

COMMITTEE REPORT

17/03/2026

PUBLIC HEALTH FUNERAL
POLICY

GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

PART I

PUBLIC HEALTH FUNERALS (ADE)

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report recommends the adoption of a Public Health Funeral (PHF) policy.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the proposed PHF Policy is adopted and that this is added to the Policy Register, for review every three years.
- 2.2 The professional genealogists are not used at this time.
- 2.3 That authority to make any minor amendments required to this policy be delegated to the Associate Director for Environment.in consultation with the Lead Member.

Report prepared by: Jennie Probert, Environmental Services Manager

3 Details

- 3.1 Public Health Funerals (PHFs) are a statutory duty of local authorities, primarily under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984, and are intended to ensure that everyone is treated with dignity in death, even if they have no surviving family or the family cannot afford or is unwilling to arrange the funeral.
- 3.2 Responsibility of PHFs transferred from Environmental Health to the Waste and Environment Service in 2019 following a service redesign.
- 3.3 The Waste & Environment Service is well placed to deliver this statutory service having officers trained and experienced in dealing with bereavement (cemeteries) and evidence gathering and legal investigation (Environmental Enforcement Officers)
- 3.4 At the handover of the service in 2019 the use of funeral directors was procured on a case-by-case basis. In August 2020 TRDC joined a Framework Agreement, led by Watford Borough Council (WBC), to use the services of Nevilles Funeral Directors. The Framework was reprocured in July 2025 with Nevilles Funeral Director remaining the contract provider. The Framework does not preclude the Council from using other funeral directors should the need arise.
- 3.5 Officers of the waste and environment service have worked with colleagues in both legal and internal audit to develop a formal policy and an update in procedures for PHFs.
- 3.6 The draft policy presented aims to cover all eventualities, however, due to the varying nature of these situations it should be noted that officers, in conjunction with the council's legal team, may have occasion to make some operational

decisions, not specifically covered by the policy. These decisions will be made sensitively, documented and considered as part of future policy review.

- 3.7 The draft policy (Appendix A) provides the relevant legal information relating to PHFs, as well as explaining expectations for sensitively dealing with the deceased, as well as their friends and family. Officers follow a set of procedures.
- 3.8 The number of PHFs cannot be predicted. The table (table 1) below outlines the number of PHFs in recent years. Contained within this table is the number of actual PHFs that the council paid for, as well as those that have been initially referred to the council but that family members have subsequently arranged and those which have been arranged by the council, but paid for out of the deceased's estate. Officers seek where possible to minimise the number of funerals the council is required to fund.

Table 1

Year	PHFs (paid for by the council)	Deceased's Estate funded	Family organised/paid
2022-23	2	2	3
2023-24	3	7	0
2024-25	2	1	0
2025-26 (up to Dec 25)	1	1	0

4 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 It is recommended to introduce a policy for PHFs to ensure compliance with the law, define expectations and manage risk.
- 4.2 As part of the development of the policy, officers have considered the need to make use of professional genealogists. Whilst this may assist in tracking down next of kin, to date council officers have been able to manage this element of work inhouse, ensuring relatives can take control of estates without the need to involve a third-party, who would take a percentage of the estate. Based on the number of PHFs and the outcomes as noted in table 1 officers do not propose, at this time, to use a professional genealogist at this time.

5 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 5.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The current cost for carrying out a single PHF is £2410 which includes for all legal administration costs, conveyance to funeral home (within 15 miles) and to crematorium or cemetery for funeral, care of deceased person, coffin, hearse, Funeral Director and staff, and crematorium costs
- 6.2 Carrying out PHFs is a statutory function and therefore the Council has to accept costs relating to arranging any PHFs, which are unknown each year. Officers try to ensure value for money, whilst balancing the sensitive nature of providing a respectful funeral.
- 6.3 Any other costs, such as Environmental Health associated cleaning or pest control costs will be added to the appropriate form before it is sent to the

Government Legal Department, however, reimbursement for this type of cost is not guaranteed and with no time limit.

- 6.4 The council's Legal department takes on the responsibility for anything in relation to the estate after the Waste & Environment service has completed the form to the Government Legal Department. This may include taking possession of keys to a property and ensuring any of the follow up in relation to the property or subsequent sale of the property. To date, whilst the Waste & Environment Service have been carrying out PHFs, there have been no properties to administer.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 PHFs are a statutory duty of local authorities, primarily under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984.

8 Equal Opportunities Implications

8.1 Relevance Test

Has a relevance test been completed for Equality Impact?	Yes
Did the relevance test conclude a full impact assessment was required?	No

8.2 Impact Assessment

A short impact assessment is attached (Appendix B) noting that residents with disabilities, and different cultures, religions or beliefs have been considered when implementing this policy.

9 Staffing Implications

- 9.1 PHFs are arranged by the Council's Bereavement Officer, who liaises with the Environmental Enforcement Officers (EEOs) to arrange house searches, if necessary.
- 9.2 Once the Government Legal Department form is sent any further queries relating to the estate are dealt with by the council's Legal department.

10 Environmental Implications

- 10.1 A Sustainable Impact Assessment has been considered but deemed not relevant to this report.

11 Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 None specific

12 Public Health implications

- 12.1 PHFs are a statutory duty of local authorities, primarily under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984.

13 Customer Services Centre Implications

13.1 None specific

14 Communications and Website Implications

14.1 Once the policy is agreed it will be added to the council website.

15 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

15.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

15.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Waste & Environment service plan(s). Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plan(s).

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
The number of PHFs could increase due to cost of living or future pandemics.	The financial burden on the council would increase	Provide clear information about support offered to families to arrange funerals for their loved ones and work with legal to ensure costs are where possible recoverable from estates	Tolerate	4
Deceased persons may not have a suitable funeral arranged	Deceased person not treated with dignity. Reputational damage to the council	Trained Staff follow clear policy and procedures to ensure that appropriate PHF arrangements are available and made	Treat	1

15.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

Very Likely ----- Likelihood ----- Remote	Low 4	High 8	Very High 12	Very High 16
	Low 3	Medium 6	High 9	Very High 12
	Low 2	Low 4	Medium 6	High 8
	Low 1	Low 2	Low 3	Low 4
		Impact -----> Unacceptable		

Impact Score

- 4 (Catastrophic)
- 3 (Critical)
- 2 (Significant)
- 1 (Marginal)

Likelihood Score

- 4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
- 3 (Likely (21-79%))
- 2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
- 1 (Remote (≤5%))

15.4 In the officers’ opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

The remainder are therefore operational risks. Progress against the treatment plans for strategic risks is reported to the Policy and Resources Committee quarterly. The effectiveness of all treatment plans are reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

Data Quality

Data sources:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-health-funerals-good-practice-guidance/public-health-funerals-good-practice-guidance>

Data checked by:

Craig Thorpe, Head of Waste & Environment

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	X
3	High	

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Draft Public Health Funeral Policy

Appendix B - EIA

