

MINUTES OF RUGBY AND DAVENTRY CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

8 JANUARY 2019

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee: Councillor Robertson (Daventry District Council)
Councillor Mrs Lomax (Daventry District Council)
Councillor Mrs Parker (Rugby Borough Council)

Officers: Dan Green (Head of Environment and Public Realm)
Lisa Handy (Bereavement Services Manager)
Ruth Barnett (Principal Accountant)
Lisa Marshall (Senior Finance Officer)
Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer) - Rugby Borough Council
Simon Bowers (Executive Director (Business)) – Daventry District Council
Julie Lewis (Contracts and Performance Manager) – Daventry District Council

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2018 were approved and signed.

15. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor Ms Robbins (Chairman) and the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Mrs Lomax, took the chair for the meeting.

16. CREMATORIUM FINANCIAL MONITORING AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) 2018/19 – APRIL TO NOVEMBER 2018

The Joint Committee considered a report concerning the finance and performance for the crematorium for the period April – November 2018.

Progress against the target for total number of cremations held at Rainsbrook as at the end of October 2018 was 56.5 per cent compared to a figure of 52.6 per cent for last year.

The number of cremations was ahead of target compared to profiled budgets to the end of November 2018.

There had been two complaints recorded that had both been resolved and around forty written compliments. Most compliments received were verbal, and these were not easily recorded, so there were no figures available.

The majority of complaints related to people walking dogs being asked to put them on a lead. Councillors requested that feedback from the crematorium be

incorporated into a consultation exercise carried out by Rugby BC on the topic of Public Spaces Protection Orders.

The level of CO₂ emissions per cremation was a new measure being incorporated into the report. A Health and Safety Audit due to be carried by environmental health officers from Daventry DC was yet to be completed. Officers had carried out a site-visit at the crematorium and it was reported they were pleased with what had been seen so far.

It was acknowledged that there had been no RIDDOR reportable incidents and a pro-active approach was being taken to monitoring ensuring that good working practises and measures were in place to meet health and safety standards. Expertise from both authorities was being shared.

It had previously been agreed that the outcomes and actions from the audit would be reported to the Joint Committee and monitored on an ongoing basis.

Although the audit was not considered a priority, the Executive Director undertook to remind officers from Daventry DC that this was still to be scheduled.

The financial position remained positive with no overspends reported and an anticipated increase in the profit share of £16,700 each for Rugby BC and Daventry DC, according to the current year-end forecast.

The current financial forecast assumes 935 cremations will be carried out by year-end based on the final number of cremations carried out for 2017/18 and trend data for 2018/19.

The demand for use of the chapel continued to remain high. The estimated income to year-end was £9,000 compared to the annual budget of £800. It was expected that the budget would be increased for the next financial year.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

17. PROPOSED MUNICIPAL FUNERAL SERVICE

The Joint Committee considered a revised report concerning a proposed municipal style funeral service.

The proposal was aimed at offering residents of Rugby and Daventry an affordable and dignified alternative to services provided by funeral directors. It would also help address the issues associated with funeral poverty.

It was acknowledged that people did not tend to shop around and did not question costs or fees, which varied between funeral directors.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) offers some means tested financial support for eligible families to cover funeral expenses, but this was only around £750.

In certain circumstances, local authorities undertook the funerals of deceased persons who had died within their district and a simple funeral service is then provided. However, there is often a stigma attached to these.

The proposed scheme was based on a low-cost all-inclusive package based on a fixed price. There would be no effect on income streams for the councils as cremation and interment fees would remain the same. However, some concerns were raised that there would be staff resource implications.

Staff time and administration costs were already built into the fees and charges and the role of the Bereavement Services Manager included project work.

A procurement exercise would be undertaken to appoint a funeral director to provide the service. It was acknowledged that there would be some risk to the profit margin for the appointed funeral director, but there would still be a financial and reputational benefit.

Care would be needed as local authorities should not be seen to be competing with local businesses. However, the scheme would be cost neutral and the councils would not be making a profit.

A concern was raised about the response from funeral directors that were not awarded the contract and the Committee were informed that discussions had been held with local funeral directors. The simple funerals being offered were still expensive and the professional fees and charging structures varied enormously.

Members commented that with the high street disappearing due to the increase in online shopping, funeral services available online had begun appearing and consideration should be given to this in the longer term.

Concerns were raised that the offer of a low-cost funeral service open to anyone regardless of their circumstances would not fully address the issue of funeral poverty. There would be no eligibility criteria and the option would be available to anyone.

The funeral industry was not regulated but introducing a low-cost scheme would help enable the market to operate more effectively, and consequently, would assist people in poverty.

The scheme could be viewed as a tool for other local authorities and the partial funding of funerals could be considered that would still cover the fees and costs.

There would be no benefit to restricting the scheme to residents from Rugby and Daventry only and this would be difficult to administer. Allowing anyone to use the service would allow wider sales opportunities for the appointed funeral director.

Legal and governance advice would be sought as part of the process to develop the scheme.

It was agreed the service should be called the Rainsbrook Funeral Service and there should be no geographical restrictions.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) a detailed pricing structure be developed, and a provide procured; and
- (2) a further report be brought to the Joint Committee for endorsement prior to the new service commencing.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Joint Committee be held at 10.00am on Tuesday 23 April 2019.

19. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC UNDER SECTION 100(A)(4) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

RESOLVED THAT - under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of information defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

20. RAINSBROOK CREMATORIUM BUDGET 2019/20

The Joint Committee considered the private report (Part 2 – agenda item 1) concerning the proposed 2019/20 crematorium budget.

Daventry DC queried the increase in the IT internal recharge and were informed that the main reason was several contracts had been reviewed and renewed which had resulted in increased costs.

The process of implementing a pay review as part of the pay award last year was yet to be finalised and could result in further growth. Details, and any impact for crematorium services, would be forwarded to the Bereavement Services Manager.

RESOLVED THAT - the proposed budget for the crematorium for 2019/20 be approved.

21. PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2019/20

The Joint Committee considered a private report (Part 2- agenda item 2) concerning proposed fees and charges relating to the crematorium for 2019/20.

RESOLVED THAT – the proposed fees and charges for the crematorium for 2019/20, as detailed in the report, be approved.

CHAIRMAN