

Agenda Item 3

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MERTON AND SUTTON JOINT CEMETERY BOARD

21 JUNE 2022

(2.15 pm - 3.13 pm)

PRESENT Councillors (in the Chair), Councillor Paul Cole,
Councillor Hina Bokhari, Caroline Charles, James Williscroft,
Councillor Rob Beck, and Sam Cumber

Zoe Church (Treasurer to the Board) and Andrew Kauffman
(Client Side Officer), Mark Robinson (IdVerde Representative),
Ijaz Chuttun (Graduate Accounting Trainee) and Amy
Dumitrescu (Acting Clerk to the Board)

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR (Agenda Item 1)

It was proposed and seconded and therefore and therefore RESOLVED:

That Councillor Paul Cole be elected as Chair for 2022/23.

It was then proposed, seconded and agreed that Councillor James Williscroft be elected as vice-chair for 2021/22.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Agatha Akyigyina.

3 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 4)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022 were agreed as an accurate record

5 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (Agenda Item 5)

The Treasurer to the Board presented the report and drew members' attention to the Improvement Plan for 2021/22 and ongoing work for the 2022/23 Improvement Plan identified for 2022/23, noting that the review of roles and responsibilities was due to be completed during the upcoming year as there had been no client side officer during 2021/22. The report incorporated best practice and was being completed Council-wide.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Governance Statement be noted and agreed.

6 ABSTRACT OF ACCOUNTS 2021/22 (Agenda Item 6)

The Graduate Accounting Trainee presented the report and provided members with an overview of the accounts and noted the following changes from the previous year:

- A decrease in employees expenditure, although similar running costs had been recorded
- An increase in expenditure on capital projects
- Total income of £724,000, of which £674,000 were from fees
- An increase in sundry debtors due to income due from IdVerde
- An increase in interest on the Common Fund Balance
- The addition of the new beams had led to a revised property valuation of £1.466m this has also revised future depreciation charges in 2022-23 estimates
- Employee costs were similar to the previous year

In response to member questions, the graduate accounting trainee advised that the loan repayment was in relation to a loan taken out with both Merton and Sutton Councils by the Board. This was taken out approximately 7 years prior to set out a new section of the Cemetery, however the land was contaminated due to rubbish within the ground

The Treasurer to the Board advised that in previous years Merton had sent accounts for formal sign-off by external audit, however it had been noted that Bandon Hill Cemetery Board in Sutton/Croydon had used internal audit to sign-off their accounts. The Audit Service is currently a joint service which covers Sutton and Merton and there had been issues with the external audit from Internal Audit signing off the accounts. It was therefore recommended within the report that the accounts were signed off internally by internal audit, in line with the practice at Sutton. A wet signature was still required by the Chair who would be signing the accounts at this minute. External Audit had been informed of the proposed change.

In response to further questions, the Treasurer to the Board advised that consultancy costs were held each year in the event that these were required however they were not always used.

The graduate accounting trainee gave an overview of the risk register, noting that whilst the risk register had listed a potential risk of reduced income due to the pandemic, the income had in fact increased during 2021/22 as the installation of the new beams had increased capacity. The graduate accounting trainee gave an overview of the risks and mitigations being put in place as outlined within the register.

In response to further questions, officers advised that Merton officers attend weekly meetings with IdVerde alongside monthly contract monitoring meetings.

Councillor Williscroft raised concern around the condition of the toilets and the Treasurer to the Board advised that there were no works scheduled for the upcoming year and therefore there were no funds budgeted for this work. Members agreed that

they wanted to set aside up to £100,000 within the budget to allow for potential works and improvements, once assessments had been undertaken of the work required. It was noted that £30,000 had been spent on the toilets in 2017 and Planning permission had been previously agreed in 2014 for a new building but this had never been progressed further and the design of the building was based on in-house service provision.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the Board received and approved the Draft Abstract of Accounts for 2021-22
- B. That the Board approved the use of Merton's Internal Audit to formally sign off the Board's Accounts for this and future financial years
- C. That the Board approved the Annual Audit Return for 2021-22 (Appendix E), if required
- D. That the Board approved the revised revenue estimates for 2022/23 in Appendix I
- E. That the Board Reviewed and Agreed the Risk Register as at June 2022 in Appendix J.
- F. That the Board agreed to amend the 2022/23 budget to include up to £100,000 for works required to the toilets on site (Appendix I)

7 CONTRACTOR REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The IdVerde representative presented the report and invited questions from members.

Councillor Bokhari requested information be provided evidencing the increase in compliments and asked how communications and progress had been made with families since the pandemic, particularly with those within the muslim community. Officers undertook to discuss this further with members and to update them in due course.

In response to further questions, officers advised that the Merton team would be considering the issue of dogs being walked in and through the cemetery. There were already a number of measures in place including a Public space protection order and the ongoing dog control pilot.

Members raised concerns regarding the wellbeing of staff working within the cemeteries. The IdVerde representative responded that a no-lone working policy had been put in place and that there were safeguarding practices in place. A number of gravediggers were nearing retirement age and across the sector authorities were having difficulty recruiting staff to these roles. Members requested that an agenda item be brought to the next meeting to discuss the retention and training of these staff within these roles.

RESOLVED:

That Members reviewed the information and noted the content of the report.

8 CLIENT REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

The Client Side Officer presented the report, noting the recent perimeter fencing improvements which had been completed by Suez at no cost to the service. This fencing was providing both a visual screen and reducing the noise and levels of litter being blown across the site. Section X had now been completed and the service were working with facilities management on the 2021/22 programme. Path improvement works had also been completed and the visual aspect on site was improving, with grass cutting on track and planting had been put in.

In response to questions, the Client Side Officer confirmed that Section M works had been completed and work within section MU was continuing, with the next phase of work commissioned.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the Members review the information and note the content of the report
- B. That the Committee note and feedback on the programme of works for 2021/22.
- C. For the Committee to note the next programme special works for consideration in 2022-23.

Prior to the close of the meeting, members requested a site visit to the Cemetery and advised that they would like to return to the pre-Covid practice of holding the June meeting on site at the Cemetery which would be followed by a tour of the grounds.