

Place Select Committee
Review of Muslim and Faith Burial Services
Outline Scope

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<p>Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?</p> <p>While the provision burial service does not naturally fit into any single area within the Stockton-on-Tees Plan, it is a service which, at some point, may be accessed by the whole community. It will also indirectly address the following sections of the Plan:</p> <p>Priority three – A great place to live, work, and visit, an environment that is well looked after, with outdoor spaces to enjoy and connect local amenities: Our open spaces will be attractive and accessible, including public realm in our town centre, as well as our parks, cemeteries, nature reserves and other grounds.</p> <p>Priority five – A sustainable Council: We will ensure our council is financially sustainable and manages our assets effectively to enhance their local impact. We will be a well-run council across areas of our business and continue to improve outcomes for communities.</p> <p>Transformation Powering Our Future - We will improve the way we work and deliver efficient, effective and value for money services within available financial resources.</p>	
<p>What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?</p> <p>The Council have a statutory responsibility to provide suitable burial provision which is discharged through the provision of cemeteries in Billingham, Oxbridge, Durham Road, Thornaby and Eaglescliffe.</p> <p>The provision of burial space is one of the most crucial and sensitive services that the Council provides. There can be significant social implications if the Council is unable to offer sufficient levels of burial provision to ensure that families are able to choose a grave space in geographical areas where they have a personal preference or a local connection with.</p> <p>There are also different religious rituals related to burial, and for some faiths the use of burial chambers/vaults are preferred. The provision/choice of the type of burial shows that as a local authority we are listening to our communities and endeavouring to provide a better and improving service.</p>	

<p>The scrutiny review aims to understand the need, as well as the associated financial and operational requirements, for the provision of a burial chambers/vaults within the boroughs cemeteries as an alternative option to the standard grave plot.</p>	
<p>The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What options are currently available for burials? • What is the demand for burial chambers/vaults? • What types of burial chambers/vaults are available? • What are the space and other requirements for burial chambers/vaults? • What are the costs associated with burial chambers/vaults? • Which cemeteries in the borough would be able to accommodate burial chambers/vaults? • What are the operational requirements of providing chambers/vaults on the service? 	
<p>Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?</p> <p>Cabinet, Council.</p>	
<p>Expected duration of review and key milestones:</p> <p>6 months (reporting to Cabinet in November 2025)</p> <p>Approve scope and project plan – April 2025 Receive evidence – May 2025 – July 2025 Draft recommendations – September 2025 Final report – October 2025 Report to Cabinet – November 2025</p>	
<p>What information do we need?</p> <p>Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):</p> <p>Place Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Burial Provision 2021 Current provision Data on number of faith burials taking place within the borough</p> <p>New information:</p> <p>Provision offered in other local authorities and take up of offer Details of potential providers and requirements/costs associated with burial chambers</p>	
<p>Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)</p>	<p>What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?</p>

SBC Officers Dale Rowbotham Darren Robinson Erin Evans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background information • Current options for burial provision • Number of requests for faith burials • Estimated requirements/costs and potential locations of sites • Customer feedback on the service
Other Local Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burial options provided for faith groups and associated costs/space required
Faith groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burial requirements for different faiths • Current options being taken by faith groups for burial
Funeral Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for faith burials and costs associated
<p>How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey)</p> <p>Committee meetings, reports, case studies desk based research, site visits</p>	
<p>How will key partners and the public be involved in the review?</p> <p>Committee meetings, information submissions</p>	
<p>How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?</p> <p>The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics (including – but not limited to – age, gender, disability, ethnicity), and advance equality of opportunity for those with Protected Characteristics. Public bodies must have due regard to the need to encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low. Reviewing whether to provide extra choice for burial will help address this.</p>	
<p>How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?</p> <p>As the provision of choice helps to ensure people feel included with strong social connections, the review will indirectly contribute to Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030: Focus Area 3: Everyone lives in healthy and sustainable places and communities.</p>	
<p>Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:</p> <p>Burial services can include same day requests for the burial to take place following a death and providing a number of burial chambers/vaults that are available as soon as notified could offer an alternative appropriate burial option. However, the cost of initial construction of the chambers, extra space required, and operational impacts will need to be reflected in the cost to the family purchasing the grave plots.</p> <p>The review will therefore explore the requirements, cost, and demand for burial chambers/vault to ascertain whether it is a viable option to extend choice for our communities.</p>	

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	March 2025	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	24 March 2025	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Agree Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	14 April 2025	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	Determine whether Communications Plan needed	TBD	Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
Obtaining Evidence	Desktop evidence gathered by Community Services, Environment and Culture. Evidence from faith groups Evidence from funeral directors Examples of all types of chambers/vaults with costs Site Visit Evidence from other local authorities	19 May 2025 9 June 2025 14 July 2025	Select Committee
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	15 September 2025	Select Committee
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	September 2025	Scrutiny Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBC	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Final Agreement of Report	Approval of final report by Committee	13 October 2025	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	18 November 2025	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet/Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	13 November 2025	Cabinet / Approving Body