

<b>MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL</b>	
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<b>Report of:</b>	Corporate Director Environment, Communities and Culture – Geoff Field
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<b>Relevant Executive Member:</b>	Executive Member for Environment - Cllr Peter Gavigan
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<b>Submitted to:</b>	Executive
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<b>Date:</b>	10 June 2026
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<b>Title:</b>	Bereavement Strategy
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<b>Report for:</b>	Decision
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<b>Status:</b>	Public
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<b>Council Plan priority:</b>	Safe and resilient communities
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<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Why:</b>	Decision(s) will have a significant impact in two or more wards

<b>Subject to call in?</b>	Yes
<b>Why:</b>	Non-Urgent Report

<b>Proposed decision(s)</b>
<p>That Executive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approves the Bereavement strategy as the framework for delivering a compassionate, inclusive and sustainable bereavement services for Middlesbrough.</li> </ul>

<b>Executive summary</b>
<p>This report seeks approval for the Bereavement Services Strategy, which sets out Middlesbrough Council’s vision for delivering high-quality, culturally sensitive, and environmentally responsible bereavement services. The strategy addresses key challenges, including ageing cremation equipment, limited burial space, and exploring additional working options within the service.</p> <p>The recommended approach introduces a unified leadership model, investment in cremator replacement, improved cemetery aesthetics, and enhanced service</p>

accessibility (including weekend appointments). It also embeds environmental sustainability through low-emission cremation practices.

Alternative options, such as maintaining the status quo, were considered but rejected due to risks of non-compliance, reputational damage, and inability to meet community needs. The implications of the recommendations have been assessed by relevant officers and are detailed in this report.

This strategy requires executive approval as per 10.20.1 (b) of the constitution which requires all key decision not otherwise delegated by the Mayor to be taken by executive.

## 1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

1.1 The Bereavement Services Strategy sets out Middlesbrough Council's long-term approach to delivering compassionate, inclusive, and sustainable bereavement services that meet the needs of residents now and in the future. It establishes a clear direction for addressing key challenges, including ageing infrastructure, limited burial capacity, and the need to improve service quality and accessibility, while also embedding environmental responsibility. Executive approval is required due to the strategy's significance in shaping service delivery, committing financial investment, and managing reputational, operational, and regulatory risks. Endorsement at this level ensures that the proposed approach is aligned with corporate priorities, appropriately resourced, and supported across the organisation to enable effective implementation

### Contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions:

- 1.2 Safe and Resilient Communities: Provides dignified, accessible bereavement services, enforces cemetery regulations, and promotes community engagement.
- 1.3 A Healthy Place: Addresses emotional wellbeing, promotes inclusivity, and aligns with environmental goals through sustainable practices.
- 1.4 Delivering Best Value: Introduces robust governance, compliance with national standards, and a financially sustainable model.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
<b>A successful and ambitious town</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investment within the bereavement infrastructure; create more business engagement with Funeral directors, stonemasons and suppliers.</li> <li>- The service to introduce clear roles and responsibilities, the strategy supports staff development within bereavement services.</li> <li>- Land use planning for cemeteries, ensuring use of council owned land</li> </ul>
<b>A healthy Place</b>	<p>Aims within this ambition are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The strategy ensures equitable access to bereavement services regardless of background, religion, or income, addressing emotional wellbeing and social inclusion during times of loss.</li> <li>- Environment sustainability throughout this bereavement strategy plays a strong part, the strategy explains actions such as improving creation practices and exploring all options for fuels for the cremators.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This strategy openly commits to culturally sensitive and inclusive services, ensuring dignity and respect for all communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Safe and resilient communities</b>	<p>Aims within this ambition are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve the service by enhancing the cemeteries and cremation records digitally.</li> <li>- The strategy encourages community engagement, consultation and the development of memorial designs fostering pride and innovation into our cemeteries.</li> <li>- Enforcing cemetery regulations and addressing issues with unauthorised memorabilia and unsafe memorials, the strategy contributes to a safer public space.</li> </ul>
<b>Delivering best value</b>	<p>Aims within this ambition are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This strategy introduces clear leadership and accountability, and compliance with notational standards, improving governance throughout bereavement services.</li> </ul>

## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1 That Executive:

- Approves the Bereavement strategy as the framework for delivering compassionate, inclusive and sustainable bereavement services for Middlesbrough.

## 3 Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

### 3.1 Bereavement Services are a critical function of Middlesbrough Council, reflecting its commitment to dignity and compassion during times of loss.

The rationale for the recommended decision is:

- Alignment with the council plan, the strategy supports the ambitions of safe and resilient communities, a healthy place and delivering best value by improving service accessibility, governance and environmental sustainability.
- Adoption of low emission cremation practices and sustainable long-term plans for our cemeteries.
- Exploring the services opening times and being open to flexible options in relation to cremations and burials.
- The strategy includes pricing reviews, efficiency measures and long-term investment planning.
- Strengthening relationships with funeral directors, faith groups and residents will rebuild trust and improve overall satisfaction.

#### **4. Background and relevant information**

4.1 The approval of the Bereavement Services Strategy is required to ensure the Council continues to meet its statutory responsibilities in relation to burial, cremation and the management of cemeteries under relevant legislation (including the Burial Act 1853–1906, Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977, Cremation Acts and associated regulations).

4.2 In addition to legislative compliance, the Strategy provides a clear long-term framework to:

- Maintain and improve safe, dignified and sustainable bereavement services.
- Ensure sufficient provision to meet future demand and demographic change, including burial capacity and cremation services.
- Support delivery of the Council's strategic priorities, particularly those relating to:
  - supporting residents at vulnerable moments
  - improving environmental sustainability (e.g. emissions, land use, biodiversity)
  - financial sustainability and cost recovery
  - community wellbeing and inclusive services.

4.3 The Strategy also responds to national policy developments, sector guidance, and increased public expectations around choice, cultural sensitivity, and environmental impact.

4.4 The development of the Bereavement Services Strategy has been informed by a range of evidence, technical inputs and strategic considerations, including:

- Condition surveys and assessments of existing cemetery and crematorium infrastructure
- Capacity modelling for burial space and cremation demand
- Environmental and regulatory compliance requirements (including emissions standards where relevant)
- Benchmarking against national standards and comparable local authorities
- National guidance and best practice from professional bodies
- Current and projected service costs and income
- Long-term sustainability of the service, including maintenance liabilities
- Capital investment requirement
- Customer feedback and complaints
- Service usage trends and demographic changes
- Equality and accessibility considerations.

#### **5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate**

5.1 Specific engagement with Executive Member for Environment.

#### **6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended**

6.1 The other alternatives are to continue with the current equipment, service options and service structures which would not be assist in future proofing the service for the reasons noted.

## 7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including Social Value)	Investment in the cremators and site improvements. There are potential financial implications from the ambitions within the strategy that are currently subject to feasibility studies. As these are completed, they will be taken through the appropriate decision-making processes to consider the financial impact.
Procurement	Any procurement activity that arises from the Bereavement Strategy and subsequent feasibility studies will be supported by the Procurement Team ensuring compliance with the Council's Constitution and/or Procurement Act 2023. This report will provide the key decision approval in the event that any procurement is in excess of £250k.
Legal	The strategy will ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory responsibilities in relation to burial, cremation and the management of cemeteries under relevant legislation, including the Burial Act 1853–1906, Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977, Cremation Acts and associated regulations. It also ensures ongoing compliance with the DEFRA, FBCA, BRAMM industry standards.
Risk	The adoption of a Bereavement Strategy will positively impact on a number of risks by reducing the likelihood of the Council failing to meet its legal obligations in relation to the service and the functions it delivers, in particular it will reduce the risk of liability through enforcement of memorial safety and cemetery regulations.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	The Strategy will ensure that the Council continues to deliver services that are inclusive and culturally sensitive to all communities. An impact assessment has been completed which found that the report would have no disproportionate negative impacts on groups or individuals because they hold one or more protected characteristics.
Reducing Poverty	Bereavement can place a significant and immediate financial burden on families, particularly those already experiencing financial hardship. The Strategy contributes positively by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting transparent and fair fees and charges, enabling residents to make informed and affordable choices</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting the availability of lower-cost funeral options, where appropriate</li> <li>Ensuring access to public health funerals in cases where no alternative arrangements can be made</li> <li>Improving information and signposting to financial support mechanisms, such as the Government's Funeral Expenses Payment.</li> </ul>
Climate Change / Environmental	Adoption of low emission cremators and sustainable options and services will positively impact on the Council's Climate change and environmental ambitions.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	<p>The Bereavement Services Strategy is expected to have a positive impact on children and young people cared for by the authority, and care leavers, who may experience bereavement without strong family support networks. The strategy promotes compassionate, accessible services and improved customer care, helping to ensure that vulnerable individuals are treated with sensitivity during times of grief.</p> <p>No negative impacts have been identified, and ongoing collaboration with children's services will help ensure appropriate support is in place when needed.</p>
Data Protection	<p>The Bereavement Services Strategy is a high-level strategic document and does not introduce new systems or processes involving the collection or processing of personal data. As such, the adoption of the Strategy has no direct or immediate data protection implications.</p> <p>Any actions arising from the Strategy such as service redesign, introduction of new digital systems, changes to record management, or enhanced data sharing with partners (e.g. funeral directors), will be subject to appropriate data protection controls.</p>

### Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Establish a management structure	Head of Environment Services / Bereavement Services Manager	July 2026
Cremator replacement plan	Bereavement Services Manager	March 2027
Cemetery expansion planning	Head of Environment and Head of Economic Growth	Ongoing
Explore additional service options	Bereavement Services Manager	July 2026
Pricing review	Bereavement Services Manager	Annually

## Appendices

1	Bereavement Services Strategy
2	Cemetery and Crematorium Regulations
3	Equality Impact Assessment

## Background papers

Body	Report title	Date

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