

Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd (Orbitas)
Minutes of Board Meeting,
23rd November 2023 at 09.00

Present:

Cllr Joy Bratherton, Chair	JB
Cllr Lata Anderson, Director	LA
Cllr Mark Goldsmith, Director	MG
Kevin Melling, Managing Director	KM
Paul Goodwin, Director	PG
Tom Shuttleworth, Director	TS
Helen Green, Finance Lead	HG
Mark Darbyshire, COO, Orbitas	MD
Cllr Michael Gorman (CEC Observer)	MiG
Sarah Worthington, Employee Rep South	SW
Melanie Henniker, Director HR & Corp Servs	MH

Other Attendees:

Megan Bowyer, PA (Minutes)	MB
Laura Owen, HR Service Manager (item 08 only)	LO

Apologies:

Agenda Item	Item Detail	Actions
06	<p>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest</p> <p>JB welcomed attendees to the meeting, in particular the two new directors TS and PG. She advised that due notice had been given and a quorum was present. She declared the meeting open and chaired it throughout.</p> <p>PG & TS both advised that they had no conflicts of interest to declare in this meeting, but due to their roles in the Council there may be matters relating to Finance or Commissioning that could cause conflicts of interest and they would declare as and when appropriate.</p>	
06a	<p>Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting on 19 October were accepted as a true and accurate record.</p> <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>Papyrus Charity – MD confirmed that he had tried to contact them by phone but there was no reply, so he has sent an email to which he awaits a response. He mentioned that a recent communication from the ICCM advised that in future it will be possible to nominate up to three charities as recipients from the Metals Recycling Scheme rather than just two, which is really positive. Next date for board consideration will be in the spring 2024. KM advised that several more charities have contacted us to be considered and nearer the time it may be worth inviting them to present to the board. JB commented that she would like Papyrus to get at least two donations before anyone else is introduced as this is a charity with significant meaning for the bereavement services team at Crewe.</p>	

<p>07</p>	<p>Operational Report</p> <p>MD presented the report which had previously been distributed to attendees.</p> <p>Volumes – Sep and Oct were quieter months and volumes were below average although they have increased in Nov. The number of MA1s completed this financial year are 77% above the contract. JB expressed concern about the Handyman situation with long-term sickness affecting capacity. MD explained that there are two employees absent but both are expected to return to work early in the new year. He emphasised that the team is still able to do private work in addition to MA1s, but the absences are impeding our growth plans. Training – we are managing the budget and making sure we don't overspend on discretionary training.</p> <p>LA remarked that an Orbitas vacancy kept popping up on Facebook and wondered why. MD said that CE social media controls this. JB asked if this was an appropriate way of advertising. KM remarked that the resource market is very hard and there is a shortage of applicants, so we are trying everything to attract them. MH confirmed that we try all avenues and keep a record of what has worked best so that we can concentrate our future efforts.</p> <p>People – skilled bereavement officer has joined at Macclesfield. The Bereavement Manager at Crewe is leaving on 1st December, and we will be looking to replace the role in the New Year. Need to decide when the best time is to advertise being mindful of the financial position. KM – it is a challenge and will put pressure on the team, but the period in which the post is vacant will help contribute to the in-year savings. LA asked if there is anyone internally who has shown an interest in the role. MH considered that interest will be declared when the role is advertised.</p> <p>Other news – Orbitas' first early pregnancy service with Mid Cheshire hospital trust took place. It was very successful and made use of very tasteful containers. It incurred no cost to the parents. MD was asked if this was done at other crematoria in other parts of the country and confirmed that is the case although it was a first for Crewe.</p> <p>We are nearing completion of the pond refurbishment at Crewe Cemetery – photos were shown revealing before and after shots and MD confirmed that the work has received a lot of positive comments from visitors.</p>	
<p>08</p>	<p>H R Policies</p> <p>MH introduced LO to present this item and advised that she will come to board in future to present HR policies.</p> <p>LO advised that the two policies she had brought to the board were ones which were reviewed on an annual basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redundancy – payments and terms reflect Council's current policy. - Pensions Discretions – required under LGPS scheme. <p>No proposals for change were made for either policy, and the review was to ensure that the terms remained non-contractual and also that the policies remain fit-for purpose for the Company.</p> <p>PG asked if the policies were identical to the Council's and also asked what was the total value for exit packages re approval limits. In the Council, for exit packages above a total</p>	

	<p>cost of £95K there is member approval, should there be corresponding board approval and what should the threshold be?</p> <p>MH advised that in the Scheme of Delegation the limits are defined as a max of £80K for KM and MH jointly, but the whole scheme is currently under review and HG will be bringing it to board for approval in the new year at which time it may change. LO stated that at the moment we have not deviated from the Council’s policies, and we would highlight in the accompanying board paper if we were to do so.</p> <p>LA had several queries as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P10 – compulsory redundancy refers to the state formula what is that? LO will put a link to the state formula website to make sure that if it does change it will remain up to date. Action LO. • Consultation period – what is that? LO said that the policy doesn’t reference because it could be different for different situations. Is there a minimum period regardless of the circumstances? LO happy to add something here to clarify. Action LO <p>MH added that the law has changed and there is no longer a minimum period if there are less than 20 redundancies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Period of notice – is there an upper limit or is it negotiable? LO explained that the policy sets out the legal notice period but occasionally for senior managers there may be more. <p>MG advised that on page 4 there is reference to drawing a pension ‘at 65 or your retirement age whichever is lesser’, this should say 55 or normal retirement age. Action LO to amend.</p> <p>Board resolution – it was resolved to agree the policies for a further twelve-month period subject the amendments set out above.</p> <p><i>LO left the meeting.</i></p>	<p>LO</p> <p>LO</p> <p>LO</p>
<p>09</p>	<p>H& S Policies and Guidance Notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fire Safety Guidance Note - Fire Checklist - LOLER - Risk Assessment Policy - Risk Assessment Guidance Note <p>MD introduced the policies and advised there were few changes, and all are refreshed policies with slight changes to references to government websites and other reference documents. These changes are detailed in red font for ease of identification.</p> <p>MD added that following feedback from TS he will add details of the Health and Safety officer who wrote the policies plus who has reviewed these policies. Action MD. TS confirmed that these documents need a note of who has prepared them with a note of their qualifications/credentials plus a note of who has reviewed. He noted that one stated it had been prepared by the board which obviously incorrect.</p>	<p>MD</p>

	<p>KM commented that it is always useful to have fresh eyes looking at processes. All the policies are written by a H&S Manager at Cheshire East Council. MD explained that Orbitas has a H&S lead who reviews from an Orbitas perspective and makes sure that the policies are put into action through toolbox talks etc.</p> <p>Board resolution – it was resolved to accept the Fire Safety Guidance Note, Fire Checklist, LOLER, Risk Assessment Policy and Risk Assessment Guidance note subject to the details mentioned above being added.</p>	
<p>10</p>	<p>Human Sundial Proposals</p> <p>MD explained that it is classed as ‘Human’ as to get a reading a human must stand in a certain position and it’s their shadow that gives the time.</p> <p>A photograph of the sundial in its original form was presented together with brief details of why it exists and how it works. There had been previous debates about its appearance, usefulness, and place in the cemetery, hence this proposal.</p> <p>Originally it was intended as somewhere for ashes to be scattered. Records show 10 sets of remains have been placed in this area. There is uncertainty as to exactly where, as there are no records as to how the remains were placed. It is believed that initially they were loose and latterly buried loosely in the ground, the last one being in 2020 based on a colleague’s memory.</p> <p>The biggest issue is infestation of a weed, horsetail, which is notoriously difficult to get rid of. Manually it is time-consuming and difficult if not impossible. Chemicals are not effective as it is a deep-rooted plant, and indeed we would not wish to use them in any case.</p> <p>MD showed a photograph showing the current state of the sundial following a concerted effort to manually remove the horsetail but stated that it would be a matter of weeks before it regrew. Weed and moss have been removed from block- paved area.</p> <p>MD believes that the best solution is to move the glass chippings and the hardcore base and to turf over the area whilst retaining the appearance of the sundial. The team could then continue to mow constantly and keep the weed in check. Can also plant seasonal bulbs to improve appearance if appropriate.</p> <p>As regards the cremated remains ICCM guidance has been sought. They advised that there is no legal barrier in doing what is proposed but it would be best practice to place notices of our intentions around the area.</p> <p>A discussion followed about other options, and it was agreed that the objective is to keep the area as low maintenance as possible whilst giving new opportunities for cremated remains. We need to enhance the area whilst keeping it easy to maintain.</p> <p>TS confirmed he was fully supportive of proposals but would stress about ensuring successful communications. This is a sensitive matter, so we need to ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware, and it does not become an issue – be clear on what we’re doing and why. MD will put notices on site, and we expect to have the benefit of many people visiting over Christmas so have a good chance of making as many people as possible aware.</p> <p>Action MD to arrange the notices.</p> <p>Board resolution – it was resolved to accept the proposal as presented and make sure that it is well-advertised.</p>	<p>MD</p>

11	<p>Employee Representative Matters</p> <p>SW hadn't anything to discuss. She confirmed that she had asked colleagues and that everyone is happy about the pay rise resolution.</p>	
12	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Christmas and New Year Opening. MD advised that this year Christmas and Boxing Day are Monday and Tuesday so there is no proposal to close for an additional day as in previous years.</p>	

Change of board meeting date?

**The Meeting closed at 10.40.
Next Board Meeting: 20 December 2023 at 13.00**