

<b>Environment Committee</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	29 <sup>th</sup> June 2023
<b>Report Title</b>	Public Health Funeral Policy
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Lisa Fillery, Directory of Resource
<b>Head of Service</b>	Tracey Beattie, Mid Kent Environmental Health Manager
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Vickie Hewson, Mid Kent Environmental Health Admin Team Leader
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	That the committee approve the policy for managing public health funerals within Swale Borough Council.

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The public health funeral service is administered by Mid Kent Environmental Health for Swale Borough Council. Over more than 10 years, we have found most cases referred are straight forward, there are occasions where the personal circumstances of the deceased can be complicated.
- 1.2 The service has found an increasing number of cases with complex family relationships, including second and subsequent marriages, social isolation and people dying intestate. A policy will formalise decisions and provide officers with clear guidance and principles to follow when dealing with emotional situations in a clear but sensitively applied way.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 Swale Borough Council is responsible for a deceased person when someone dies within its district boundary if:
  - no arrangements for a funeral or burial have been made
  - no relatives of the deceased can be found, or
  - the relatives of the deceased are unable or not prepared to arrange a funeral

The Act does not require the local authority to make funeral arrangements but rather to dispose of a dead body by burial or cremation. As the title of the act indicates, the purpose is to protect the public, by dealing with unclaimed bodies to prevent them becoming a threat to health, rather than concerns over social care or welfare. However, given the financial pressures many families are under, there are a proportion of cases where relatives are unable (funeral poverty) or unwilling (relationship breakdown) to make arrangements for the deceased.

During the Covid pandemic we saw an increase in funeral poverty to 78% of cases accepted, this then decreased in 2022 to 14% of cases accepted. However, we are again seeing a steady increase in funeral poverty in 2023 with the current rate at 25%.

The policy has been complied following research of government guidance, practices followed at other local authorities and advice from UK.Gov and officers attending training with the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management.

Where possible we do try and re-coup costs, either the whole amount or at least some costs towards the funeral, but each case is different.

**Table 1:** Total number of public health funerals.

<b>Total No of PHF's – 2021</b>
9
<b>Total No of PHF's - 2022</b>
7
<b>Total No of PHF's - 2023</b>
4

With approval from members, Swale Borough Council will have transparency on its policy regarding the disposing of bodies to stop the spread of disease, and that we do this in a dignified and sensitive way.

### **3. Proposals**

3.1 To adopt the Policy for Public Health Funerals to formalise the decision-making process for officers. (see Appendix 1)

#### **Alternative Options Considered**

To continue the service with no policy agreement from members.

#### **Procurement**

Swale Borough Council have appointed a genealogy company on a quality assurance procurement bases, as there are no financial implications on this service.

In relation to funeral directors, Swale Borough Council has an agreement with Maidstone Borough Council to use Vinters Park Crematorium and a jointly appointed funeral director services, with the agreement undertaken through Maidstone's procurement procedures. The current agreement runs from February 2022 for 3 years with a possible extension of a further 2 years.

Having secured this agreement with Maidstone Borough Council we have seen a reduction in costs for Swale's Public Health Funerals from £910 to £805.

## Staffing/Requirements

Two officers from the Environmental Health Department are engaged with this service, one administration officer and a Team Leader who manages the process and leads on property searches.

All the case information, including records, documents associated with the case are logged within the Uniform database system and the associated document management system. There are no additional requirements.

## Budget Information

There are no additional costs related to approval of this policy as budgets are already in place.

**Table 2:** Budget, cost and income from public health funerals

	Budget	PH Expense (Including staff costs)	Proceeds from estate (Including staff costs)	Balance
2020-21	£5,000	£4,160	£4,278	(£118)
2021-22	£5,000	£7,677	£3,770	£3,907
2022-23	£5,000	£4,834	£6,657	(£1,823)
2023-24	£5,000			tba

## 4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

### 4.1 What are the implications of **not** having a policy?

- Lack of clarity and consistency in decision making for cases administered by the authority.
- Increased risk to the council of challenge by bereaved families if Swale does not accept the case leading to potential increase in costs to Swale Borough Council.
- Increase in staff time administering the arrangements.
- Increase in costs due to potential rise in public health funerals taken.

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 There is no requirement under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 to undertake a consultation which places a duty on the authority to accept responsibility for the disposal of bodies as indicated in paragraph 2.1, to prevent the spread of disease.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Priority 4 – Renewing local democracy and making the council fit for the future. Through providing a framework for use to ensure consistency.
Financial, Resource and Property	No new financial proposals as budgets are already in place.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	This policy will meet the council’s legal duties under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and the disposal of bodies to stop the spread of disease. Procurement has been undertaken following the council’s procurement procedures.
Crime and Disorder	None identified
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified
Health and Wellbeing	None identified
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified.
Equality and Diversity	We understand that due to some religious beliefs that cremations would not be appropriate, this cultural need would be respected.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified

## 7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Public Health Funeral Policy