure also informed the committee of the resignation of Karen Sansom the Team Manager of the Bereavement Team as of June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, with the position being advertised as soon as possible.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure would like to know if the committee is happy to send a letter of thanks to the long servicing member.

- The Committee agreed to this.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure went on to state another staffing issue as Paul Dundon is currently unwell and it is not clear when he would be able to be fully active in his role. Therefore, it was suggested to externally source a temporary cremation manager.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure would like the committee to approve the recruitment posts as well as the external sourcing of a temporary manager.

- Councillor Taylor noted he was happy to agree to this.
- The Chair also agreed to this request.

Councillor Evans asked about the urgency in hiring the roles as it relates to which ones will be sought to be filled first.

- The Service Manager Environment & Leisure informed the members that both the interim manager and deputy will be sought after at the same time although the interim manager position may be fulfilled sooner.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure did confirm she would be meeting with Paul to figure out his plans, with this being reported back to the committee.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure reported that the 12-week contract for the work on the waiting room and toilets had been conducted in the early hours to avoid as much disruption as possible.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure also confirmed the first time slot begins at 11:30am

The Chair wanted to give thanks to the workers.

- K. Donavon noted he will pass this onto the workers.

Councillor Evans would like the staff to be informed of the positive report.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure informed the committee of the works in 2020 which involved relining 2 of the cremators as well as replacing the boilers.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure detailed to the committee that during the servicing visit some critical issues were noted with the other 2 cremators with both requiring the filtration bags and dans costing £15,000 and £40,000 respectively.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure noted that immediate action will be needed to keep those 2 cremators in action.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure further went on to detail that of these cremators both would need relining within the next 2 years as well as the boiler for these cremators, totalling a cost of £250,000.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure also noted technical issues with the consoles that control the cremators. Further going on to explain that the FT3 is the newer model of cremators.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure detailed the extent to which the newer model is superior such as its larger size, and the creation of less emissions, which would lead to reduced pollution and allow the crematorium to take in larger coffins.

The Service Manager Environment & Leisure would like the committee to agree to allowing an information search on the costs and benefits of both the works required compared to switching from the two FT2 to one FT3.

Councillor Evans questioned whether by reducing from 4 cremators to 3 would that reduce services?

- The Service Manager Environment & Leisure noted that two cremators are in constant use with the 3<sup>rd</sup> serving as a backup and the fourth rarely being used.

Councillor Tudor affirmed that due to cremation being in a competitive market, it would be worth looking if Gwent wants to keep up with the times.

P. Toms highlighted that with the population getting larger in physical size, the funeral home has taken measures by increasing the casket size they cater for, noting that any casket above 31 inches in diameter will go to the private crematorium in Langstone.

The Chair asked if the boilers were gas powered.

- The Service Manager Environment & Leisure noted that the boilers are connected to the system and are powered by gas.

The Chair wanted to know if there were any eco-friendly options for the boilers.

- The Service Manager Environment & Leisure informed the chair they could find this out, as well as highlighting that the newer model is less harmful to the environment.
- The Service Manager Environment & Leisure also noted the new cremator has an integral boiler and not external.

The Chair would like a cremator with reduced emissions looked at, as well as the use of solar panels.

Councillor Evans noted that it is the right time to be looking at a more modern and cost-effective machine.

- The Service Manager Environment & Leisure noted that a more efficient machine would reduce emissions.

The Chair asked about whether Blaenau Gwent is chairing the meetings.

The Head of Law and Standards noted they will chase this up.

The Chair also asked when the next change over for chairs is?

The Head of Law and Standards informed the chair they will look to resolve this.

Councillor Taylor noted that the changeover used to occur in the September meeting.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting.**

To be confirmed at a later date.