

## **PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **Scrutiny Review of Burial Provision**

#### **Executive Summary**

The main aims of this review were to recognise the importance of ensuring that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) provides sufficient burial space within the Borough and to understand the impact on the Council if SBC were unable to provide the appropriate choice to residents. The review also focussed on the allocation of appropriate resources to ensure that any future demand was met and was delivered in a timely manner.

Members were asked to review the provision of burial space within the Borough to ensure that sufficient capacity remained to serve all areas within the Borough and to review any links with future demand associated with both the increasing size of the Borough and the addition of the new crematorium.

The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- The Council has a statutory responsibility to provide suitable burial provision and this is currently provided through Thornaby, Billingham, and Durham Road, Stockton Cemeteries.
- Thornaby Cemetery currently has around 72 years of burial provision remaining and around 20 years of Muslim burial provision. Billingham currently has around 35 years of provision and Durham Road around 7-9 years.
- In its first year of operation, 1,116 cremations had taken place at Stockton-on-Tees Crematorium (23 September 2019 - 23 September 2020).
- For the financial year 2020-21, income from grave purchases, funerals and other associated income totalled approximately £432,000. For the same financial year, the approximate net cost to the Council after income for Bereavement Services and Cemeteries provision was £65,000.
- 80% of the Borough's residents opted for cremation and 20% of residents opted for burial. It would take several years before the true extent of residents' preference for cremation would become apparent.
- To maintain the service provided to residents, additional burial provision is needed, particularly in the central, western, and southern parts of the Borough. This is primarily due to provision running out in Durham Road and an increasing population in the south of the Borough.
- The preference was for two new cemeteries - one in the central/western area and a smaller site in the south. However, it was felt that the larger, more central site should be prioritised. The second site in the south could be obtained in partnership with Town/Parish Councils.
- Further surveys and investigations would need to take place at a new site/s. Any site would take an appropriate period of time to settle and to be suitable for burials to take place.

- A new site needs to be large enough to accommodate sufficient provision (eg. around 100 years plus) and it needs to be accessible via public transport.
- A site of around 7 Hectares would provide roughly 100 years of burial provision. This would take into account roads/paths etc.
- The Committee would prefer to place a site on land already owned by SBC. If not, funding would need to be sourced.

## **Conclusion**

The Council currently provides suitable burial provision according to its statutory responsibility. However, in the near future additional burial provision will be needed to maintain this level of service to residents. This has largely resulted from the depletion of provision in Durham Road, Stockton, and an increasing population towards the south of the Borough.

The Committee supported the provision of a new burial site in the central or western areas of the Borough. The Committee also recognised that a site with more than 100 years provision was needed and any future site should be accessible by public transport. It was also acknowledged that consideration should be given to an additional, smaller site in the south of the Borough and that officers should consult with appropriate Ward Members and Town and Parish Councils on options for collaboration.

## **Recommendations**

The Committee recommend that:

1. That a new burial site be provided that would meet the following criteria:
  - Located in the central or western areas of the Borough
  - Provision for more than 100 years
  - Accessible via public transport
  - Preferably land already owned by Stockton Borough Council
2. That officers undertake further surveys and investigations into potential sites to determine if they are suitable for burial provision.
3. That consideration is given to an additional, smaller burial site in the south of the Borough and that officers consult with the appropriate Ward Members and Town and Parish Councils to determine if this can be facilitated through collaboration.