

Public health funerals

If somebody dies and it appears that no suitable arrangements have been made then Dudley Council has a responsibility to make sure that a person receives a proper burial or cremation (Section 46 of the 1984 Public Health Act).

This usually happens when someone dies with no known blood relatives or has relatives that do not want, or who are not able, to be involved.

A public health funeral (also known as national assistance funerals and paupers' funerals) will be a basic funeral covering the following services:

- Collection and care of the deceased
- An obituary notice placed by the funeral directors, if required
- Provision of a simple coffin
- Provision of suitable transport to the crematorium
- Care of the body including embalming if necessary
- Viewing of the body in the funeral directors office hours only, if required
- Safekeeping of personal items for collection by appointed representative
- A minister to conduct the funeral: religious, civil celebrant or non-religious
- Cremation or burial service
- A simple floral coffin spray
- Doctors fees for cremation certificates
- Crematorium fee
- Any scattering of ashes required

If any extra services are requested by family e.g. better quality of coffin or witnessing of the scattering of ashes, then there is likely to be extra costs which the Council will not pay for.

When does this happen?

Dudley Council normally acts on instructions from the local Coroners Office.

In some cases managers of residential homes or sheltered accommodation tell the Council when a death has happened at their home or accommodation. This happens when they do not think that there are any relatives willing, or able, to make the funeral arrangements.

If a person dies in hospital and there are no known blood relatives then arrangements for burial or cremation are the responsibility of the health authority

What happens next?

If the deceased persons' address is known, the council will search their home to try and find a will or any other documents that will tell us if they have any relatives, religious beliefs or funeral preferences. We will also look for keys to the property, evidence of any bank or building society accounts and any cash in the property. We will retain these items for safekeeping. Any cash/capital will be used to contribute towards the funeral cost.

The death is registered by the council if there is no-one else to do this.

If details about family and friends are found, they will be told about the death and asked if they want to make the funeral arrangements.

If a will is found the Executor (the person responsible for looking after the estate of the deceased) will be asked to make the funeral arrangements in line with the deceased person's wishes. If this is not possible the council will make the arrangements.

Dudley Council currently use R. Morgan Funeral Directors, Badger Street, Sedgley, DY3 1XZ to undertake its public health funerals.

Who pays for the funeral?

The cost of the funeral is normally paid for using the money from the deceased persons' estate (a persons' estate is all the belongings owned at the time of death). If there isn't enough money in the estate to meet the costs, enquiries will be made with the Executor of the will as to who may be willing to pay.

If the deceased person has not made a will enquiries will be made with the person who is arranging the funeral (usually the next of kin) as to who may be willing to pay.

Help may be available from other sources like charities and the Department for Work and Pensions. If, however, the next of kin is not prepared to arrange or pay for the funeral, for example if there isn't enough money in the deceased persons' estate to pay for the funeral, the next of kin will be asked to provide bank statement/s as verification.

Where evidence of monies held in bank statements is found, the Council will request the bank to release funds up to the value of the funeral.

Burial or cremation?

Unless we know that the deceased would have wanted a burial, funeral arrangements will be made with the funeral director to have a cremation service. If the deceased has left paperwork or told family or friends that they wanted to be buried, suitable arrangements will be made. In either case an appropriate religious or non-religious ceremony will be arranged depending on the deceased's beliefs (if we know what their beliefs were).

At the crematorium a public health funeral is just the same as any other funeral with a chapel service. If possible the minister doing the service will have an opportunity to speak to the family before the funeral so that they can make the service a personal one. If family and friends are going to be at the funeral, if appropriate, hymns/music may also be included in the service.

If it is a burial, a graveside service is normally held, this would be the same as any other graveside service, however there will not be a gravestone to mark the grave.

If family wish to purchase a headstone or a particular plot this would need to be arranged directly with the crematorium.

When and where will the funeral be held?

If there is no one available, or prepared, to arrange the funeral and all alternative options are exhausted, the council will take responsibility for the funeral arrangements, upon confirmation from all relatives that they have no interest in the funeral. These arrangements will include arranging the registration of the death if required and instructing a funeral director to undertake a basic funeral. The funeral will take place as soon as arrangements can be made, although with a public health funeral, dates and times are limited.

Unless any specific wishes of the deceased person are known, the council will ask R. Morgan Funeral Directors, Badger Street, Sedgley, DY3 1XZ to undertake the basic funeral. These funerals will take place at various crematoriums across the borough (normally at the closest location to the deceased's last known address).

Please note that the grave cannot be marked with memorials or flowers at any time as the grave will be used for a second burial of a similar nature.

Property and belongings of the deceased person

The property will be made secure and any keys or relevant financial documentation belonging to the deceased that family and friends have should be handed in to the council's Adult Social Care finance team for safekeeping. A receipt for any items handed in will be issued.

Property should only be handed over to the legal representatives dealing with the deceased person's estate. This may not be family or friends because if a will has been made executors may have been chosen

If the deceased left furniture or other personal belongings the council's Adult Social Care finance team cannot make arrangements for these items to be disposed of. The cost of clearing the property is normally met by the estate. Property should not be removed from the house unless legal authority exists to do so.

If the deceased person's belongings are not worth anything in monetary value and the property was rented, the landlord is responsible for recovering the property and dealing with the contents

If, after the funeral costs have been met and there is still some money left over, the Council will advise the bank of any known relatives to liaise with regarding dispersal of funds.

Recovery of expenses

Dudley Council will recover expenses from the deceased's estate, wherever possible, to limit the cost to the taxpayer.

The provision of a basic lowest cost public health funeral will minimise cost and maximise the deceased persons' estate.

The council will not charge any administration fees for undertaking its duties under the 1984 Public Health Act.



For further information on public health funerals please contact our Adult Social Care Finance Team – Tel.01384 81 5862 or email finance.dachs@dudley.gov.uk