



Lichfield
District Council

Public Health Funeral Policy

November 2025

Approved by:	Cllr Richard Cox, Cabinet Member for Community and Public Protection
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 A public health funeral is one that is arranged under [Part III of the Public Health \(Control of Disease\) Act 1984](#). The Act places local authorities under a duty to cremate or bury the body of any person found dead in their area where no suitable arrangements have been made, or are being made, by another person.
- 1.2 Public health funerals have colloquially been known as pauper's funerals. Often the person has no living relatives or friends. Occasionally, relatives or friends are identified but are unable or unwilling to arrange the funeral.
- 1.3 Public health funerals are principally undertaken to protect public health, but they also provide an opportunity for the community and anyone who knew the person to mourn. They are delivered with dignity and respect.
- 1.4 This function is delivered by environmental health within the Council's Regulation & Enforcement Service.

2. Purpose of policy

- 2.1 This policy provides detail about how the Council will comply with the Act, and the standard of public health funeral that will be provided.
- 2.2 Whilst the Act exists to protect public health, this policy will also ensure that the deceased are afforded respect and dignity, that the bereaved are considered, and the burden placed on the taxpayer managed.

3. Scope of policy

- 3.1 The Council is under a duty to cremate or bury the body of any person found dead in their area where no suitable arrangements have been made, or are being made, by another person. This duty applies even where the person did not live in the district. Likewise, where a person lives in the district, but dies in another district, the duty falls on the Council for that area.
- 3.2 If a person dies at Samuel Johnson Community Hospital, then their funeral will be arranged by University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust.
- 3.3 The Council will not take responsibility for a funeral where arrangements have already been made, or are being made, or where the funeral has already taken place.

4. What does the data tell us

- 4.1 According to Local Government Association research undertaken in 2024, an estimated 4,400 public health funerals were carried out by Councils in England in 2022/23. This is an increase of 500 on the previous year.
- 4.2 Since 2016, the Council has arranged 24 public health funerals, an average of 2.5 per year.

Year	Number of public health funerals
2025 (to date)	3
2024	6
2023	4
2022	0
2021	0
2020	0
2019	0
2018	0

2017	5
2016	6
TOTAL	24

5. Referrals for a public health funeral

5.1 Referrals may come from a variety of sources, including (but not limited to):

- HM Coroner for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- Staffordshire Police
- Nursing, residential or care homes
- Funeral directors
- Executors
- Family or friends

6. Locating next of kin

- 6.1 The Council will take all reasonable steps to locate family members to inform them that their relative has died and to seek that they take responsibility for arranging the funeral. Friends may also be identified who will take on this responsibility.
- 6.2 Relatives and friends can also provide important information about any funeral wishes of the deceased, such as any religious beliefs or a desire for burial as opposed to cremation.
- 6.3 Whilst every case will be different, as a minimum officers will search the home of the deceased to seek to identify any will or funeral plan, information about relatives and friends, and financial information. Where possible, officers will also seek to gain information from neighbours.
- 6.4 Records will also be searched. This may include records held by the NHS, social services, registrars, or the police.
- 6.5 Officers may also use the internet, including social media, to search for relatives or friends.
- 6.6 Where an appropriate person is identified and they wish to take on arranging the funeral, officers will obtain confirmation in writing before handing responsibility to them and closing the case.
- 6.7 Where an appropriate person is identified, but they are unable or unwilling to arrange the funeral, officers will request confirmation in writing from them.

7. Help with funeral costs

- 7.1 Local funeral directors provide affordable options that still allow for a personalised service. Relatives or friends of the deceased may wish to share the costs between them.
- 7.2 Where a person is in receipt of certain benefits they may be eligible to claim a [Funeral Expenses Payment](#), [Bereavement Support Payment](#), or support from the [Children's Funeral Fund for England](#).
- 7.3 If the deceased served in the Armed Forces, there may be assistance available from charitable organisations such as the [Royal British Legion](#), [SSAFA](#), or regimental associations.

8. The public health funeral

- 8.1 A public health funeral will be simple but respectful. Family and friends will not be able to influence the way that the funeral is delivered but may provide the officer with information about the deceased. If any family or friends wish for a more personal funeral, they will need to take on responsibility for arranging for the funeral.

- 8.2 A public health funeral will always involve a cremation, unless the officer has reason to believe that cremation would be contrary to the wishes of the deceased. In these cases, the person will be buried.
- 8.3 The funeral will include a brief ceremony, usually at the cremation chapel, at a time and date determined by the officer. It will be conducted by a minister or celebrant based on the officer's knowledge of the person's religious beliefs. The ceremony will usually include music chosen by the officer.
- 8.4 Any readings will be done by the minister or celebrant or by someone independent such as a community leader or local councillor.
- 8.5 There will be no provision for the viewing of the deceased, dressing of the deceased in their own clothing, flowers, or transport for mourners to or from the funeral.
- 8.6 The officer will share the details of the funeral with known family or friends as soon as possible. They will also be shared on the Council's social media channels so that community members may attend.
- 8.7 Following a cremation, the person's ashes will be scattered in a garden of remembrance at the crematorium.
- 8.8 The officer will make decisions in consultation with the funeral director and minister or celebrant. The funeral director will not engage with any family or friends directly.
- 8.9 The officer, or another officer if their absence, will attend the funeral.

9. Recovering costs

- 9.1 Where possible the Council will recover reasonable costs of the public health funeral from the estate of the deceased in accordance with the Act.
- 9.2 The costs the Council will seek to reclaim include:
- The cost of the funeral including burial or cremation fees
 - Cost of registering the death
 - Officer time spent arranging the funeral and registering the death
 - Reasonable administrative costs associated with the arrangement of the funeral
 - Funeral director fees.

10. Searching the home

- 10.1 A search of the home of the deceased will be conducted by a minimum of two officers wearing body worn video cameras.
- 10.2 The purpose of the search is primarily to identify any will or funeral plan, information about relatives and friends, and financial information.
- 10.3 Officers may remove property of value that may be used to offset funeral costs. Any property removed from the home for this purpose will be recorded and stored securely.
- 10.4 Any cash found will be counted at the home, recorded and placed into a bank account by the officer.
- 10.5 Landlords must not enter the property or remove any property unless permission has been granted by the officer.
- 10.6 The Council is not responsible for clearing or cleaning the home. However, if the home is insecure, the officer will arrange for it to be made secure using powers under [s.29 Local Government \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 1982](#).

11. Record keeping and information requests

- 11.1 Good record keeping is vital and all forms and details of each case will be retained by the Council in accordance with the Council's retention policy.
- 11.2 A register of public health funerals will be kept and published on our website.

12. Related policies and procedures

- 12.1 The Council is committed to developing and delivering services in a way that ensures it treats people fairly and promotes equality of opportunity and social cohesion within the wider community.
- 12.2 This policy aims to give the fairest outcomes to everyone regardless of race, gender reassignment, age, disability, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, marital or civil partnerships status and/or disability.
- 12.3 This policy has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that there is no discrimination in the way that it has been designed, developed or how it will be delivered and that, wherever possible, equality is promoted.
- 12.4 Where there is a clear indication of the wishes of the deceased the officer, in conjunction with the Regulation & Enforcement Manager, may deviate from this policy providing doing so does not present a threat to public health or contravene the requirements of the Act or associated guidance.

ENDS