

Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd (Orbitas)
Minutes of Board Meeting,
21st September 2023 at 09.00

Present:

Cllr Joy Bratherton, Chair	JB
Cllr Lata Anderson, Director	LA
Kevin Melling, Managing Director	KM
Helen Green, Finance Lead	HG
Mark Darbyshire, COO, Orbitas	MD
Melanie Henniker, Director HR & Corporate Services	MH
Cllr Michael Gorman (CEC Observer)	MiG
Sarah Worthington, Employee Rep South	SW

Other Attendees:

Jade Barber, PA (Minutes)	JBa
Lorraine Sarson, Bereavement Manager South	LS

Apologies:

Cllr Mark Goldsmith, Director	MG
-------------------------------	----

Agenda Item	Item Detail	Actions
01	<p>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest JB welcomed attendees to the meeting, she advised that due notice had been given and a quorum was present. She declared the meeting open and chaired it throughout. Apologies were accepted – KM noted one declaration of interest; when talking about engagement with AES, it is noted that KM is also a Managing Director of AES.</p>	
02	<p>Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising The minutes of the meeting on 27 July 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record.</p> <p>Matters Arising JB asked if MD had managed to set up a meeting with Papyrus to present the charitable donation and to learn more about the organisation and how they will use our donation. MD advised that he had been in contact with Papyrus, but nothing had yet been arranged. JB noted they are attending a future conference and will use the opportunity to try and arrange something there. MD will find out who is attending this event on behalf of Papyrus and will let JB know. Action MD</p> <p>Following on from the sundial removal discussed at the last meeting, JB asked if it had been investigated as to how many cremated remains were placed underneath the site, and whether the relevant families had been contacted. SW advised that it had and that we will be following ICCM Guidance on what activities can be undertaken and what notice needs to be given to families. JB noted she felt it was important to contact relatives nonetheless, and requested a plan be developed added as a future agenda item. KM agreed that there should be an attempt to contact families as well as erecting signage, and that further thought needs to be put into what to do with the site in the sundials place.</p> <p>LA queried whether this was a Victorian sundial; JB advised that this was erected for the Millennium, and there used to be signage explaining this but is no longer there. MiG requested photos of this sundial be brought to the next meeting. MD will arrange this, and ensure the sundial is added to next agenda. Action MD</p>	MD
		MD

<p>03</p>	<p>Presentation - Update on Friends Groups</p> <p>LS gave a presentation to update the board on the set up of the Cemetery Friends group, reviewing the benefits of setting up a friends group, and explaining all the work that went in to creating this. LS then outlined the future aims of the friend group, as well as highlighting the recently set up Crewe Bereavement Group, located at St Michaels Church Hall.</p> <p>Following the presentation, LS asked if anyone had any comments or feedback. LA noted her congratulations and well done to the team for their hard work. LS noted that a Crewe bereavement assistant had been nominated for an Orbitastic award for her contribution to this project.</p> <p>MH also noted the work had been fantastic and congratulated them on their hard work. She suggested Alison Jenkins in Ansa as a point of contact – she runs the volunteers in Ansa and has good ideas on how to recognise the work done by volunteers and keep interest going. LS thanked MH for this and advised she would be in contact. KM added that the recognition is important and that celebrating the work done helps strengthen volunteer morale.</p> <p>KM noted that LS mentioned expanding to Meadowbrook, and that there is a number of volunteers there already. Before expanding it is important, we consider whether or not we have the capacity to do so. We will need to be guided by LS once she has considered available time.</p> <p>KM asked LS to consider what support is needed from the board going forward, and to report back once consideration is given to this.</p> <p>MiG congratulated LS on her hard work on this and asked for it to be noted that the board supports this project, and how much value the group is providing. JB will pass this on at the next meeting which she will be attending.</p> <p>KM also noted it is important to maintain consistency across all groups. Sandbach has now become self-sufficient, and it is important they also benefit from any future recognition scheme.</p> <p><i>LS left the meeting.</i></p>	
<p>04</p>	<p>Operational Report</p> <p>MD gave an update on the Operations for July and August as per the circulated report.</p> <p><u>Volumes</u></p> <p>194 cremations in July (79 Crewe, 115 Macclesfield) 10.2% below Orbitas average since 2014/15.</p> <p>229 cremations in August (79 Crewe, 150 Macclesfield) 10.6% above Orbitas average since 2014/15.</p> <p>1,087 cremations YTD, <0.1% down on Orbitas average since 2014/15 (excl. 2020/21).</p> <p>217 MA1s completed in July. 221 MA1s completed in August.</p> <p>905 MA1s completed YTD (72% above contract units). FY forecast based on YTD run rate 2,172 units (contract 1,260).</p> <p><u>Training</u></p> <p>One employee has passed Cremator Technician training.</p> <p>Three employees have passed both Grave Preparation and Shoring and Use of Excavator training.</p> <p>Further training in October will result in a further two employees being fully qualified gravediggers.</p> <p>4 x colleagues attended IOSH Working Safely training.</p> <p>4 x colleagues attended a series of training webinars covering use of the Epitaph Bereavement Admin system used by High Peak & Staff Moorlands DCs.</p>	

	<p><u>People</u> We have recruited a Handyperson based in Crewe and an Admin Assistant based in Macclesfield. A Skilled Bereavement Operative based in Macclesfield was recruited but has now unfortunately withdrawn his acceptance of the offer.</p> <p><u>Alliance Bereavement</u> Orbitas commenced provision of admin support to High Peak & Staffs Moorlands bereavement services from Monday 7th August 2023 covering burial and associated activities in 6 cemeteries. Currently working with AES colleagues, we have successfully transferred the services. KM noted that he has received nothing but compliments for the Orbitas team from AES since being involved in the project. He gave credit to the whole team for how they have managed the transition. KM asked if the new system being used in AES, Eptaph, was proving any better than Orbitas current system and whether it was worth investigating. MD noted the current system has a weakness within the mapping system and will be discussing trying to use some of the other elements of Eptaph not currently used. The other admin elements of the system are very similar to what is already used.</p> <p>MH asked if vacancies were advertised on the notice boards at the cemetery. MD advised he doesn't believe they are but will look into doing this going forward. Action MD</p>	MD
05	<p>Employee Representative Matters SW presented a list of employee representative matters.</p> <p><u>Pay Rise</u> The latest union update from HR Team was given to employees last week. SW has asked to still raise this at the request of employees who are struggling financially. MH advised that unions met again on 20th September with the employer. No decision was made on the pay offer, but the unions agreed to meet again after the GMB ballot closes on the 24th October. It is hopeful once this closes it may be agreed and we would then be able to go ahead with payment, but MH cannot guarantee this. KM asked if MH could give an insight into what will happen if this offer is agreed following the 24th October ballot closure. MH advised that where possible they will try to get this into pay before Christmas, but it is totally dependent on what the unions decide to do following the closure of the GMB ballot.</p> <p><u>Grade 4/5</u> SM advised that some of the grade 4 employees have put forward a request to be regraded (hoping for grade 5). There has been an ongoing process and a meeting was held recently, but they have not heard the outcome of this. MH advised this meeting did go ahead, and the HR Business Partner will be meeting with MD to discuss and communicate the outcome.</p> <p><u>Welfare Units</u> SW asked where these are up to. It is coming to the wet and muddy time of year and teams are keen for there to be a couple of sites where there are facilities to be able to get changed. MD is currently trying to change the supplier were using but has not been able to arrange this so far. MD will continue to push this in order to proceed.</p> <p>JB asked if it was true that the plan is to not plant plants next year, and that it will be bulbs and shrubs only. MD advised that a lot of time is spent planting bedding twice a year, as well as trying to properly maintain these, both of which are very work intensive. MDs plan is to move away from seasonal bedding to replace with bulbs and permanent plants, which are just as aesthetically pleasing, and are potentially more beneficial to</p>	

	<p>biodiversity, as well as being less maintenance intensive for our operational teams. JB asked what the financial saving would be on this; MD has not yet quantified this, but the main motivation is not financial saving but to reduce the pressure on operational teams.</p> <p><i>SW left the meeting.</i></p>	
<p>06</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JB requested that we look into ways to relieve the heat in the chapel when services are going on, the lack of air circulation is uncomfortable for those attending. The windows being looked at, or fans being positioned would be something to consider. JB also asked if the TVs could be looked at being changed, potentially two flat screens on each alcove walls to ensure a better view. MD and KM will look into both of these. Action MD • JB advised she recently attended a cemetery tour as part of the heritage weekend that Crewe Town Council run. JB feels it is something worth looking at if someone would be interested in taking this on along with Peter Ollerhead who currently runs it – and asked for it to be considered. JB also asked that someone write a letter to Peter to thank him for the tour, and for his hard work on this. Action MD to arrange. • LA noted that it was discussed previously around Wilmslow Cemetery opening for services, and queried how this was progressing, and enquired whether this cemetery had a Friends group attached to it already. MD advised the Wilmslow Chapel had not been progressed as yet, as the inside needs to be assessed for what needs to be done in order for it to be useable. MD advised the Friends group will come under Christine Heathcote’s remit in the future, when capacity is available to action this. 	<p>MD</p> <p>MD</p>

**The Meeting closed at 10.15.
Next Board Meeting: 19 October 2023 at 09.00**