

Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd (Orbitas)
Minutes of Board Meeting,
21st July 2022, via Teams

Present:

Kevin Melling, Managing Director	KM
Cllr Joy Bratherton, Chair	JB
Cllr Lata Anderson, Director	LA
Cllr Mark Goldsmith, Director	MG
Mark Darbyshire, COO, Orbitas	MD
Helen Green, Finance Business Partner	HG
Melanie Henniker, Director HR & Corporate Service	MH
Anthony Gosling, Employee Rep North	AG

Other Attendees:

Megan Bowyer, PA to Group MD (Minutes)	MB
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Apologies:

None

Agenda Item	Notes	Action
1.	<p>Welcome to all participants, Apologies and Declarations of Interest</p> <p>JB reported that due notice of the meeting had been given and that a quorum was present. She chaired the meeting throughout. There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
2.	<p>Introductions to new directors</p> <p>LA and MG introduced themselves and gave details of their background, skills and interests.</p> <p>All attendees introduced themselves to the new directors.</p>	
3.	<p>3.1 Minutes of Last Meetings and Matters Arising</p> <p>The Minutes from the board meeting on 30 June 2022 were accepted as a true and accurate record.</p> <p>3.2 Matters Arising</p> <p>JB reported that the wheeled bier is now repaired.</p> <p>MD advised that the road and turning circle at Nantwich Cemetery are still not finished despite him chasing the contractors. He will continue to pursue. Action</p> <p>MD</p>	MD
4	<p>Operational Update</p> <p>The operational report was distributed prior to the meeting.</p> <p>MD advised the following:</p>	

	<p>Volumes – it was a busy first quarter for cremations and burials at both sites. This has had an impact on employee resources. LA asked if staffing has increased to support. MD advised not. MG asked if the increase was driven by higher mortality rates or another reason. MD explained that there had been a slight increase in the mortality rate, and additionally a neighbouring crematory had an issue with their cremator causing capacity issues, so some cremations were diverted to Macclesfield.</p> <p>MA1s for Adult Services returned to more normal levels for the month. JB explained the Handyperson service to the new directors and KM confirmed this is an area of the business where there could be expansion and opportunities depending on staffing levels. One extra person has been recruited recently and this should help accommodate increased demand.</p> <p>Training – PAT testing, one employee is progressing.</p> <p>People – it is still a busy time for recruitment and there are vacancies at various stages of recruitment for several roles. KM noted that the jobs market is very competitive and fast-moving at present. Lack of resource is a major risk to Orbitas’ operations, and we will need to keep revisiting it. It is proving difficult to recruit even temporary agency staff currently. On the same note we need to be mindful of retaining existing employees and be aware that people may look for alternatives.</p> <p>MG asked at what point we can review salaries. MH explained that we are still governed by local government national terms and conditions. KM stressed that we are a people business, and we can’t function without them. If there is a business-critical need in future, we will need to obtain shareholder approval for any special initiatives required.</p> <p>Other – MD was happy to report a reduction in gas use/carbon dioxide emissions. We have carefully planned our cremation activity over recent months which has reduced our fuel bill and aided the council’s environmental targets. Macclesfield crematorium is fitted with mercury abatement machinery to remove pollutants. MD is aware that rules are likely to change, and all crematoria will be obliged to fit this machinery in the future. We are discussing this with the CEC Commissioner.</p> <p>Wildflower areas have been planted at Congleton cemetery to aid biodiversity and we hope to do a lot more of this in future. AG explained the processes that have been used for achieving the results. JB looked forward to seeing a similar area in Crewe – she stressed the need for signage and MD confirmed he would check this is in place. Action MD This is labour intensive and still trial and error, but it is hoped that early investment will save work in future years.</p>	MD
5	<p>Progress Update on establishment of Friends of Cemeteries groups</p> <p>JB advised she had attended Sandbach cemetery recently to see how the volunteer groups operate. The Orbitas workforce is being assisted by a ‘Friends of’ group plus Care4ce, a group of adults with mental health issues.</p>	

	<p>There was a discussion about the scope of work that volunteer groups perform, how that could be organised and any potential sensitivities. MD reported that there have been lots of good things done by Care4ce team. JB reiterated that the Sandbach Friends group are very enthusiastic. KM noted that we want a clear structure and that the model developed at Sandbach is ready for other groups to adopt. JB felt the establishment of such groups is the only way forward to achieve all the 'nice to have' jobs in the cemeteries.</p> <p>MG agreed that some supervision is needed and that we should supply high vis vests etc to show people are working officially on tasks over and above what Orbitas can deliver, rather than for existing work. Wildflower planting is an area that could be expanded with more manpower.</p> <p>KM stated that we will not be able to actively supervise all the groups, but we can provide access to welfare facilities and agree with leaders what the scope of added value tasks can be performed. Terms of Reference would be in place and we would make the groups self-sufficient. MD confirmed that this is the way the Sandbach group works.</p> <p>LA asked about problems with vandalism and whether visibility of more people would prevent it. MD advised this is not a major problem at present, but having people present in the cemeteries would help deter vandals.</p> <p>MD gave the background to the establishment of Sandbach Cemetery Friends Group. He reported that there has not been much progress with establishing groups at other cemeteries. Additional admin resource will be allocated to progress the initiative after the summer holiday period ends.</p> <p>KM reminded attendees that previously the board agreed a sum of money towards the cost of insurance and equipment for Friends Groups.</p> <p>A discussion took place on how to take this forward. Social media, open days and other forms of advertising were suggested.</p> <p>MD mentioned that Orbitas staff working in the cemeteries are constantly talking to visitors, so they can promote the groups by word of mouth. There are loads of people we already know who would be willing to do work. He supported the idea of an Open Day. MH suggested MD contacts Ansa's Volunteer Co-Ordinator, for guidance. Action MD</p> <p>It was agreed to progress planning with Crewe and Meadowbrook to be a joint group if possible. Action MB to add to next agenda to check on progress.</p>	<p>MD</p> <p>MB</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Charity Nominations re Metals Recycling Scheme</p> <p>JB and MD gave brief background about the scheme and explained the level of funds which could be expected from it each half year. JB would like the funds to support charities that benefit residents in the Cheshire East area.</p> <p>MB recapped that at the last board meeting it was agreed that we should review charity recipients and give Orbitas employees the chance to submit their nominations. These were detailed on the accompanying schedule.</p>	

	<p>MG suggested we could choose two charities each half year - One supporting pre-death and one post-death. There followed a detailed discussion about the charities which were nominated.</p> <p>JB agreed to contact the nominated organisations to find out how our funds could help them and will circulate details with a view to identifying projects. We can then follow up with invitations to their representatives to attend a future board meeting to give more details. Action JB. MD confirmed that we have time as the next nominations are due to be submitted to the ICCM by October/November.</p>	JB
7	<p>Employee Representative Matters</p> <p>AG reported that there had been problems with the inverter overheating in the hot weather at Macclesfield, where ambient temperatures in the mid-40 degrees C were experienced and machinery failed. This led to staff welfare issues and needs to be improved. In the short-term an air conditioning unit solved the issue temporarily. KM stated that if we need more small air conditioning units there should be no hesitation in obtaining them.</p> <p>Compound area resurfacing at Macclesfield is progressing, the base is laid but we are waiting for completion of the drainage. KM remarked that this was good progress and thanked AG for the work to date.</p>	
8	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>As MG is away on the original date for the September board meeting it was agreed to change the date and hold it on 8th September starting at 9am. Action MB to update the Outlook invitation.</p>	MB

The meeting closed at 10 a.m. Next meeting to be held on 8th September.