

item 4



South Tyneside Council

Our Place Scrutiny Committee

Cemetery Memorial Safety Review

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Date: 25.9.2025



Scope of Review

- A background of memorial safety in South Tyneside
- Review and challenge our current procedures

Outcome

- A new Council policy for memorial safety



Background

- 30,000 memorials across our cemeteries and closed churchyards
- 2004 - HSE report following 3 deaths
- 2005 to 2006 – Hebburn and Harton Cemeteries inspected
- Scheme discontinued





Background

- Raised profile of our cemeteries;
 - Growth in family history research
 - Cemetery volunteer groups created
- 2020 – Westoe Cemetery inspected
- 2024 – Scheme reinstated and Whitburn Cemetery inspected
- 2025 – Jarrow Cemetery inspections ongoing



Our current procedures

- 5-year inspection cycle
- In-house inspections by trained operative
- Order of inspections:
 - Whitburn
 - Jarrow
 - Boldon
 - Hebburn
 - Harton
 - Westoe
 - Closed churchyards





Our current procedures

- 14% failure rate in Whitburn Cemetery
- Temporary make-safe actions taken on the same day where possible
- Grave owners advised
- No complaints / negative press





Benchmark & Best Practice

Compliant with guidance from HSE, MOJ, NAMM, ICCM and Local Government Ombudsman

Listened to residents affected in 2005 / 2006

Above and beyond what our neighbouring authorities are doing





Pressures

- Staff and equipment funded from Bereavement Services' revenue budget
- Falling behind with annual inspection target
- Requirement to make savings

Actions:

- Restructure within Bereavement Services / train operatives from other teams to assist
- Reconsider temporary make-safe actions to save time and costs



Wider future pressures

- Cemetery capacities
- Changing public perception of memorialisation





Potential areas for committee review

- Review current operational procedures
- Consider service pressure: finance and risk
- Consider what our neighbouring authorities are doing



Review current operational procedures

- Continue to make memorials temporarily safe?

Positives	Negatives
Less emotional impact on residents	Council accepts level of risk
Less financial impact on residents	Time consuming & labour intensive
Less reputational damage to Council	Financial impact on Council budgets



What are our neighbouring authorities doing?

Only Northumberland and South Tyneside undertake temporary make safe actions.

Sunderland – still at planning stage

Gateshead - ????????????????

Newcastle and North Tyneside:

- Stake and band
- Lay down flat
- Socket larger memorials



Grave ownership

- Exclusive Right of Burial
- Fixed term lease since 1975
- Transferrable
- Extendable
- Starting to expire in 2025

