

# **Independent inquiry into infant cremations at Emstrey Crematorium**

## **Progress update from Shropshire Council – March 2016**

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 then moved to monthly meetings and, from January 2016, is meeting when required.

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 second of those updates, which reports on the work carried out to date by the working group.

It is anticipated that this will be the final such update, as each of the Shropshire-specific recommendations has now been met or actioned. However, further updates will be issued if appropriate.

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**

As outlined in the September 2015 update, The Co-operative Funeralcare Ltd was engaged by Shropshire Council in late 2011 to operate Emstrey Crematorium on their behalf. 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**

Shropshire Council invited those recommended above to a Stakeholder Liaison Meeting, which was held in September 2015 and was attended by several local funeral directors and officiants.

Shropshire Council's bereavement services officers have since held discussions with funeral directors and other stakeholders to enhance communications.

Future meetings will be held approximately every six months and will be chaired by Shropshire Council. The next meeting is scheduled for April 2016.

### **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**

Shropshire Council has identified a number of appropriate training sessions to ensure development in this aspect of the service, which relevant staff have undertaken. Recognising the significance of this aspect, Shropshire Council will ensure appropriate ongoing training for the appropriate staff.

A Professional Development Plan for Shropshire Council's bereavement services officers is now in place and good progress against the plan has been made. Further industry training for Shropshire Council officers is currently under consideration, to enhance officers' understanding.

### **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**

As outlined in the September 2015 update, 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 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.*

In response to this recommendation Shropshire Council, in collaboration with The Co-operative Funeralcare, prepared a revised Ashes Policy Statement which was shared with the main professional industry bodies to seek their endorsement. These bodies are: the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA); Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM); The Cremation Society of Great Britain (CSGB); and the Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries (APCC) to seek their endorsement.

In addition to endorsing the statement all four professional bodies have now adopted it as a single, universally-agreed national Policy Statement and best practice guidance document for infant cremation, and will be issuing it to their respective members.

This statement has been published on Shropshire Council website, and will shortly be added to the Emstrey Crematorium website, and shared with local funeral directors, officiants, and hospitals.

We welcome the fact that a new national ashes policy statement is now in place as a result of the Emstrey inquiry.

## **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:

- Shropshire Council welcomes the Government consultation being held in response to the independent inquiry into infant cremations at Emstrey. We're pleased that the recommendations of the Emstrey report are being carefully considered as part of this consultation. We will, of course, be responding to the consultation and will await its findings with interest.
- 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, since September 2015 Shropshire Council has received and responded to a number of queries from other parents affected by this difficult matter.