

Agenda Item 3

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MERTON AND SUTTON JOINT CEMETERY BOARD

26 FEBRUARY 2019

(2.10 pm - 3.30 pm)

PRESENT Councillor Annie Moral (in the Chair), Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Nick Draper, Councillor Simon McGrath and Councillor Annie Moral

ALSO PRESENT Zoe Church – Board Treasurer
Doug Napier – Client Side Manager
Lisa Jewell – Clerk to the Board

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor David Williams, Councillor Jean Crosby, Howard Joy – Surveyor to the Board and Mark Robinson – Cemetery Manager and Registrar.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

In answer to a question asked regarding Board Members personal indemnity insurance, the Board noted that this would be covered by the Council's own insurance

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2018 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 BUDGET MONITORING 2018/19 AND REVENUE ESTIMATES 2019/20 (Agenda Item 4)

The Treasurer presented her report Budget Monitoring 2018/19 and Revenue Estimates 2019/20. The Treasurer asked the Board to note that she had concentrated on looking at income and erred on the side of caution and been very prudent when projecting the contract income. Demand for burial space was starting to pick up, it had dropped previously when prices were raised. Income figures were good.

The Treasurer asked the Board to note Recommendation 6 of her report, that the Board should recommend to Merton Council a price increase of up to 2.5% for 2019/20 burial services. Board members were unsure if they wanted to make this recommendation, as they did not want the MSJC to be so expensive that families could not afford to use it. Members asked if they could receive comparative information on the charging at other local cemeteries. The Treasurer said that she could ask the Contractor to provide this information at the next meeting, she

reminded members that The Board does not make the actual decision on charges, it is asked to make a recommendation to Merton Council regarding the charges.

The Treasurer was asked about the indicative valuation decrease in the Cemetery Land of £135k, and replied that this was as a result of the loan taken out to cover the costs of laying out the newest part of the Cemetery. Appendix A, column 1 shows the adjustments made to get to a real fund balance, and Appendix E shows the repayment details for this loan.

The Board noted the Special Projects Budget, and that the Bearer Beams project was a priority. Members suggested that £20K for removing the greenhouses was expensive and noted that this included the costs of removing all material but that it would probably not cost this much. Members noted that the Greenhouses were currently costing a lot to heat and were a Health and Safety Hazard as they were not fitted with safety glass.

The Treasurer asked the Board to note the new style Risk Register, which is held on Merton Council's system which can also show the history of each item on the register. The panel noted that the risk of a pandemic has been reduced, but that the risks associated with Brexit, as the contractor is an Anglo/French operator, and risks associated with the Pension Fund, as the fund is mature and about to commission the next actuarial evaluation, have both increased slightly.

The Board noted Recommendation 5; that Idverde be requested to provide comparative charging information to this meeting next year so that the Board may recommend Fee increases for the financial year 2020/21. The Client Side Manager explained that more market intelligence is needed, and that some prices could come down following such a review. Idverde are best placed to look at the market and recommend what is fair and reasonable as they have the market knowledge

The Board returned to discussing Recommendation 6; that the Board should recommend to Merton Council a price increase of up to 2.5% for 2019/20 burial services. Members asked what a 2.5% increase would mean, in real terms, to prices paid. The Treasurer would provide this information to the Board at the next meeting. Members noted that this would be too late to implement this recommendation for the 2019/20 charging year, and asked if a rise could be implemented during the financial year and not at its start, the Treasurer replied that it could.

Members again stated that they did not want to make financial difficulties for residents but also noted that if increases are not made annually then there is a danger of falling behind competitors. The Board asked the treasurer to delay the recommendation to Merton Council regarding increasing charges and for her to bring the requested information on charges at other cemeteries and the actual effect of a 2.5% rise to the next meeting. The Treasurer said she would request the information from Idverde.

RESOLVED

The MSJCB Agreed:

1. That the current budgetary position for 2018/19 based on the end of January 2019 shown in Columns 1 to 3 of Appendix A be noted.
2. The Revenue Estimates for 2019/20 shown in Column 4 of Appendix A be approved.
3. That the precepts for the financial year ended 31 March 2020 be set at zero.
4. That the Board establishes its next meeting as early as possible in June 2019 to ensure that approved information is included in Merton's Accounts and information is despatched to Merton's External Auditors as soon as possible.
5. That Idverde be requested to provide comparative charging information to this meeting next year so that the Board may recommend Fee increases for the financial year 2020/21
7. That the Board review and approve the Risk Management Strategy and Risk Register (as at February 2019) attached as Appendix I

The Board agreed to delay recommendation 6 and reconsider in the light of additional information:

6. That Merton Council be asked to consider price increases of up to 2.5% for 2019/20 for burial services.

5 CONTRACTOR'S REPORT FEBRUARY 2019 (Agenda Item 5)

The Board received the Contractor's Report. The Client Side Manager added that going forward funding was available for extending the digital mapping of the Cemetery.

The Board discussed the bins currently on site and noted that work is required to determine the most suitable bin solution – current bins are not big enough to accept wreaths, and so these then get left next to the bins, and then need collection. However large Euro Bins, wheeled bins, that could accept wreaths are visually intrusive and might not be acceptable in the cemetery setting. They are also difficult to empty as special vehicles are required. IdVerde need to do some work to consider the best solution to bin provision. Currently idverde do have a bin emptying regime, bigger bins would enable the wreaths to be more easily disposed of.

Members noted that they were free to visit other cemeteries in the two Boroughs to see how their bin systems were working.

6 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda Item 6)

RESOLVED: That the public are excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following report(s) on the grounds that it is (they are) exempt from disclosure for the reasons stated in the report(s).

7 EXEMPT MINUTES (Agenda Item 7)

RESOLVED: That the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2018 are agreed as an accurate record.

8 VERBAL UPDATE FROM CLIENT SIDE MANAGER (Agenda Item 8)

The Board received a verbal Update from the Client Side Manager, and requested a further update at the next meeting