

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....12th April 2007

1. Title of Item/Report

The Future Development of Cemeteries - Report of the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report of the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee relating to a review it had undertaken on the future development of cemeteries.

It was explained that the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee had agreed to examine the future development of cemeteries as part of a two phased review of cemeteries and memorials with the first phase focusing on the development of cemeteries and long term strategy for the provision of cemeteries within the Borough. It was the intention to conduct the second phase of the review following the May elections and this would be examining the management of memorials within cemeteries.

Although there was no legal requirement for a council to provide burial or cremation facilities, this Authority had acted as burial authority for almost 140 years. The Council had five cemeteries and had a legal responsibility for the maintenance of all or part of nine closed churchyards within the Borough. Due to a history of minimal maintenance and age of the assets within the Cemeteries, the Council on 1 March 2006 approved capital resources of £150,000 to fund improvements to cemeteries. The Council also approved, in principle, allocations of £150,000 for the following two years subject to capital resources being available.

The Committee found that there was a projected shortage of burial space across the Borough and recommended that this situation needed to be addressed through extension to existing cemeteries, where possible, and additional burial land, if this could be identified. In view of the pressure on burial land, the Committee also concluded that the Council should also consider using remaining grave depths and explore more space efficient ways of interring cremated remains.

The Committee found that there was a lack of awareness of burial

options amongst the public and felt that more information should be provided together with an extended choice of funeral and burial options. The Committee also felt that funeral times and office opening hours should be reviewed to provide, where possible, an improved service to the customer.

The Committee found that the Council's cemeteries were maintained to a high standard but felt that some localised drainage problems needed to be addressed and made suggestions for improved facilities within cemetery grounds.

The redevelopment of the disused chapels in Durham Road and Oxbridge Lane were considered by the Committee as was the possibility of a crematorium for Stockton. However, the Committee were mindful that such developments would need to be subject to more detailed feasibility work and investigation of funding streams.

It was explained that following consideration by Cabinet an action plan would be submitted to the Select Committee setting out how the approved recommendations would be implemented detailing officers responsible for action and timescales.

RESOLVED that

Financial Issues

1.a comprehensive fees and charges review for the service be undertaken as part of the service planning process for consideration before April 2008.

2.the further capital investment to deliver the existing five year Improvement Plan for cemeteries and closed churchyards be considered through the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams.

3.the service review its medium term financial plan to re-assess the assumptions on which the budget has been set.

Funeral Times and Office Opening Hours

4.Care for Your Area be asked to review working arrangements in order to establish whether there is scope to provide an extended service on Fridays and Saturdays

5.Registration and Bereavement Services review office opening hours to provide, where possible, an improved service to the public.

## Safety and Security

6.in view of the experience at Durham Road Cemetery, the installation of CCTV be considered for inclusion within the five year Improvement Plan for other cemeteries.

7.further efforts are made to establish friends groups for all of the Council's cemeteries

8.planting be undertaken at strategic locations to deter vandals and assist with traffic control within cemetery grounds.

## Maintenance

9.localised flooding problems be investigated and any capital implications identified for consideration by the Capital Asset Strategy Group.

10.improvements are made to the way graves are back filled and reinstated.

11.a "green" approach to the maintenance of cemetery grounds be developed.

## Facilities

12.improvements be made to the maps on display in the cemeteries in conjunction with section signage in the cemetery grounds.

13.the redevelopment of the disused chapels of Oxbridge and Durham Road Cemeteries be further explored and a feasibility study be prepared on the various potential options.

## Future Provision

14.a project brief be prepared for submission to the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams to meet the costs of extension into Area C at Billingham Cemetery (approximately £40,000) and the extension and development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby (approximately £300,000).

15.the Land and Property Section identify additional land within the Borough for the siting of a cemetery in order to meet future burial needs.

16.future burial provision be considered as part of the planning development framework.

17. Officers investigate alternative, space efficient ways of interring cremated remains within cemeteries.

18. the audit of space available in unpurchased graves within cemeteries be continued and upon completion grave space be offered in the following circumstances subject to appropriate consultation or awareness raising exercises:

- Graves previously sold in perpetuity but containing no interments be identified for the purpose of cancelling Rights where the purchase took place over 75 years ago and re-offer the Rights of Interment and Rights to erect a memorial.

- That unused space within, previously 'reserved' graves be used for future interments. The Committee recommended that those 'reserved' graves where the previous interments took place 100 years or more ago be offered first.

19. all graves be excavated, as a matter of course, to allow for 3 interments.

#### Publicity/ Public Awareness

20. articles be included in Stockton News to raise awareness on the full range of burial options and alternatives together with information on grave rights and transfer and the service offered by the Council in respect of civil funerals.

21. information leaflets be prepared on the issues to be considered when planning a "green" funeral, on how to organise your own funeral and that leaflets on planning funerals be provided to solicitors to distribute to people when they are making wills.

#### Extending Choice

22. a detailed business case be prepared on the feasibility of providing a crematorium for Stockton including possible funding streams and partnership arrangements.

23. the development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby be considered by the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams and that the extension and creation of a woodland cemetery be undertaken in one single phase to minimise the risk of subsequent phases causing damage to previously completed works.

24.the identification of further woodland burial sites be supported.

25.the Council's current regulations in respect of type and design of coffin be reviewed to allow greater freedom of choice within the constraints of availability and safe materials.

26.bio-degradable coffins be supplied via Bereavement Services and that a reusable coffin shell (to be used in conjunction with a cardboard coffin) and a pall be available for use.

#### Dedicated Benches and Trees

27.clearer guidelines are developed in respect of the dedicated benches and trees schemes together with the introduction of appropriate fees and that the benches, trees and other appropriate memorial dedications be extended to locations other than cemeteries.

#### Timescales

28.the timescales included in the action plan for implementation of the review recommendations reflect a desire to make significant progress by December 2007.

### 3. Reasons for the Decision

The following key objectives were identified for the review:

- To ensure that there is adequate provision for future burial needs in the Borough
- To identify improvements to existing cemeteries for inclusion on the 5 year improvement plan
- To develop the range of burial options available
- To introduce measures to reduce the incidence of unsocial behaviour at cemeteries

### 4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

### 5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Kirton declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of this item as a result of his employment and the nature of the organisation's involvement within the funeral service

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not Applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight Friday 20th April 2007

Proper Officer  
13 April 2007