

NORTH EAST SURREY CREMATORIUM BOARD**Report by the Surveyor to the Board – September 2017****1.0 BUSINESS LEVEL ACTIVITY**

- 1.1 Appendix A to this report provides information on cremation numbers for the past five years and for the first five months of this financial year. Appendix B shows the same information in a graph.

This item is for information.

2.0 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 2.1 The performance report for Enable Leisure and Culture, quarter 4, year 2 (August 2017) is sent under separate cover to the surveyors report.
- 2.2 Members will note that the crematorium continues to meet all of its requirements in accordance with its permit to cremate. Arrangements are in place to begin the installation of above ground niches on the second of the two new areas within the Garden of Remembrance. Random samples of paperwork taken for cremations were found to be in accordance with cremation regulations with the correct fees levied. The crematorium retained its 'Gold Status' in this year's Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Managements Charter for the Bereaved.

This item is for information.

- 3.0 FINANCIAL MATTERS** All financial matters have been correctly reported.

- 4.0 QUALITY CONTROL ISSUES** Two complaints were received in the past quarter, one regarding the chapel's organ and the other relating to items removed / stolen from a cremated remains grave. Both complaints were investigated and replies sent to the complainants in accordance with the crematoriums complaints procedure and timescales.

This item is for information.

- 5.0 EMPLOYEE MATTERS.** Members are asked to note the following:

- 5.1 Claire Darke, Administration Assistant, and Tina King, Crematorium Technician, are both settling well into their respective roles. Tina has begun her studies toward the Cremator Technician's Certificate.

This item is for information.

- 6.0 CUSTOMER STATISTICS.** All statistics have been produced as required.

7.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS.

- 7.1 There have been no reportable Health and Safety issues in the past three months at the crematorium or within its grounds.

This item is for information.

8.0 CREMATION FEES FOR UNDER 18'S

- 8.1 Previous reports provided members with information relating to funeral poverty and the issues faced by the bereaved and those that struggle to meet the cost of a funeral. As a result, a decision was taken to introduce a reduced cremation fee before 10.00am of £267 which came into effect from the 1st January 2017. The current cremation fee after 10.00am is £555.
- 8.2 In 2016 the average cost of a cremation was £3,214¹ therefore the cremation fee represents a relatively small percentage from the array of costs that make up the total cost of a cremation. These costs are divided into two categories; non discretionary fees and discretionary fees. Examples of non discretionary fees include the cremation fee, doctor's fees, arrangements for the deceased, and other essential Funeral Directors costs. Discretionary fees, chosen by the bereaved, include the type of coffin, church services, ministers/celebrant fees, choice of memorial and flowers.
- 8.3 To assist those families eligible for help to pay for a funeral, the government provide assistance through the Social Fund Funeral Expenses Payments (SFFEP) for non discretionary fees. However, the average cost of funeral debt has risen from the 2015 figure of £1,318 to the 2016 figure of £1,601. Overall, funeral poverty now stands at a figure of £147 million².
- 8.4 Attempts are being made to address funeral debt with the emergence of new types of Funeral Directors where associated arrangements for the funeral are kept to a minimum. Examples include using basic materials for the construction of a coffin, funeral services taking place with a minimum number of mourners in attendance and a general reduction in arrangements that add to the cost of a funeral. Funeral Directors, realising there is now this type of competition, are holding their prices and the public are moving toward comparing costs between each Funeral Director.
- 8.5 At the last meeting of the board, members were made aware of a media article regarding the struggle to meet the costs of a funeral. The article involved a mother, who did not have the financial means to meet the cost of her 8 year old son's funeral, being forced to take out a loan to pay for it. The comment included the ordeal faced by families of a premature death combined with the financial burden funding a funeral for a baby, young child or adolescent.
- 8.6 In response to the mother's dilemma, and in keeping with a growing number of local authorities and private funeral operators, the Funeral Director waived the fee. Funeral Directors in this particular area of the country (Cardiff, Swansea and Plymouth) have now scrapped charges for child burials and cremations to cover the funeral costs for people up to 18 years of age.
- 8.7 At the last meeting of the Board members requested information relating to the cremation fees for under-18's in order to consider future charges for this type of cremation. Appendix C shows two tables. The first table provides crematoria in the local area and the fees charged for this type of funeral service. The table also includes charges levied by Funeral

¹ The Royal London National Funeral Cost Index Report 2016

² The Royal London National Funeral Cost Index Report 2016

Directors who are the most frequent users of North East Surrey Crematorium (NESC). The second table provides a breakdown of the number of cremations at NESC in the past 3 years and the associated income.

- 8.8 The fees applied vary from each cremation authority although generally a charge is not imposed up to 10 years of age, and in some cases up to the age of 16. NESC currently charge a fee of £10 for a cremation of an infant up to the age of 90 days and a charge of £50 for a child from the age of 90 days up to twelve years of age. In the past three years the crematorium had an income total of £5,075 for these types of cremations. Should the decision be taken to remove the fee for cremations up to the age of 18, on average, the crematorium would see an income reduction of £1,700 per annum. Based on the average income from cremations in the past three years, this represents 0.19% of all cremation income per annum.
- 8.9 Members are asked if they wish to remain with the cremation fees currently in place or to revert to a nil charge for a 40 minute chapel service and cremation up to the deceased's eighteenth birthday. The Surveyor and members of staff from Enable LC are on hand to answer questions relating to this item.

This item is for decision

9.0 VISITS TO FUNERAL DIRECTORS

- 9.1 Funeral Directors are considered as main stakeholders to the crematorium and it is thought important to maintain visits to their premises. These visits take place on a bi annual basis and provide the opportunity for Funeral Directors and staff to talk about their experiences and expectations from the crematorium and other related matters. The visits also provide the opportunity for the Crematorium Manager to provide information relating to the crematorium and to discuss new developments and facilities which are of benefit to Funeral Directors and the bereaved.
- 9.2 During the months of July and August, over sixty Funeral Directors were visited within the vicinity of the crematorium and areas including Epsom, Kingston, Tadworth, Carshalton and Wallington. Each of the Funeral Directors was asked a series of questions which generally centred on the services currently provided:
- * Were they happy with the services provided by the crematorium?
 - * Was there anything that the crematorium could do better?
 - * How did they find the staff who work there, both in the office and at the crematorium?
 - * Their views on the Wesley music system.
- 9.3 The responses to the questions were reassuring. This was due to the resounding consensus from Funeral Directors that everything appeared to run smoothly and it was rare to have a problem with the crematorium. They were also very impressed with the grounds of the crematorium and how well the Garden of Remembrance is maintained. The Funeral Directors found office staff to be very helpful and any issues with paperwork were resolved immediately. The new Wesley music system was discussed and the response was how much easier it now is to access music rather than using CD's. The general feeling being that the difficulties they once had with CD's not playing on the crematoriums public address equipment were no longer an issue.

9.4 I am pleased to report there are no issues or concerns to report to the Board from visits to the Funeral Directors. This is testament to the staff managing and carrying out the many administrative and operational duties of the crematorium on behalf of North East Surrey Crematorium.

This item is for information.

10.0 ACTION PLAN

10.1 Appendix D provides the Board's current 2017/18 action plan, updated in bold to reflect actions taken since the last meeting.

This item is for information.

11.0 REPAIR AND RENEWAL – ROUTINE WORKS

11.1 Appendix E provides information on the repairs and renewals revenue programme for 2016/17 and 2017/18.

This item is for information.

12.0 REPAIR AND RENEWAL – CAPITAL WORKS

12.1 Appendix F provides information on the capital programme with expenditure requirements forecast through until 2025/26.

12.2 Members are advised that the resurfacing of the main drive was completed week ending 20.08.17. Appendix G provides members with a selection of photographs of the resurfacing works.

12.3 Installation of the Heating System. Despite the intention to carry out certain works whilst the crematorium was closed for services during the resurfacing of the main drive., Regrettably unforeseen delays with the contract being awarded did not allow for both activities to operate simultaneously.

12.4 Pre-contract meetings have since taken place with the appointed contractor regarding the new heating system, to include the installation of a heat exchanger. The work will be completed by the end of October 2017. Having discussed the works in detail with the Council's Design Services, the contractor will work around service times and therefore will not disrupt the operation of the crematorium.

This item is for information.

12th September 2017

Clive Andrews
Surveyor to the Board