

Public health funeral - protocol



- 1.0 Public health funerals are provided when someone has passed away and has no next of kin, or whose next of kin, relatives or friends are unable or unwilling to make the necessary arrangements for a funeral.
- 1.1 The Council will provide a public funeral except where:
- The person has passed away outside of the borough of Cheshire West and Chester. In these circumstances the matter should be referred to the relevant Local Authority responsible for the district where the death occurred.
 - Funeral arrangements have already been or are being made.
 - The person died in hospital and there is no next of kin. In these circumstances the NHS Trust is expected to make the funeral arrangements.
- 1.2 When providing a public funeral the Council aims to:
- Treat the deceased with dignity and respect
 - Be considerate of the bereaved
 - Recover the public funds spent on a public funeral.
- 1.3 The Council will usually arrange for a cremation (as this is the more popular choice in the UK) unless there is reason to believe that cremation would be contrary to the wishes of the deceased.
- 1.4 The Council will arrange for the statutory paperwork to be completed and relevant fees to be paid to enable the cremation or burial to go ahead. As well as the cremation or burial a simple, respectful and dignified service will be provided. For cremations the service will be at Chester crematorium, Blacon and usually take place at 9.20 am. Once the date and time of service have been confirmed the Council will inform any known family members or other parties likely to wish to attend the service.

- 1.5 The Council will arrange for a coffin and gown, a hearse, an appropriate number of bearers and either a minister or funeral celebrant to conduct the service. The service will be open, meaning that any family, friends or acquaintances of the deceased are welcome to attend.
- 1.6 The cremated remains of the deceased will be retained for a minimum of 4 weeks to allow the next of kin (or another friend or relative) to claim them if they wish. If the ashes remain unclaimed they will usually be scattered over the Gardens of Remembrance at Blacon cemetery. Where a burial takes place the Council does not provide a gravestone or any other marker.
- 1.7 The deceased will be treated with respect and dignity**
The Council will make funeral arrangements with care and will make all reasonable attempts to ensure the wishes of the deceased are followed. This will include establishing whether there is a will, speaking with family and friends of the deceased, searching records and documents (including, if appropriate those at the deceased's home).
- 1.8 Officers may visit the deceased's last known address role to obtain personal information that could help trace relatives, find a will (in which case the executor would be expected to take on arrangements for the funeral), establish the wishes of the deceased and to identify potential sources of funds to cover the funeral costs.
- 1.9 Consideration of the bereaved**
Finding the next of kin
The Council will make all reasonable attempts to locate the deceased's family to inform them that their relative has passed away. The family will be given the opportunity to take the responsibility and make the funeral arrangements themselves should they wish. Otherwise, if a public funeral is to take place the family may be able to assist in identifying whether the deceased may have wishes, religion or belief which would influence whether they should be cremated or buried.

- 1.10 Steps taken by the Council to trace relatives include speaking with the deceased's known friends or acquaintances, looking for documents or records in the deceased's property or residence and placing public notices via social media and the Council's website.
- 1.11 The Council will engage with the next of kin sensitively and keep them informed. The Council will make the next of kin aware of the options available to them and what a public health funeral will entail. This include explaining to the next of kin that if opting for a public health funeral, they are relinquishing responsibility for, and control of, the funeral to the Council. The local authority is legally entitled to recover the cost of the funeral from the deceased's estate.
- 1.12 If the next of kin are willing and able to pay for the funeral, the Council will hand responsibility for the deceased to the next of kin for them to make their own arrangements. The Council's involvement will usually end at this point.
- 1.13 The Council will encourage the next of kin to explore the options available to enable them to arrange the funeral themselves to give them the autonomy over the funeral arrangements in a way that a public health funeral will not. This will include providing information on potential funding sources in cases where the next of kin is willing to take on responsibility for the funeral but may not feel able to pay for it. Financial support schemes are provided by government and certain charities may also help with funeral expenses.

2.0 Funeral Expenses Payment

This payment helps people on qualifying benefits with the costs of arranging a funeral. It can be used to cover costs, including the purchase of a grave; necessary burial or cremation fees; and travel costs for the applicant to arrange and attend the funeral. It can also cover other funeral costs, such as the coffin or flowers, up to a maximum of £1000. Relatives can apply by calling the Bereavement Service helpline Telephone: 0800 151 2012 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm or by visiting the website www.gov.uk/funeral-payments

2.1 If the next of kin cannot afford funeral costs or are unable or unwilling to make such arrangements, the Council will arrange a public health funeral. The Council will continue to keep them informed and this includes advising them of the date and time of the funeral service.

3.0 Public funds

The Council will ensure that all funeral arrangements are cost-effective and value for money, whilst maintaining the dignity of the deceased and being considerate of the bereaved. Wherever possible the Council will recover the costs of providing a public health funeral to minimise costs to the taxpayer.

The Council can reclaim the cost of expenses incurred for the deceased's funeral. Costs can include anything connected with the burial or cremation, as well as reasonable ancillary costs e.g. the cost of the funeral including burial/cremation fees; time spent registering a death; time spent arranging a funeral and funeral director fees.

Costs can be recovered from the deceased's estate and the Council may approach the relevant bank to settle or seek reimbursement of the funeral account. Alternatively, if there is a will the Council may try to recover the costs from the administrator of the estate. Depending on the value of the deceased's estate the Council may liaise with the Bona Vacantia Division of the Government Legal Department that administers the solvent estates of people who appear to have died without leaving a valid will or relatives entitled to share in their estate.

4.0 Records

At some point in the future an approach made be made by family member(s) who were not identified at the time of the funeral arrangements being made. Therefore, the Council will keep comprehensive records of any investigation or checks made and details of the funeral arrangements so that family member(s) with questions about their deceased relative may be assisted.