

Public Funerals – Background Information

Our legal duties

The Local Authorities legal duty

Where no suitable funeral arrangements have been made or are being made for a deceased person who has died in the Plymouth area, the Council may have a duty to help out (under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984). Where possible expenses will be recovered from the estate of the deceased.

If the death occurred in hospital

In this instance the Plymouth Hospitals Trust will arrange for the funeral of any person who died in hospital.

Who pays for the funeral?

If possible the cost of the funeral is met out of the estate of the deceased, or from a family member. If details of family and friends are found they will be informed of the death and invited to make the funeral arrangements. If it is not possible to contact a family member the cost will be met by the Council.

Paying for the funeral

Funerals can be expensive. So remember to check where the money for the funeral will come from before making any arrangements. Otherwise, you may have to pay the bill yourself. Check whether the deceased person has contributed to schemes to pay for the funeral. You can contact the hospital's bereavement officer on 01752 761682, who will have to be satisfied that there is no financial assets available to meet the funeral cost.

You may be able to get a payment from the Social Fund to help pay for the funeral if you are getting any of these social security benefits:

- income support
- jobseeker's allowance (income-based)
- pension credit
- working tax credit (where a disabled worker is included in the assessment)
- child tax credit (at a rate higher than the family element)
- housing benefit
- council tax benefit

Check the [Directgov - Funeral Payments factsheet](#) for further details.

If no one is able or willing to arrange and pay for the funeral, the local council, or in some cases, the health authority may do so, but only where the funeral has not already been arranged.

Payment by the deceased

The bank account of the deceased will be frozen, unless it is a joint account. It may be possible to have part of the deceased's savings released to pay for the funeral, for example from a building society or national savings. You will be asked for appropriate documents, usually including the death certificate.

Check the deceased's papers for a cremation society certificate, life insurance policy papers or prepaid funeral plan. Also look for letters from previous employers with details about any occupational pension scheme or personal pension.

If the person who died was living in hospital or a residential home, the possessions will be handed over to the nearest relative or to a person with written authority from whoever is dealing with the will.

Property and personal effects

If the deceased left furniture or other personal effects arrangements will be made for the disposal of these items and any money recovered offset against the cost of the funeral.

When all costs are known and the value of the estate exceeds this, the Treasury Solicitor is informed.

Registering a death

When someone dies there is a legal obligation to register the death but only certain people are qualified or able to register. They are:

- A relative of the deceased
- A person present at the death
- A person arranging the funeral (not the funeral director)
- In certain circumstances there are other people qualified to register a death but you would need to discuss this with the Registrar

A death must be registered in any register office within 5 days (although this is not always possible there must be a good reason for this). It should be within the district where the person died or can be done by declaration in another district.

What information is required to register a death?

You will need to bring the medical certificate of the cause of death issued by a doctor or, if the death has been referred to the Coroner, the necessary certificate from the coroner's officer.

Cost

The only cost attached to registering a death would be for certified copies of the original entry. Certificates cost £4 each and there is no restriction on the number of copies which can be purchased. More than one is always recommended as photocopies are not valid.