

Independent inquiry into infant cremations at Emstrey Crematorium

Progress update from Shropshire Council – September 2015

Following the publication of the independent report into infant cremations at Emstrey Crematorium on 1 June 2015, Shropshire Council set up a working group to consider and progress the five Shropshire-specific recommendations in David Jenkins' report.

This group consists of key Shropshire Council officers, and representatives from The Co-operative Funeralcare. As the current operator of Emstrey Crematorium on behalf of Shropshire Council, they provide technical and operational support at these meetings.

The working group met for the first time on 5 June 2015 and, for the first two months, met weekly to ensure rapid progress and momentum to action the recommendations. The group has recently moved to monthly meetings.

The working group has used the inquiry recommendations as the basis for a project plan which is reviewed at each meeting.

In its response to the report, Shropshire Council promised to provide regular updates about progress made in relation to the Shropshire recommendations. This is the first of those updates, which reports on the work carried out to date by the working group.

We plan to provide these updates periodically, as and when there is further progress to report.

Below we have given each Shropshire-specific recommendation, and outlined the action taken and progress made to date.

Recommendation 8

I recommend that the Council, working with their contractors, ensure that adequate arrangements and financial provision are made to ensure that the crematorium equipment is maintained in good order and at optimum performance, and is renewed promptly when it is time to do so.

Progress made to date

The Co-operative Funeralcare Ltd was engaged by Shropshire Council to operate Emstrey Crematorium on their behalf until 2041. The cremators are maintained in line with the manufacturer's recommendations and there is a schedule in place for their ongoing maintenance, and ultimate replacement before the end of the agreement. Regular meetings between both parties are scheduled throughout the year to review performance.

Recommendation 9

I recommend that the Council ensure and participate in arrangements for regular liaison with The Co-operative Funeralcare, funeral directors, funeral officiants, and hospitals so as to keep connected with practical service issues and contribute to a high quality of public service being provided at the Emstrey Crematorium.

Progress made to date

Shropshire Council has invited those recommended above to a Stakeholder Liaison Meeting to be held in September 2015. Future meetings will be held every six months. The meetings will be chaired by Shropshire Council.

Recommendation 10

I therefore recommend that the Council ensure that the management arrangements for its bereavement service include expertise and competencies normally associated with personal social care, as well as expertise associated with the technical aspects of cremator technology.

Progress made to date

Shropshire Council is working to identify training opportunities to ensure improvement in this aspect of the service, and will ensure appropriate ongoing training for the appropriate staff. Initial training aimed at enhancing communication techniques is already scheduled.

Recommendation 11

I recommend that The Co-operative Funeralcare and Shropshire Council ensure that there is a programme of continuing professional development in place for managerial and operating staff at the Emstrey crematorium.

Progress made to date

The Co-Operative Funeralcare has been assessed against the 'Charter for the Bereaved' since 2011 and, as such, they are regularly assessed by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM). Technicians and managerial staff hold, or are working towards, recognised qualifications, and processes are in place to share best practice.

Recommendation 12

I therefore recommend that The Co-operative Funeralcare and the Council now consult on and then jointly issue a revised and plainly written Ashes Policy Statement, to be made known to local funeral directors, officiants, and hospitals.

Progress made to date

The Co-operative Funeralcare, in collaboration with Shropshire Council, is working on a revised Ashes Policy Statement, and industry bodies have been consulted on this.

Note regarding the national recommendations

Whilst Shropshire Council cannot directly influence the implementation of the seven national recommendations in the inquiry report, we have taken – or are taking - the following actions in relation to them:

- To assist progress with the seven national recommendations, Shropshire Council has written to the Secretary of State for each of the following government departments: DCLG, Defra and Ministry of Justice, bringing these matters to their attention for consideration.
- We have subsequently received correspondence direct from Caroline Dinenage MP, the Minister for Justice, in which she confirmed that the government is giving serious consideration to David Jenkins' recommendations. She will continue to provide us with progress updates, via one of the officials in her department.
- We also continue to monitor and follow any action taken, and statements made, by the Government and our local MPs in relation to this issue.
- We will provide progress updates to our three local MPs at their periodic meetings with the Leader and Chief Executive of Shropshire Council.

Other progress made

In addition to actioning the Shropshire-specific recommendations within the report, Shropshire Council has received and responded to queries from other parents affected by this difficult matter, and has contacted the Action for Ashes group to seek their views on a possible memorial.