

## MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

### FINAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL – TEESSIDE CREMATORIUM

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## **AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION**

1. The aim of the investigation was to examine any potential impacts of bereavement services offered by neighbouring local authorities on those provided by Middlesbrough Council at Teesside Crematorium.

## **MAYOR'S VISION**

2. The scrutiny of this topic fits within the following priorities of the Mayor's Vision:
  - We will make sure that our business management practices, including how we manage finance, performance, projects, risks and assets, compare with those of the best-performing councils, and achieve good outcomes for our communities.

## **COUNCIL'S THREE CORE OBJECTIVES**

3. The scrutiny of this topic aligns with the Council's three core objectives as detailed in the Strategic Plan 2020-2023<sup>1</sup>:
  - People - working with communities and other public services to improve the lives of our residents.
  - Place - securing improvements in Middlesbrough's housing, infrastructure and attractiveness, improving the town's reputation, creating opportunities for local people and improving our finances.
  - Business - promoting investment in Middlesbrough's economy and making sure we work as effectively as possible to support our ambitions for People and Place.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

4. The terms of reference for the scrutiny panel's short review were:
  - A) To explore the service offered by Middlesbrough Council and recent improvements at Teesside Crematorium.
  - B) To examine the service offered by Stockton Council at Stockton Crematorium.
  - C) To investigate the potential financial impact of recently opened Crematoria at Kirkleatham and Stockton on Teesside Crematorium and any mitigation required.

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<sup>1</sup> Middlesbrough Council's Strategic Plan 2020-2023

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5. The Panel began this scrutiny review with a site visit to Stockton Crematorium followed by a presentation from Middlesbrough Council Officers in February 2020. Arrangements were in place for a site visit to Teesside Crematorium on 31 March 2020. However, on 23 March 2020, the Government introduced measures putting the UK in a state of lockdown due to the Coronavirus Pandemic and the site visit was unable to go ahead.
6. The next formal meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure (EDEI) Scrutiny Panel was held on 15 July 2020 and the Panel revised its work plan for completion of the review. It is widely acknowledged that the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic is unprecedented and ongoing, and bereavement services are operating in circumstances previously un-encountered. Despite these uncertain times, the Panel felt it was worthwhile to produce a final report on their findings, acknowledging the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on review of Teesside Crematorium and recommending future updates to ensure that any necessary financial mitigation required is applied.

### **Stockton Crematorium**

7. On 4 February 2020, Panel Members undertook a site visit to Stockton Crematorium. Panel Members met with the Ward Councillor and Officers from Stockton Council who showed them around the facility. The Panel is grateful for their assistance and input.
8. Stockton Crematorium is a purpose-built, single storey, state-of-the-art building, set within its own expansive grounds. The facility cost £6.5 million to build, was designed by a local architect, and took ten years from initial planning to opening. The building has two chapels, with the crematory located in the centre of the building. Within the grounds there is also:
  - Memorial Wall and Gardens.
  - Remembrance Garden.
  - Book of Remembrance, set in its own Pavilion.
  - Infant Memorial Garden.
9. Bluebell Chapel is the smaller of the two chapels, with seating for 50 mourners. Maplewood Chapel is the larger of the two chapels, and will comfortably seat 120 mourners, with room for an additional 50 standing. *The chapels are finished with an emphasis on light and space. Furnished to the highest standard, with beautiful bespoke wooden benches and catafalque.*<sup>2</sup>
10. The benches in the front row incorporate sections that can easily be removed to allow wheelchair users to fit seamlessly into the row. Another innovative feature is the use of a voile curtain which can be drawn around the catafalque while the lights are dimmed at the close of the service.
11. Similar to Teesside, Stockton has one-hour time slots for services as well as dedicated Chapel Attendants. All services can be streamed via a live webcast and music is

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stocktoncrematorium.co.uk/>

supplied by the Obitas AV System. The Maplewood Chapel also has a traditional organ.

12. The Crematorium has ample on-site car-parking facilities. Outside the Maplewood Chapel there is parking for 93 cars, plus disabled parking for 5 cars, and overflow parking. A smaller car park, serves the Bluebell Chapel, to the left of the Crematorium building, with parking for 35 cars plus disabled parking for 3 cars. To the right of the main Crematorium building is the administration office.
13. *The crematory itself has been designed with consideration for the local environment in mind. It utilises two of the latest and most efficient cremators, equipped with filtration systems which meet current emissions regulations, and thereby ensure that the Crematorium is one of the cleanest facilities of its kind.*<sup>2</sup>
14. A viewing room has been incorporated into the crematory, in consultation with members of the Sikh community, to enable final committals to be witnessed.

### **Teesside Crematorium**

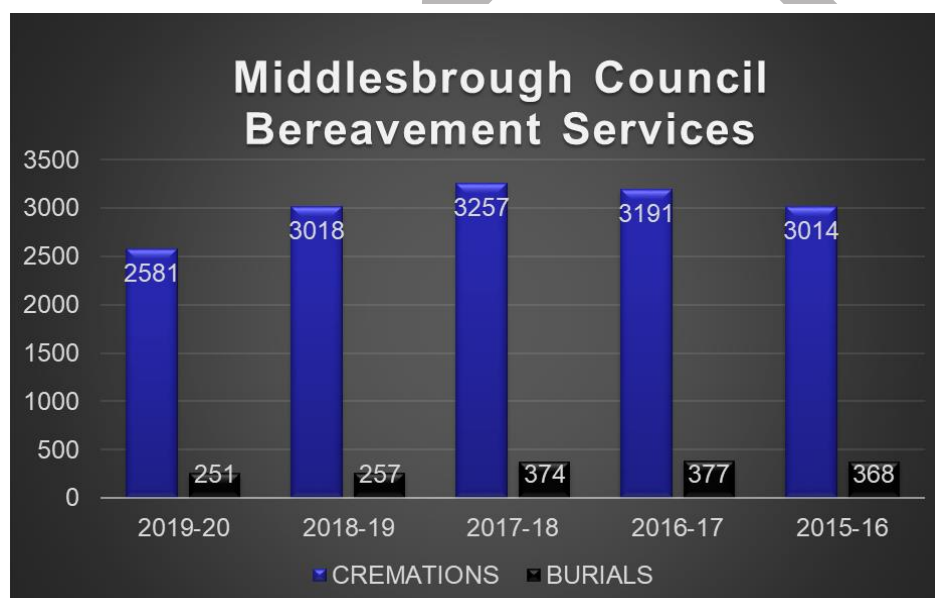
15. Teesside Crematorium has two chapels: St. Bede's and St. Hilda's and a Chapel of Rest. St Bede's car park has 58 spaces, a coach bay and disabled parking spaces approximately 50 metres from the front doors of the chapel. St Hilda's car park has 40 spaces, a coach bay and disabled parking spaces approximately 25 metres from the front doors of the chapel. Cremation services are offered five days a week with flexible time slots for services, including longer slots as required. All cremations take place on the same day as the services.
16. A streaming service is provided free of charge. This is particularly useful at the current time, since at the time of writing this report, attendance at services is restricted to 30 mourners due to the Government's Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. A copy of the streamed service is available to families. The service is hoping to make further improvements to the streaming service.
17. Over the last few years there had been an extensive refurbishment programme of both Chapels and the Chapel of Rest. St Bede's Chapel has been refurbished at a cost of £150,000. St Hilda's Chapel has been remodelled and refurbished, with the installation of new windows, at a cost of £300,000 in total. The Chapel of Rest has been re-roofed and refurbished internally, for a total cost of £160,000. Installation of a canopy structure at the entrance to both chapels now provides additional shelter for mourners, at a cost of £72,000.
18. The landscape surrounding the Crematorium has also been improved with extensive re-planting. A new land drainage scheme, costing £300,000, has been installed at the back of the site. This significant scheme will improve the land drainage sufficiently to provide an additional 10 years burial capacity.
19. As part of Middlesbrough Council's Digital Strategy, it is planned that information about pricing, services and burial plots will be more accessible to the public. The Council holds a huge amount of paper records and is exploring opportunities to digitise those records for safe, long-term retention. One idea being explored is to map information onto

the Council's GIS system, linked to a database, so that records can be retrieved quickly and more efficiently.

20. Direct cremations are currently offered by both Stockton and Kirkleatham Crematoriums and the option to offer this service at Teesside Crematorium is under consideration. Direct cremation is an alternative to a traditional funeral, and is becoming increasingly popular with families. Direct Cremation is a simple, unattended cremation with all the dignity and care of the more traditional service. Without the funeral directors' fees, service, music, flowers etc, the cost is much reduced.

### **Financial Impact on Teesside Crematorium**

21. Over the period from 2015/2016 through to 2019/2020 there has been a drop in the total number of burials and cremations carried out by Middlesbrough Council's Bereavement Services of 420.<sup>3</sup> Over the period from 2008 up to 2019, there has been a reduction of around 1200 cremations.



22. Stockton Crematorium opened in September 2019 and Kirkleatham Memorial Park and Crematorium in 2014. In February 2020, the EDEI Scrutiny Panel was advised that the initial impact on Teesside Crematorium in October 2019 was a year-on-year reduction of 28 cremations, which climbed to 88 in December 2019. However, there had been an underlying reduction in the number of cremations of six per month, in line with national trends for death rates reducing over the last year or so. There was also an impact from Kirkleatham Crematorium, which was offering reduced rates for selected times at that time.
23. In the current financial year, actual numbers for cremations for April to July show a reduction of 64 cremations in comparison to 2019/2020. However, due to the current

<sup>3</sup> Presentation to EDEI Scrutiny Panel by Head of Property and Commercial Services, Middlesbrough Council – 8 September 2020

Covid-19 pandemic it is impossible to provide accurate estimates for the remainder of the year.

		Estimate	
Month	2019-20	2020-21	Comments
April	240	295	Actual
May	248	254	Actual
June	215	158	Actual
July	227	159	Actual
August	243	190	Estimates
September	231	190	Estimates
October	210	190	Estimates
November	181	190	Estimates
December	145	190	Estimates
January	265	190	Estimates
February	185	190	Estimates
March	191	190	Estimates
<b>Total</b>	<b>2581</b>	<b>2386</b>	

*Actual/Estimated cremations at Teesside Crematorium 2019-2021<sup>4</sup>*

24. In terms of mitigation, £490,000 has been allocated in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2020/2021 and this figure will be reviewed at Quarter 4. As part of current savings, a reduced headcount in the service has provided £80,000 savings in 2019/2020 and £53,000 in the current financial year. The estimated income for 2020/2021 is £1.9 million. The operating model is under review to explore further efficiencies and consider how income can be increased. The pricing structure is being reviewed and it is envisaged that further digitisation will improve efficiency and reduce costs.
25. Any expansion at Kirkleatham or Stockton Crematoria, seems unlikely at the current time.

### **Fees and Charges**

26. The fees and charges at Teesside, Stockton and Kirkleatham Crematoria are published on their respective websites. It is difficult to make a direct comparison since the service types offered vary. The service for an adult over 18 years of age at Teesside and Stockton appears broadly similar with the fees being £790 and £765 respectively. Kirkleatham

<sup>4</sup> Presentation to EDEI Scrutiny Panel by Head of Property and Commercial Services, Middlesbrough Council – 8 September 2020

offers its premium service for £875 or £775 for timeslots from 8.00 am to 10.00 am. Burial prices vary slightly more and this is mainly due to the availability of land. Kirkleatham and Stockton also offer direct cremations at a cost of £500 or £465 respectively. <sup>5</sup>

Area	Cremations £	Burials Purchase of grave	Internment fee £	Non Resident	Direct cremations
Hartlepool	£761	£1332	£919	Purchase of grave£2666  Internment £1728	
Kirkleatham	£875	£730	£525		£500.00
Middlesbrough	£790	£995	£635		
Redcar & Cleveland	No crem	£830	£700	Purchase of grave £1245  Internment £1050	
Stockton	£765	£750	£550		£465.00

27. Middlesbrough Council does not apply any increased fees for non-residents.

## CONCLUSIONS

28. The scrutiny panel reached the following conclusions in respect of its investigation:

**TERM OF REFERENCE A – To explore the service offered by Middlesbrough Council and recent improvements at Teesside Crematorium.**

**TERM OF REFERENCE B - To examine the service offered by Stockton Council at Stockton Crematorium.**

<sup>5</sup> Presentation to EDEI Scrutiny Panel by Head of Property and Commercial Services, Middlesbrough Council – 8 September 2020



**TERM OF REFERENCE C - To investigate the potential financial impact of recently opened Crematoria at Kirkleatham and Stockton on Teesside Crematorium and any mitigation required.**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

29. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for consideration by the Executive are as follows:

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

30. The Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following for their assistance with its work:

Councillor J Beall, Stockton Council  
A Buckton, Bereavement Services Manager, Stockton Council  
G Field, Director of Environment and Community Services, Middlesbrough Council  
P Thwaites, Operational Manager, Middlesbrough Council  
M Shepherd, Head of Property and Community Services, Middlesbrough Council  
C Willows, Community Services Manager, Stockton Council

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

31. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

Kirkleatham Memorial Park and Crematorium website:  
<https://www.kirkleathammemorial.co.uk/services-and-facilities/cremation-and-burial-prices/>

Stockton On Tees Crematorium website: <https://www.stocktoncrematorium.co.uk/our-services/scale-of-fees/>

Teesside Crematorium website:  
<https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/births-deaths-and-marriages/cemeteries-and-crematorium/cremation-charges>

Minutes of the meetings of the EDEI Scrutiny Panel held on 5 February, 15 July and 8 September 2020.

Presentation to EDEI Scrutiny Panel by Head of Property and Commercial Services, Middlesbrough Council – 8 September 2020.



**COUNCILLOR M SAUNDERS  
- CHAIR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
SCRUTINY PANEL**

The membership of the scrutiny panel is as follows:

Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel 2019-2020

Councillors M Saunders (Chair), B Hubbard, (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, D Branson, D Coupe, T Furness, L Garvey, M Storey, S Walker

Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel 2020-2021

Councillors M Saunders (Chair), B Hubbard, (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, D Branson, D Coupe, T Furness, L Garvey, L Lewis, M Storey

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