

## NORTH EAST SURREY CREMATORIUM BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held at Civic Offices, St Nicholas Way, Sutton,  
on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2013 at 10.00 am

**MEMBERS** Merton: Councillors Margaret Brierly, Philip Jones\*,  
(\*absent) Geraldine Stanford

Sutton: Councillors Malcolm Brown, Stanley Theed, and  
Roger Roberts

Wandsworth: Councillors John Farebrother, Claire Clay,  
Mike Ryder\*, Liz Stokes\* one vacancy

### OFFICERS

Charles Ward (Clerk)  
Jean Stevenson (Treasurer)  
Tony McDonald (Surveyor)  
Sarah Gordon (Minute Taker)

Wandsworth Officers:  
Clive Andrews (Bereavement Services Manager)

### 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Ryder, Stokes and Jones. An apology for lateness was received from Councillor Theed.

### 3. MINUTES (11<sup>th</sup> December 2012 Meeting)

3.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2012 were approved without amendment.

### 4. REPORT OF THE SURVEYOR

4.1 **Business Level Activity.** The Surveyor reported that business level activity was 9% higher than for the same period last year. He noted that there had been a wide variance in performance in recent months with September's performance being one of the lowest and November being one of the busiest months ever. As a result of this the Treasurer had maintained the estimate for the current year at 1,720. However the 2013/14 estimate would remain at 1,670.

**Resolved: that this item be received for information.**



## 4.2 Performance Monitoring.

### Quality Control Issues

The Surveyor had no significant quality control issues to report to Members. However, he explained that as a result of recent power surges the existing electrical installations were being surveyed and the circuits tested to ensure that they were not being overused. The key areas being investigated were the audio system, lighting, curtains and cremators as they would directly affect the bereaved and service delivery if there was a power cut.

Councillor Roberts asked whether the local supply board had explained the cause of the power surges. In answer to this Officers advised that the supplier had been experiencing problems locally. Councillor Roberts was of the opinion that Officers should meet with them. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that the Premises Manager from Wandsworth Council had spoken to the supplier, however, he had not had any feedback as yet.

Councillor Clay and Brierly asked whether there had been a previous problem with the power. Officers confirmed that there had been, however, service delivery was not affected.

The Surveyor assured the Board that he was confident that everything was in hand to ensure that service would not be disrupted if there was another power surge.

### Employee Matters

The Surveyor informed Members that Athony Randall, an Administrative Assistant, retired from her employment with Wandsworth Council on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012. Her replacement, Joanne Benjafield, commenced her employment on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

### Health and Safety Matters

The Surveyor had no health and safety matters to bring to Members' attention.

**Resolved: that this item be received for information.**

- 4.3 **Freedom of Information.** Councillor Farebrother opened discussion on the BBC's recently submitted FOI request for information concerning cremation of babies and whether remains were returned to the family. Councillor Brown noted that the BBC had recently reported on this issue.

Councillor Clay asked what usually happened to babies' ashes following cremation. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed

that the bone structure of an infant under two years of age was not developed and therefore if they were cremated there would be no remains to give back to the parents. He added that the Crematorium followed strict ICCM guidelines and that he had detailed conversations with bereaved parents explaining that there would be no remains following a cremation. Cremation figures of this age group are low as usually a burial is preferred.

In answer to Councillor Clay's question as to whether there would be any remains from a three year old child, the Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that there would be as the bone structure would be more developed.

Councillor Stanford queried whether the remains included the coffin, Officers confirmed that they did.

Councillor Clay asked whether the Crematorium had to deal with any of the ash or whether it was all given back to the bereaved. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that with 98% of cremations there is an urn containing ash that has to be dealt with before being passed to the public. He noted further that by arrangement people can be shown around the Crematorium so they can see exactly what happens during a cremation.

Members were informed that 60% of remains were taken away by the bereaved and 40% were scattered at the Crematorium.

**Resolved: that this item be received for information in view of the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the possibility of a programme following.**

- 4.4 **Review of Memorials.** Members were asked for their comments on the memorials presented in the Surveyor's report. The Bereavement Services Manager highlighted the fact that the Board had limited options to expand the variety of memorialisation due to the lack of suitable land that is not affected by ground water flooding.

The Board had no specific comments. Councillor Farebrother asked whether options could also be discussed with Funeral Directors with a view to getting an idea of public preference.

**Resolved: that Officers will bring a programme of works with associated costs to the June meeting.**

- 4.5 **Repair and Renewal – Routine Works.** The Surveyor advised Members that due to health and safety concerns repairs to the rockery pathway would be brought forward to March, weather permitting, instead of forming part of the 2013/14 programme.

**Resolved: that this item be received for information.**



## 5. REPORT OF THE TREASURER

- 5.1 **Management Agreement – performance 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2013 against Annual Budget.** The Treasurer informed the Board that gross expenditure to date was 81% of the revised budget, noting that everything was substantially on line with the Management Agreement.
- 5.2 **Interim Accounts for the Period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2013.** The Treasurer reported that invoices for plant maintenance had not been taken into consideration in the Board's accounts and would mean that the maintenance contingency of £2,000 would be overspent. This extra expenditure was made up of £4,000 for new vents and valves needed for the large cremator which was over compressing causing a leakage around the seals. An added cost of £3,000 followed a recent power surge, which although caused no problems to service delivery, IT equipment was severely damaged and had to be replaced. Councillor Brierly asked whether the IT equipment would be covered by insurance. The Treasurer confirmed that she would make enquiries.

Councillor Roberts thought that the large cremator was purchased on the understanding that it could cope with large caskets. He queried whether the problem was the result of wear and tear or a design fault, which should be paid for by the manufacturer. The Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that the previous Surveyor did not feel it was fair to pass on the cost to the manufacturer as Defra had made slight changes to cremator permits.

Following Councillor Farebrother's query regarding the outstanding payment owed by a Funeral Director, the Treasurer confirmed that a County Court Judgement had been received and Officers were now looking at how to enforce it.

- 5.3 **Review on Internal Control.** The Treasurer advised the Board that two items of weakness had been identified in the Internal Audit Report.

The first item raised concern over the time it takes to publish the minutes on the website. Currently they are not uploaded until after they are approved, which is three months after the meeting to which they refer. The Treasurer sought Members guidance on how to proceed, they in turn asked the Clerk for direction. The Clerk advised uploading the draft minutes on the website stating that they would be subject to approval and possible amendment.

The second item identified was with regards to maintaining an inventory. The Auditors were concerned about issues arising here due to the changeover of staff and the fact that the inventory record in use was dated 2009. A later version dated February 2012 was, however, in existence and held by Internal Audit. The Treasurer noted that due

to staff pressures Officers had not had time to revise the inventory assuring the Board that it would be done.

The Report also highlighted the procedure for disposal of assets and how obsolete items were recorded. The Auditors recommended that a Condemning Officer be appointed to be responsible for this process. The Treasurer said that she would agree with the Bereavement Services Manager how this role would be carried out.

**Resolved: that the Board note the report by Wandsworth Council's Head of Audit.**

## **6. URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent items were discussed.

## **7. DATES AND VENUES OF MEETINGS FOR 2013**

The Chairman confirmed the date of the next meeting as being 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013 starting at 9.30 am at the Crematorium.

The meeting ended at 10.33 am

Chairman:  .....

Dated: ..... 11<sup>th</sup> June ..... 2013

