

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 25 OCTOBER 2001 AT 1.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Guest (Chairman), Councillors Mrs Bradley, Blackadder, Jefferson, Joscelyne (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Parsons), Morton (as substitute for Councillor Bain) and Prest J

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Bloxham attended the meeting as the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing

CROS.20/01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bain, Mrs Parsons and Mrs Styth.

CROS.21/01 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest and no declarations of the Party Whip relating to any item on the Agenda.

CROS.22/01 REVENUE ESTIMATES 2002/03 CHARGES REVIEW – BEREAVEMENT SERVICES/CREMATORIUM

With reference to Minute CROS.12/01, Councillor Bloxham, the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, attended the meeting to answer questions and discuss the level of charges for Bereavement Services and the Crematorium in general, and in particular, the proposal to increase the level of charges for those services by twice the rate of inflation, as opposed to the proposed rate of increases for other services which were lower.

The Chairman asked Councillor Bloxham to explain the reasoning behind the large increase in Bereavement charges, which was well above the Council policy of inflation plus 1% and the seemingly excessive charges for certain items.

The Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder stated that he had some sympathy with the Committee and emphasised that these figures were being put up for consideration as part of the budget process. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were correct to make clear their views on these figures and at the end of this meeting they should formalise their comments to pass to the Executive.

He referred to a report which had been considered by the Leisure and Community Development Committee in November 2000 which looked at a

Charges Review based on an Auditors Report on Bereavement Services. The charges which were proposed in that report were in response to the Audit Report which highlighted anomalies which had been taking place in charges for the Bereavement Service over a number of years. It suggested that charges needed to be reviewed to address these anomalies. That report was accepted by the Leisure Committee and the Council as policy. The charges in that report were in excess of inflation plus 1%. He advised that there had been previous years when charges had been well in excess of inflation plus 1%.

In response to a question about whether it was anticipated that Bereavement Services would break even or make a loss on Crematorium operations, the Portfolio Holder commented that it was difficult at that stage to make any clear predictions. He commented that although Bereavement Services was not the sort of area where charges were intended to achieve a profit, the level of subsidy which are put into Services must constantly be reviewed and monitored.

In response to a question about how increased Bereavement Services charges were in essence inescapable, whereas charges for other Council services such as leisure facilities could be avoided by the public by simply not using these services, the Portfolio Holder provided details of some specific increases and why they had been proposed and again he emphasised that the Scrutiny Committee should make its views clear to the Executive on the budgetary figures.

The Chairman then thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the Executive be told that the Committee was concerned at the rate of increase in charges for Bereavement Services in the Crematorium and that the Executive be asked to look at these more closely during the budget process and the Committee would monitor progress on this decision through the budget process.

(The meeting ended at 1.50 pm)