

Select Committee Work Programme Suggested Review – Pro Forma

Summary of issue you wish to be scrutinised, including key concerns and outcome for scrutinising the topic?

The issue of Muslim burial provision was previously touched upon in the wider Place Select Committee Report, Scrutiny Review of Burial Provision, May 2021. The final report shows that there is approximately 20 years of Burial Provision at Thornaby Cemetery. No provision is identified at any of the other cemeteries in the Borough. The aim of that review centred on the provision of space/land.

The Muslim community were under the impression that during the last scrutiny review the issue of burial chambers and/or vaults (choice) was going to be part of the review. This may have been discussed during the initial scoping exercise, but missed out when the aims of the review were tightened up.

- To understand the impact on the Council if SBC fail to provide the **appropriate choice** to residents.

Additionally, choice appears to be focused on which cemetery is available to be used.

<https://moderngov.stockton.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/202105201630/Agenda/att40517.pdf>

The proposed scrutiny review is to understand, and hopefully provide, the need for the provision of a burial chamber/vault as an option to choose, away from the provision of a standard grave plot.

Cremation of the body is strictly forbidden in Islam.

The provision of a chamber/vault is provided as a choice in many local authorities throughout the United Kingdom. Locally, Middlesbrough Borough Council provide this choice.

The scrutiny review would specifically focus on the provision, as a choice, the option of a chamber/vault rather than a standard grave plot. Indeed, this option should be open to all and not necessarily restricted to Muslims.

It is recognised that that this provision/choice will come at a higher financial burden to the family who choose this option.

It is also recognised that cost savings can be achieved, and the surrounding ground become less disturbed, if a number/line of chambers/vaults are constructed ahead of any subsequent requests for this option, rather than construction on the day of a funeral.

There are many companies in the UK who provide this construction service, an example being,

<https://greengraves.com/products/concrete-headstone-socket/>

The desired outcome would be choice regarding the type of burial available to the Muslim and other faith communities that make up our Borough.

Please be clear about the focus of the review and desired outcome.

NOTE: ENTRIES BELOW RELATE TO ISSUE CATEGORIES OF THE PICK PROCESS.
PLEASE REFER TO THE EXPLANATION NOTES TO THIS FORM FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION.

Public interest justification:

The issue of death is a sensitive subject that we all approach with humanity and dignity, and as a Council we have a proud record of ensuring all our communities are listened to. The Muslim community, rightly, or wrongly were under the impression that their concerns were being addressed regarding the choice of burial.

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.

Impact on the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area:

The wellbeing and needs of our Muslim community, like any other minority community in the Borough are in the forward thinking that the local authority undertakes when reviewing to provide a better service. The previous review on Burial Provision missed an opportunity to encompass the provision of choice, type rather than land area on that occasion. Having been identified that this provision was missed, it should be incumbent on the Council to undertake a short, and very quick review of the specific provision of chamber/vault as a choice in burial provision.

Council performance, efficiency (identification of savings and reducing demand) in this area:

The identified savings, at this time, are the excavation and construction of a number of burial chambers/vaults ahead of request for burial at short notice, that the council already provides. This short notice does come at a cost to the council and is reflected in the cost to the family requesting this service.

Should the review identify that a choice, chamber/vault should be provided, then the savings in prior excavation and construction en-masse are evident. Providing a chamber/vault at short notice would invariably cost more and has the potential for greater ground disturbance in the surrounding plots by the use of machinery to lift a chamber/vault into place.

Keep in Context (are other reviews taking place in this area?):

None currently

Place Select Committee carried out a Review of Burial Provision in 2020/21 but did not fully explore the provision and choice of burial chamber/vaults.

How does the topic support delivery of the Council Plan?

This topic supports the Council Plan vision that people live in cohesive and safe communities:

We are proud that community cohesion is strong in the Borough and that people report a strong sense of belonging here and we want it to stay that way. The provision of choice will further this commitment we have made.

What would you want the outcome of the review to be?	
The provision and choice of a burial chamber/vault.	
Signed:	Date:
Please return to: Judy Trainer Scrutiny Section Democratic Services Municipal Buildings Church Road Stockton on Tees TS18 1LD Email: judith.trainer@stockton.gov.uk Tel: 01642 528158	

PICK Priority Setting

P for Public Interest

Members' representative roles are an essential feature of Scrutiny. They are the eyes and ears of the public, ensuring that the policies, practice and services delivered to the people of the District, by both the Council and external organisations, are meeting local needs and to an acceptable standard. The concerns of local people should therefore influence the issues chosen for scrutiny. This could include current issues. For example, dignity is consistently cited as a high priority for service users (e.g. Mid Staffordshire Enquiry, care in Winterbourne hospital) and scrutiny committees are well placed to influence the agenda locally and drive forward better-quality services). Members themselves will have a good knowledge of local issues and concerns. Surgeries, Parish Councils, Residents Associations and Community Groups are all sources of resident's views. Consultation and Surveys undertaken by the Council and others can also provide a wealth of information.

I for Impact

Scrutiny is about making a difference to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. Not all issues of concern will have equal impact on the well-being of the community and there may be issues which are important to residents but where the Council can exert little or no influence. This should be considered when deciding the programme of work, giving priority to the big issues that have most impact and where scrutiny can tangibly influence the outcome. To maximise impact, particularly when scrutinising external activity, attention should also be given to how the committee could influence policy and practice.

C for Council Performance

Scrutiny is about improving performance and ensuring the Council's customers are served well. With the abolition of external inspection regimes, scrutiny has an even more important role to play in self-regulation. Members will need good quality information to identify areas where the Council, and other external organisations, are performing poorly. Areas where performance has dropped should be our priority. As well as driving up Council performance, scrutiny also has an important role in scrutinising the efficiency and value for money of Council services and organizational development. In the current financial climate, the challenge for scrutiny is investigating whether improvements can be made within existing resources or with less resource and identify ways that demand for services can be reduced.

K for Keep in Context

To avoid duplication or wasted effort priorities should take account of what else is happening in the areas being considered. Is there another review happening or planned? Is the service about to be inspected by an external body? Are there major legislative or policy initiatives already resulting in change? If these circumstances exist Members may decide to link up with other approaches or defer a decision until the outcomes are known or conclude that the other approaches will address the issues. Reference should also be made to proposed programmes of work in the Council's plans and strategies and whether topic suggestion is in line with the Council's four policy principles.

Council Plan

All topic suggestions should be in line with the Council Plan.

Outcome

Greater weighing will be given to those suggestions where it is clear that scrutiny will make a tangible difference, can exert influence, achieve savings and reduce pressure on demand for services.

Scoring System

- **P**ublic Interest: the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen

Score	Measure
0	no public interest
1	low public interest
2	medium public interest
3	high public interest

- **I**mpact: priority should be given to the issues which make the biggest difference to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area

Score	Measure
0	no direct impact
1	low impact
2	medium impact
3	high impact

- **C**ouncil Performance and efficiency: priority should be given to the areas in which the Council, and other agencies, are not performing well or proposals will identify efficiencies/savings and reduce pressure on demand for services.

Score	Measure
0	'Green' on or above target performance
1	'Amber',
2	low performance 'Red'

- **K**eep in Context: work programmes must take account of what else is happening in the areas being considered to avoid duplication or wasted effort.

Score	Measure
0	Already dealt with/ not a Council/ public sector priority
1	Longer term aspiration or plan
2	Need for review acknowledged and worked planned elsewhere
3	Need for review acknowledged

In addition, extra weighting will be given to suggestions which are in line with the Council's priorities and where it is clear that scrutiny can achieve a positive outcome:

- **C**ouncil Plan Priority

Score	Measure
0	Not a Council Plan priority
1	Council Plan priority but worked planned elsewhere
2	Council Plan priority and need for review acknowledged

- **O**utcome

Score	Measure
1	Low value added
2	Medium value added
3	High value added