

Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd (Orbitas)
Minutes of Board Meeting,
14th February 2024 at 09.00

Present:

Cllr Joy Bratherton, Chair	JB
Kevin Melling, Managing Director	KM
Cllr Mark Goldsmith, Director	MG
Cllr Lata Anderson, Director	LA
Paul Goodwin, Director	PG
Tom Shuttleworth, Director	TS
Helen Green, Finance Lead	HG
Mark Darbyshire, COO, Orbitas	MD
Anthony Gosling, Employee Rep North	AG
Melanie Henniker, Director HR & Corp Servs	MH

Other Attendees:

Megan Bowyer, PA (Minutes)	MB
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Apologies:

Cllr Michael Gorman (CEC Observer)	MiG
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Agenda Item	Item Detail	Actions
08	<p>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest JB welcomed attendees to the meeting and chaired it throughout. She advised that due notice of the meeting had been given and that a quorum was present.</p> <p>No Conflicts of Interest were declared.</p>	
08a	<p>Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising The minutes of the meeting on 22 January 2024 were accepted as a true and accurate record.</p> <p>Matters Arising LA asked about progress re price increases per agenda item 8. MD advised that he is undertaking a review of prices even though we last implemented an increase in December 2023. He has been in contact with our near-neighbour authorities to check whether we are in line with them and has found out they are planning increases of between 3% to 15% in April. There is other work to be done re pricing for direct cremations, and a proposal paper will be brought as an agenda item to the next board meeting. Action MD</p>	MD
09	<p>Operational Report MD presented his report which had been circulated to the board prior to the meeting and the following points were highlighted:</p> <p>Volumes for cremations and burials now include charts as requested showing trends. Cremations were low in December and January and death registrations were low in December with January figures not yet available. There has been no worsening of the leakage rate. Interments have been higher than previous years.</p> <p>There were 171 MA1s completed in December and 205 in January. It is anticipated that a total of 2,200 will be completed by year-end, which is substantially above the contracted figure.</p>	

	<p>An Admin Assistant at Crewe has recently qualified as a Cremator Technician and there is a further employee at Macclesfield currently undertaking the qualification, so we hope to soon be back at full complement.</p> <p>Information re the Memorial Plaque renewals programme was included, and MD advised that this will in future be broadened out to encompass other products now we have shown that it can be done successfully.</p>	
10	<p>Memorialisation proposals</p> <p>MD presented his report which had been circulated prior to the meeting and the board was asked to consider and approve the proposals contained therein for performing work at the Tree of Light Garden at Crewe Cemetery to include new memorialisation items. A discussion took place, and a variety of concepts were identified. The team was requested to check on any regulatory requirements and site licence requirements prior to developing the project further.</p>	
11	<p>Health & Safety Policies</p> <p>As per normal practice several Health and Safety policies and procedures were presented to the board for review and approval. MD confirmed that there were very few changes suggested and all were existing policies.</p> <p>Board Resolution – it was resolved to approve the Electricity at Work Guidance Note, Policy and Quick Reference Guide and the Manual Handling Guide as presented.</p>	
12	<p>H R Policies</p> <p>MH presented two policies for the board’s consideration per the explanatory paper which had been circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>(i) Drug and Alcohol Testing Policy and Procedure</p> <p>Two changes to the existing policy were proposed, namely that the Company introduces testing of new employees within their probationary period. This will be communicated to all potential employees throughout the recruitment process and induction. MH then engaged in brief discussion around the proposal.</p> <p>The second change proposed was that the wording is amended to add “charged with or” under section 6 on ‘Reporting Incidents outside of work’ requiring employees to advise the Company if they are charged rather than just if convicted. This is in line with the current requirements under the Driving for Work policy.</p> <p>LA remarked about the ‘innocent until proved guilty’ concept. MH stated that employees are being asked to keep the Company informed and that each case would then be treated on its own merits and with reference to their particular occupation. She added that it brings consistency with the Driving for Work policy which already includes this requirement. LA asked how the changes would be communicated. MH advised that it would be through the newsletter and in the code of conduct for existing employees, whilst it will be heavily highlighted in recruitment and probationary information for job candidates and new recruits. The proposed changes have already been discussed with the local Trades Unions and they are comfortable with them.</p> <p>Board Resolution – it was resolved to approve the Drug and Alcohol Testing Policy and Procedure as presented.</p>	

	<p>Grievance Policy This policy was not due for review until April 2025, but it has been brought forward following operational review and legal guidance. It is proposed that a section is inserted to set out the Company approach to post-employment grievances.</p> <p>Board Resolution – it was resolved to approve the Grievance Policy as presented.</p>	
13	<p>Metals Recycling Scheme Recipients MD presented a paper summarising the background to the scheme and Orbitas’ past involvement. Decisions need to be made about future donations and approval given by board. JB was surprised to see that the EoLP had received a further donation. Her understanding was that Papyrus was allocated two payments. MD advised that he had consulted previous board resolutions, and this is in line.</p> <p>Requests to be considered have been received from several new charities and these were listed. Previous donations have been made to one entity on each occasion, but the ICCM (who administer the scheme) has amended the rules and donations can now be made between up to three charities for each pay out and these can be made up of different percentages of the total.</p> <p>JB asked if the Council/Shareholder could instruct Orbitas to pay the funds to them instead of charities. KM responded that the ICCM scheme has a condition that the funding should be donated to bereavement related charities. The allocation changes, mean that we could donate to three charities on each allocation and if so, we would need to invite them to present to the board.</p> <p>PG asked about the history of the practice and what had happened since 2009 when CEC was formed, prior to the establishment of Orbitas? KM confirmed that this practice was in place prior to Orbitas, and the Company inherited it. MD advised that the scheme has been running for approx. 15 years.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that Orbitas could withdraw from the scheme. KM remarked that in the current economic climate any publicity around the scheme would need to consider sensitivities and any unintended consequence that could damage the Council’s reputation.</p> <p>A thorough discussion took place about which option from the recommendations in the paper should be adopted and how benefiting charities should be selected. The nomination deadline for the next payment is not clear but we expect it to be around May, so this is the time for the decision to be made. On that basis recipients were agreed for the next donation and the board agreed to reconsider future recipients based on a bid- type process, which could include the selected charities being invited to conduct a 5-minute presentation. Action – bring back this item to board later in the year (say June) MD</p> <p>Board resolution – Option One was selected and it was agreed to split the next donation between St Lukes Hospice and East Cheshire Hospice and then to invite further charities to present their cases for future donations.</p>	MD
14	<p>Employee Representative Matters AG advised that he had checked with the team, and he had nothing to report at present.</p>	
15	<p>Any Other Business Businessplan Workshop JB had circulated notes of discussions but felt they had been discussed enough earlier in the meeting. She stressed that they should continue to be kept at the forefront of board priorities.</p>	

	Board Annual Work Plan	
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TS asked if there is a Work Plan for the board. KM confirmed that this is something that has recently been developed and that prior to it being circulated more widely he would like to discuss it with the Chair. It was agreed that the discussion would take place on 15/2/2024 and further actions would take place based on the result of that discussion.

The Meeting closed at 11.20.

Next Board Meeting: 18 March 2024 at 09.00