

Public Health Funerals – Response to FOI Requests

PUBLIC HEALTH FUNERALS

Bristol City Council is responsible for making funeral arrangements for anybody who dies within their boundary where no other arrangements are being or are likely to be made, e.g. when the deceased has no family and they haven't left a will. This responsibility is placed on the Council by S46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984.

Frequently requested information

We frequently receive Freedom of Information requests in relation to public health funerals. We have prepared an FAQ list below which addresses a number of the questions which frequently arise.

NB. This document is updated annually.

1. How many public funerals were referred to Bristol City Council in the following years:

2015/16 **136**

2016/17 **133**

2017/18 **141**

2018/19 **124**

2019/20 **91**

2020/21 **86**

2021/22 **101**

2022/23 **132**

2023/24 **92**

2. What was the financial cost to the Council for following years:

NB. It can take months or sometimes years to obtain payments from estates, especially in complicated cases. As such, these figures may change in future publications, especially in the case of the most recent year listed.

2015/16:

Expenditure: £222,962

Income: £122,245

Total cost to BCC: £100,717

2016/17

Expenditure: £228,736

Income: £105,207

Total cost to BCC: £123,529

2017/18

Expenditure: £231,127

Income: £85,442

Total cost to BCC: £145,685

2018/19

Expenditure: £253,705

Income: £101,606

Total cost to BCC: £152,099

2019/20

Expenditure: £191,411

Income: £89,257

Total cost to BCC: £102,153

2020/21

Expenditure: £176,161

Income: £103,943.34

Total cost to BCC: £72,217.66

2021/22

Expenditure: £203,658.54

Income: £120,623.34

Total cost to BCC: £83,035.20

2022/23

Expenditure: £264,544

Income: £135,999

Total Cost to BCC: £128,545

2023/24

Expenditure £241,893

Income £110,904.78

Total Cost to BCC £130,988.22

2024/25

Expenditure £234,693

Income £ 92,245

Total Cost to BCC £142,448

3. Please list what the costs were spent on:

Our costs are divided into the following three categories: services of the funeral director (provision of a hearse and bearers, provision of a minister); service charges (the cost of chapel use and the cremation/burial); City Council services (registration of death, property searches, administration of the funeral).

4. How much money has been set aside to pay for public funerals in the next financial year:

The cost of providing this service in the following financial year is covered, as required, from the Revenue Budget.

5. What is the breakdown of gender for public health funerals referred to Bristol City Council?

2015/16: **88 male, 48 female**

2016/17: **93 male, 40 female**

2017/18: **107 male, 34 female**

2018/19: **99 male, 25 female**

2019/20: **68 Male, 23 female**

2020/21: **71 Male, 15 female**

21/2022: **83 Male, 18 female**

22/2023 **104 Male, 28 female**

23/2024 **63 Male, 29 female**

24/2025 **67 Male 24 female**

6. What is the typical cost for a Public Health Funeral?

The typical cost to provide a public health funeral is currently between £2400 - £2750

7. What does Bristol City Council provide at a Public Health Funeral?

Bristol City Council provides either a cremation or burial service. The majority are cremation services, as a burial would require that the deceased be buried in an unmarked, communal grave (in 2012/13 only 1.6% of public health funerals were burials). We provide an early morning (9:00 or 9:30) half hour service in the crematorium chapel, a minister and organist, a simple coffin, and the use of a hearse and bearers to transport the coffin. Where possible we seek to personalise the service provided by contacting relatives or friends of the deceased.

8. What relationship do you have with your local NHS Trust regarding funerals of this nature?

In the Bristol City Council area, all deaths requiring a public health funeral are dealt with by the local authority, irrespective of whether the death takes place in hospital or not. The only relationship we have with the local trust is that they will often make referrals to Bristol City Council for deaths requiring a public health funeral.

9. For each public health funeral where there have been no known next of kin, does the council contact any organisation to trace the next of kin? If yes, please state the name of the firm/company and why?

We do not use any private companies to help locate family. We act on the best knowledge available to us at the time, and then refer to case to the Government Legal Department if the estate is above a certain threshold. This is in accordance with advice supplied by the Government Legal Department.

10. Does the council or contracted funeral director publicise notices of public health funerals so family or friends can attend the funeral before the funeral takes place?

Yes, but only in instances where we believe estranged family may live in a particular area. If we have no knowledge of any NOK, or have no knowledge of where in the country they might be, then we would not place an ad. In instances where we are dealing with family members directly, all information relating to the service is communicated over the phone/in person.

11. If the council is unable to locate family or relatives, what additional steps are taken?

If there is no reason to believe that any family members exist, no further steps are taken. In cases where it is believed that there are family members in a particular area of the country, a notice will be placed in a local newspaper.

12. If yes, where is this published (name of newspaper)?

The Bristol Post. Occasionally we will place an ad in an out of town newspaper, but which one to use is decided on a case by case basis.

13. What steps does the council take to contact family members or relatives when a person dies and there is no arrangement of a funeral?

The Council routinely contacts the appropriate housing office, doctor's surgery, nursing home etc to locate any information relating to next-of-kin. We also carry out a search of the property of the deceased, where appropriate, to try to locate anybody who may wish to be notified about the arrangements, or details of arrangements made by the deceased prior to death (for example, a will or a funeral plan).

14. Does a council officer visit the property of the deceased?

See 13 above. In most cases where family cannot be located, a search of the property is carried out. The only exceptions are when a property has already been cleared prior to council involvement. All searches are carried out with at least two council officers present.

15. What is the job title, department and address of the officer responsible for arranging public health funerals on behalf of Bristol City Council?

Bereavement Services Officer

Cemeteries Department

South Bristol Cemetery

Bridgwater Road

Bedminster Down

Bristol

BS13 7AS

Information about deceased

Please note that we only provide limited information in relation to the deceased. We consider s.31(a) (prevention or detection of crime) to be engaged by the name, date of birth, address and the value of the assets of the deceased. The provision of this information prior to the securing of the assets of the deceased is considered likely to prejudice the prevention of crime; in particular identity theft, theft of assets from the property of the deceased and squatting.