



# Public Health Funerals 2024

Research Report

March – April 2024



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# Summary

## Background

Between March and April 2024 the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted an online survey of district and single-tier councils asking them to share information about their public health funeral provision. This exercise aimed to help the LGA understand the prevailing trends around public health funerals at a national and local level. The survey follows a [similar survey we conducted in 2011](#). The survey was sent to English heads of environment or equivalent position, and a total of 109 councils (37 per cent) responded.

## Key findings

- An estimated 4,400 public health funerals were carried out by councils in England, in 2022/23. This was an increase of around 500 from the estimated figure for 2021/22 (3,900).
- Two-thirds (62 per cent) of councils said the most commonly cited reason for public health funerals was a lack of family or friends to provide a funeral, in 2022/23. It was also one of the most commonly reasons cited in the previous three years.
- Half (50 per cent) of all respondents said that they felt the rise in cost of living had had an impact on public health funerals to a great or moderate extent.
- Councils across England spent nearly £6 million in total on public health funerals in 2022/23.
- On average per council around £20,000 was spent in 2022/23 on public health funerals. Fifty-five per cent said they had been able to reclaim 'all of the costs' sometimes from the deceased's estate.

- Four-fifths (84 per cent) of councils said that their staff were familiar to a great or moderate extent with the Government's good practice guidance on public health funerals.

## Introduction

From March to April 2024, the LGA conducted an online survey of district councils unitary councils, metropolitan districts and London boroughs regarding their public health funeral provision. The survey was carried out to help the Local Government Association understand the prevailing trends around public health funerals at a national and local level. The survey follows a [similar survey we conducted in 2011](#).

Under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984, when a resident passes away outside of a hospital, and/or in any case where it appears to the council that no suitable arrangements for the disposal of the body have been or are being made otherwise than by the council, they will make the necessary arrangements for a public health funeral. Councils will do everything in their power to try to locate living relatives or friends of the deceased, and in some cases, pass the responsibility on to them.

If a council cannot find a friend or family member willing to deal with the deceased's estate and pay for the funeral, the council will try their hardest to establish the faith of the deceased and arrange a dignified service. If they are unable to establish any preferences, then a simple ceremony takes place followed by a burial or a cremation. The council is obliged to deal with all aspects of a state-assisted funeral, including registration of the death, dealing with the undertakers and organising the details of the funeral, and involving where possible, friends and relatives of the deceased in the process.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted by the LGA's Research and Information Team using an online questionnaire. An email containing a unique link was sent to all heads of environment (or equivalent position) in district and single-tier councils in England (296 in total). The survey was available to complete online between March and April 2024. The final overall response rate was 37 per cent (109 councils).

## Response rate

As Table 1 shows, by council type, the highest level of engagement was from district councils, 44 per cent or 72 councils. Thirty-six per cent, or 23 unitary councils, and 24 per cent, or eight London councils responded to the survey. The lowest level of response was from Metropolitan districts (17 per cent or six councils).

Regionally, as shown in Table 2, the highest level of engagement was from councils in the Eastern region with a response rate of 47 per cent, or 21 councils, and councils in Yorkshire and Humber (47 per cent or 7 councils). This was followed by the South East with a response rate of 44 per cent or 28 councils, and the East Midlands, at 42 per cent or 15 councils. The West Midlands had a response rate of 37 per cent, which was also the same for the South West. Seven councils or 20 per cent from the North West responded, and the lowest level of response was from the North East (17 per cent, or 2 councils).

This level of response means that these respondents should not necessarily be taken to be widely representative of the situation of all districts and single-tier councils. Rather, they are a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents.

**Table 1: Response rate by type of council**

Type of council	Number of questionnaires	Number of responses	Response rate
District	164	72	44%
London borough	33	8	24%
Metropolitan district	36	6	17%
Unitary	63	23	36%

**Table 2: Response rate by region**

Region	Number of questionnaires	Number of responses	Response rate
Eastern	45	21	47%
East Midlands	35	15	42%
London	33	8	24%
North East	12	2	17%
North West	35	7	20%
South East	64	28	44%
South West	27	10	37%
West Midlands	30	11	37%
Yorkshire and Humber	15	7	47%

Data has been weighted to be more representative of councils across England. The number provided for the base for the tables below refers to the actual (unweighted) number of respondents who answered each question.

Numerical figures provided in this survey have been used to estimate the likely totals for all councils. This process makes use of imputation: estimating councils' missing



numerical values based on the values provided by other, highly similar councils. This methodology assumes some similarity between respondents and non-respondents, so results should be interpreted cautiously.

In addition, the following should be considered when interpreting the findings of this survey:

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the unweighted number of respondents who answered each question. Please note that bases can vary throughout the survey
- Numbers and percentages are provided for any questions where the base was less than 50. To calculate the number of respondents who provided a certain response for other questions, simply multiply the percentage provided by the base
- Throughout the report, percentages may not appear to add up to exactly 100 per cent due to rounding

## Public Health Funerals 2024

This section contains analysis of the full results from the survey.

### Public health funeral provision

Respondents were asked how many public health funerals their council had carried out over the last four years. They were also asked to provide this information broken down into two age bands, 16 to 64 years olds, and those aged 65 and over. The responses to this question were used to estimate the overall number of public health funerals across England, by assigning the number of the most similar available council to each council which did not participate in the survey or answer this question.

In the 2022/23 financial year, there were an estimated 4,400 public health funerals carried out by councils in England. This was an increase of around 500 from the estimated figure for 2021/22 (3,900) - see Table 3. This was broken down into an estimated 1,700 public health funerals carried out for those aged between 16 to 64 years old, and 2,600 for those aged 65 and over.

On average there were 15 public health funerals carried out per council in 2022/23, an increase of two funerals per council from 13 in 2021/22. This included an average of six public health funerals per council for those aged between 16 and 64 in 2022/23, compared to five the year before (2021/22). For those aged 65+ in 2022/23 there were nine public health funerals on average per council, compared to eight the year before (2021/22).

**Table 3: How many public health funerals did your local authority carry out over the last four financial years? (all councils)**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Estimated England Total	<b>3800</b>	<b>4200</b>	<b>3900</b>	<b>4400</b>
16-64 year olds	1600	1600	1600	1700
65+	2200	2600	2300	2600
Total per council (average)	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>
16-64 year olds – per council (average)	5	5	5	6
65+ per council (average)	7	9	8	9

Unweighted base: all respondents (102). Note: estimated numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest hundred. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Table 4 shows the data for district councils. There were an estimated 1,300 public health funerals among district councils in 2022/23, an increase of 300 (1,000) funerals compared with 2021/22. When looking at the data broken down by age, in 2022/23 there were an estimated 500 public health funerals in district councils for those aged between 16 and 64, and 800 funerals for those aged 65 and over.

In 2022/23 there were eight public health funerals on average per district council, compared to six in 2021/22. This included an average of three funerals for those aged between 16 and 64 years old per council, and five per council for those aged 65 and over.

**Table 4: How many public health funerals did your local authority carry out over the last four financial years? (District councils)**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Estimated England Total	<b>1000</b>	<b>1100</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>1300</b>
16-64 year olds	400	400	400	500
65+	600	700	600	800
Total per council (average)	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>
16-64 year olds – per council (average)	2	2	2	3
65+ per council (average)	4	4	4	5

Unweighted base: all respondents (68). Note: estimated numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest hundred. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

As shown in Table 5 2022/23 there were an estimated 3,100 public health funerals in single-tier councils, compared to 2,800 in 2021/22. The estimated number of public health funerals for those aged between 16 and 64 in single-tier councils had not changed since 2019/20 from 1,200. For those aged 65 and over, the estimated number of funerals had increased by 300 since 2021/22 to 1,900 in 2022/23.

On average, there were 24 public health funerals per single-tier council in 2022/23. For Those aged between 16 and 64 the average number of public health funerals has been nine funerals, this has not changed since 2019/20 for single-tier councils. In 2022/23 there were on average 14 funerals per single-tier councils for those ages 65 and over.

**Table 5: How many public health funerals did your local authority carry out over the last four financial years? (Single-tier councils)**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Estimated England Total	<b>2800</b>	<b>3100</b>	<b>2800</b>	<b>3100</b>
16-64 year olds	1200	1200	1200	1200
65+	1600	1900	1600	1900
Total per council (average)	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>
16-64 year olds – per council (average)	9	9	9	9
65+ per council (average)	12	14	12	14

Unweighted base: all respondents (34). Note: estimated numbers for England have been rounded to the nearest hundred. This may cause the figures to not add up precisely to the total.

Respondents were asked over the last four years what were the most common reasons when carrying out a public health funeral. As Table 6 shows, the most commonly cited reason in 2022/23, at 62 per cent, was a lack of family or friends to provide a funeral. It was also one of the most commonly reasons cited in the previous three years. People dying without any assets or income with no family or friends, and family and friends unable to contribute to a funeral, were the next highest reasons for carrying out public health funerals. There were four 'other' responses, which were the same as options already provided in the survey.

**Table 6: What were the most common cited reasons over the last four years for carrying out public health funerals in your council? (All councils)**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Lack of family or friends to provide a funeral	58%	54%	56%	62%
People dying without any assets or income with no family or friends	53%	55%	54%	59%
Family or friends unable to contribute to a funeral	52%	51%	50%	52%
Family or friends unwilling to contribute to a funeral	36%	38%	39%	40%
Other	2%	2%	3%	3%
Don't Know	12%	12%	12%	7%

Unweighted base: all respondents (104)

As Table 7 and Table 8 show, the responses broken down by district and single-tier councils. Among district councils, 57 per cent of councils said the most commonly cited reason in 2022/23 was lack of family or family or friends to provide a funeral. For the same period, in single-tier councils, people dying without any assets or income with no family or friends was the most common reason.

**Table 7: What were the most common cited reasons over the last four years for carrying out public health funerals in your council? (District councils)**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Lack of family or friends to provide a funeral	54%	47%	50%	57%
Family or friends unable to contribute to a funeral	54%	54%	58%	53%
Family or friends unwilling to contribute to a funeral	43%	46%	46%	50%
People dying without any assets or income with no family or friends	49%	53%	46%	50%
Other	2%	2%	3%	3%
Don't Know	9%	9%	9%	6%

Unweighted base: all respondents (68)

**Table 8: What were the most common cited reasons over the last four years for carrying out public health funerals in your council? (Single-tier councils)**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
People dying without any assets or income with no family or friends	57%	57%	65%	71%
Lack of family or friends to provide a funeral	64%	63%	64%	69%
Family or friends unable to contribute to a funeral	50%	47%	39%	52%
Family or friends unwilling to contribute to a funeral	26%	28%	28%	26%
Other	3%	3%	3%	3%
Don't Know	16%	16%	16%	9%

Unweighted base: all respondents (36)



Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of respondents said that family and/or friendship breaking down was the most common reason why family and friends were unwilling to pay for a funeral in 2022/23, as shown in Table 9. The next two highest reasons were family and/or friends not being eligible for a social fund funeral payment (62 per cent), and family and/or friends believing it is someone else’s responsibility (24 per cent). These were also the top reasons for both districts and single-tier councils.

Twenty-nine ‘other’ responses were provided - however, they referred to people dying without any assets or income with no family or friends, despite these being provided as a default option.

**Table 9: When family and/or friends are unwilling to pay for a funeral what are the reasons given? (2022/23)**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Family and/or friendship breakdown	76%	69%	73%
Family and/or friends not eligible for social fund funeral payment	58%	66%	62%
Family and/or friends believe it is someone else's responsibility	25%	22%	24%
Family and/or friends unwilling to take money from social fund funeral payment	11%	7%	9%
Other	27%	28%	27%
Don't Know	6%	16%	10%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

Just over a third (39 per cent) of respondents said that the COVID-19 pandemic had not had much of an adverse impact on the delivery of public health funerals. Thirty-one per cent of councils said that the pandemic had impacted the delivery of public health funerals a great deal or a fair amount. As Table 10 shows, just under half (49 per cent) of single-tier councils said that the pandemic impacted the delivery public health funerals a great deal or a fair amount - however among district councils, around half (51 per cent) of all respondents said it had not impacted them very much.

**Table 10: How much of an adverse impact, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic had on the delivery of public health funerals?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
<b>A great deal or a fair amount</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>31%</b>
A great deal	1%	8%	4%
A fair amount	15%	41%	27%
Not very much	51%	25%	39%
None at all	23%	13%	18%
Don't know	10%	14%	11%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

Respondents who had answered that the pandemic had impacted the delivery of public health funerals a great deal or a fair amount were asked to specify how it was impacted. Twenty-seven councils responded to this question, and their responses fell into the following themes:

- Family and friends worried about attending funerals for their own safety
- Staff levels low due to sickness, self-isolation and working from home
- Increased number of deaths

- Due to safety measures, difficulty in accessing the deceaseds property and assets
- Family and friends going through job losses meant it was difficult for them to help with paying for the funeral
- Loss of contact with family and friends, due to social distancing and not visiting the deceased
- Not enough cremation slots

As Table 11 shows, half (50 per cent) of all respondents said that they felt the rise in cost of living had had an impact on public health funerals to a great or moderate extent. Broken down by type of authority, a higher percentage of single-tiers said they were affected to a by the cost of living to a great extent compared to districts.

**Table 11: To what extent, if at all, do you feel that the rise in the cost of living has led to an impact in public health funerals?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
<b>To a great or moderate extent</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>
To a great extent	24%	30%	27%
To a moderate extent	26%	20%	23%
To a small extent	24%	23%	24%
Not at all	17%	12%	15%
Don't know	9%	15%	12%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

Respondents that had answered the rise in cost of living was having a great or moderate impact on public health funerals were asked to say how, 73 councils responded to this question. Responses were put into the themes below:

- More people cannot afford funerals
- Family and/or friends unwilling to cover the cost
- Increase in funeral or cremation costs has made them less affordable
- Increase in those dying with no next of kin or funeral plan

## Families and friends

In this section, respondents were asked about their liaison with family and friends of the deceased. As Table 12 shows, four out of five (81 per cent) councils said that when planning a public health funeral they liaised with family members to a great or moderate extent. When looking at the data broken down by type of council, 83 per cent of district councils had significant contact with family members, compared to 77 per cent of single-tier councils.

**Table 12: To what extent do council officers liaise with family members when planning a public health funeral?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
<b>To a great or moderate extent</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>81%</b>
To a great extent	39%	50%	44%
To a moderate extent	44%	27%	37%
To a small extent	14%	14%	14%
Not at all	3%	0%	2%
Don't know	0%	9%	4%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

As Table 13 shows, 52 per cent of respondents said that family and/or friends were informed of the date, time and location of the funeral but could not make any amendments. Nearly a third (30 per cent) of respondents said that family and/or friends are informed of the date, time and location and could make amendments. When the data was broken down by council type, single-tier councils were notably more likely to provide opportunities to make amendments than district councils.

Sixteen 'other' responses were given, which have been put into the themes below:

- Family (and /or friends) are put in touch with the celebrant about the service
- No family or friends
- Direct cremation or burial, family and friends not informed about
- Any additional requests are considered but at a cost

**Table 13: In what way do relevant council officers liaise with family members?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Family (and/or friends) are informed of date, time and location of funeral but cannot make any amendments	54%	50%	52%
Family (and/or friends) are informed of date, time and location of funeral and can make amendments	27%	34%	30%
Other (please specify below)	19%	16%	18%

Unweighted base: all respondents (88)

As Table 14 shows, almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of respondents said that they had allowed family and/or friends to personalise the funerals, with a third of respondents said they had not allowed this. Districts would more likely than single-tiers allow the funerals to be personalised.

**Table 14: Are families and/or friends allowed to personalise public health funerals e.g. with flowers or music?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Yes	67%	61%	64%
No	33%	31%	32%
Don't Know	0%	9%	4%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

## In cases where there are no family or friends

Respondents were asked when they had been unable to identify family and/or friends of the deceased, how often they advertised information about the deceased or their funeral on their council's website. As Table 15 shows, 19 per cent of respondents said they always or often advertised information about the deceased or their funeral on their councils website, however, two-fifths (41 per cent) of respondents said they never do this. A little less than a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents said they advertised on their website sometimes.

Twenty-one per cent of district councils always or often advertised on their website, higher than among single-tier councils, at 15 per cent. Forty-seven per cent of district councils and 33 per cent of single-tier councils never advertised on their website about the deceased or their funeral.

**Table 15: How often, when your council has been unable to identify family and/or friends, do you advertise information about the deceased or their funeral on your website?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
<b>Always or often</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Always	8%	2%	6%
Often	13%	13%	13%
Sometimes	14%	36%	24%
Rarely	14%	8%	12%
Never	47%	33%	41%
Don't know	3%	7%	5%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

As Table 16 shows, a third (32 per cent) of councils said that they always or often used genealogical researchers to identify the next of kin when they have been



unsuccessful in identifying family and/or friends. Thirty-seven per cent said that they had never used them. Forty-four per cent of single-tier councils said they had never used them, with twenty-six per cent saying they had used them always or often. Thirty-six per cent of districts councils said they always or often used these researchers, and thirty-two per cent said they had never used them.

**Table 16: When you have been unsuccessful in identifying family and/or friends, how often does your council use genealogical researchers to identify next of kin?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
<b>Always or often</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>32%</b>
Always	19%	20%	20%
Often	17%	6%	12%
Sometimes	21%	15%	18%
Rarely	11%	13%	12%
Never	32%	44%	37%
Don't know	0%	2%	1%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

## Costs of public health funerals

Councils were asked what elements were included in their public health funerals.

The top five elements and services included in public health funerals were, cremation (93 per cent), coffin or casket (93 per cent), funeral director (87 per cent), funeral service (75 per cent) and burial fees (75 per cent). As shown in Table 17 these were also the top five elements and services when the data was broken down by district and single-tier councils.

Nineteen councils gave 'other' responses, which fell into the following areas:

- Religious requests
- Short service
- Celebrant
- Personal wishes at a cost

**Table 17: What is included in your council's public health funeral?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Cremation	91%	96%	93%
Coffin/casket	92%	95%	93%
Funeral director	86%	87%	87%
Funeral service	69%	82%	75%
Burial fees	69%	83%	75%
Venue of funeral service	58%	70%	63%
Right of burial	46%	49%	47%
Music	38%	50%	43%
Ashes urn	38%	30%	35%
Funeral parlour	26%	40%	33%
Viewing of deceased	4%	21%	12%
Notice in newspaper	11%	14%	12%
Floral tributes/flowers	13%	7%	11%
Fees for maintenance of plot	3%	2%	3%
Other	21%	9%	16%

Unweighted base: all respondents (107)

Respondents were asked to provide either the actual amount or an estimated total amount spent on public health funerals broken down over the past four years. As above, these figures were used to estimate figures among councils who did not respond to approximate a national total. As Table 18 shows, in 2022/23 councils across England spent a little shy of an estimated six million pounds in total on public health funerals. This was an increase of around £324,000 since 2021/22. District councils spent an estimated £1.6 million in 2022/23, compared to single-tier councils spending £4.3 million.

**Table 18: Estimated total amount spent on public health funerals in the past four years**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2	2022/23
Estimated England - total	£4,503,000	£5,096,000	£5,631,000	£5,955,000
Estimated district councils - total	£1,287,000	£1,294,000	£1,372,000	£1,646,000
Estimated single-tier councils - total	£3,216,000	£3,802,000	£4,258,000	£4,309,000

Unweighted base: all respondents (93). Note: these figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

As Table 19 shows, across England on average councils spent around £20,000 in 2022/23. The average cost per funeral in 2022/23 was £1,600, an increase of £100 from 2021/22. In 2022/23, district councils spent £10,000 on average, compared to £8,400 in 2021/22. Among single tier councils, the average amount spent per council increased in 2022/23 by £300 from £32,300 in 2021/22.

**Table 19: Average amount spent on public health funerals per council in the past four years**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/2	2022/23
Average per council -total`	£15,200	£17,200	£19,000	£20,100
Average per council – district councils	£7,800	£7,900	£8,400	£10,000
Average per council – single-tier councils	£24,400	£28,800	£32,300	£32,600
Average cost per funeral -total	£1,200	£1,300	£1,500	£1,600

Unweighted base: all respondents (93). Note: these figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Respondents were asked how often they had been able to reclaim the cost of the public health funeral from their deceased's estate. Table 20 the data broken down by reclaiming 'some of the costs' or 'all of the costs'. Eighteen per cent of respondents were able to reclaim 'all of the costs' all or most of the time or very often. Fifty-five per cent said they had been able to reclaim 'all of the costs' sometimes. Twenty-seven of respondents said that they were able to reclaim 'some of the costs' all or most of the time or very often.

**Table 20: How often has your council been able to reclaim the costs of a public health funeral from the deceased's estate? (All councils)**

	Some of the costs	All of the costs
<b>All or most of the time / very often</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>18%</b>
All or most of the time	7%	4%
Very Often	20%	14%
Sometimes	56%	55%
Rarely	12%	23%
Never	2%	4%
Don't know	3%	1%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

As Table 21 shows, 49 per cent of district councils said they were able to reclaim ‘all of the costs’ sometimes. Forty-eight per cent of district councils said they were able to reclaim ‘some of the costs’ sometimes.

**Table 21: How often has your council been able to reclaim the costs of a public health funeral from the deceased's estate? (District councils)**

	Some of the costs	All of the costs
<b>All or most of the time / very often</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>25%</b>
All or most of the time	10%	7%
Very Often	22%	18%
Sometimes	48%	49%
Rarely	13%	22%
Never	4%	3%
Don't know	3%	1%

Unweighted base: all respondents (68)

Among single-tier councils, less than a tenth (eight per cent) said that they were able to reclaim 'all of the costs' all or most of the time or very often, and 62 per cent of them said they reclaimed sometimes. Sixty-six per cent of them said that they were able to reclaim 'some of the costs' only sometimes, as shown in Table 22.

**Table 22: How often has your council been able to reclaim the costs of a public health funeral from the deceased's estate? (Single-tier councils)**

	Some of the costs	All of the costs
<b>All or most of the time / very often</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>8%</b>
All or most of the time	4%	0%
Very Often	17%	8%
Sometimes	66%	62%
Rarely	11%	24%
Never	0%	6%
Don't know	2%	0%

Unweighted base: all respondents (37)

Respondents that had answered that they had rarely or never been able to reclaim the net cost of public health funerals were subsequently asked how much they had not been able to reclaim. Due to the low number of responses to this question an average per council has been calculated. As Table 23 shows on average an estimated £30,000 per council had not been reclaimed by councils in England over the last four years. The average amount not reclaimed per council was substantially higher among single-tier councils, at £58,600, than among district councils, at £19,000, which makes sense given the smaller average resident population among district councils.



**Table 23: What is the total net cost of public health funerals you have not been able to reclaim over the last four years?**

	<b>Estimated per council (average) £</b>	<b>Districts (average) £</b>	<b>Single-tier (average) £</b>
Total net cost	£30,300	£19,000	£58,600

Base: all respondents (28). Note: these figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

As Table 24 shows, half (50 per cent) of respondents said that they always or often found it challenging to ascertain what funds were available in the deceased persons' bank or building society account prior to carrying out the funeral. Compared to districts, single-tiers found it challenging always or often more frequently.

**Table 24: In the course of organising a public health funeral, how often, have you ever found it challenging to ascertain what funds are available in the deceased person's bank or building society account prior to carrying out the funeral?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
<b>Always or often</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>50%</b>
Always	13%	11%	12%
Often	35%	42%	38%
Sometimes	37%	35%	36%
Rarely	11%	2%	7%
Never	3%	8%	5%
Don't know	1%	2%	2%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

Respondents were asked to share information on low-cost funeral options they shared. Fifty-four councils were able to share information, which fell into the following areas of interest:

- Signposting family and/or friends to the funeral grants or payment plans available
- Referring to websites of local funeral firms
- Direct cremation
- Services shorter or earlier in the day
- Using local funeral firms

As Table 25 shows half (51 per cent) of councils said they provided information regarding other options for low cost funerals.

**Table 25: Does your council provide information regarding other options for low-cost funerals?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Yes	52%	49%	51%
No	36%	44%	40%
Don't Know	11%	8%	9%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

As Table 26 shows, 61 per cent of councils said that when someone contacts the council for assistance with a relative’s funeral, they would contact the service directly. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents said they would be contacted via a funeral director, and 28 per cent said via the registrar’s office. Three-quarters (73 per cent) of district councils said that people went directly to the relevant service, whilst 45 per cent said via a funeral director, and 21 per cent via the registrar’s office. For single-tier councils, 47 per cent said directly to the relevant service, 36 per cent said via the registrar’s office and 33 per cent said via social services.

Fifty-two councils provided ‘other’ answers; they have been grouped into the options below:

- Via the coroner
- Via the old people’s or care home
- Via the palliative care hospice

**Table 26: When someone contacts the council for assistance with a relative’s funeral, how do they approach the council?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Directly to the relevant service	73%	47%	61%
Via a funeral director	45%	29%	38%
Via the registrar’s office	21%	36%	28%
Via social services	17%	33%	24%
Via the local hospital	7%	25%	15%
Other (please specify below)	49%	51%	50%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

## NHS Bereavement

Respondents were asked if their council carried out public health funerals on behalf of their local council. As Table 27 shows, eight out of ten (83 per cent) respondents said they did not carry out public health funerals on behalf of local hospitals, whilst 16 per cent said that they did. When the data is broken down by council type, single-tier councils were more likely than district councils to carry out public health funerals on behalf of their local hospital (23 per cent compared to 10 per cent in district councils). Nearly nine out of ten (89 per cent) district councils said that their council does not carry out public health funerals on behalf of their local hospital, compared to 75 per cent of single-tier councils.

**Table 27: Does your council carry out public health funerals on behalf of your local hospital?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Yes	10%	23%	16%
No	89%	75%	83%
Don't Know	1%	2%	2%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

Respondent that answered 'yes' to carrying out public health funerals on behalf of their local hospitals were asked if they had a formal agreement with them to provide this service. As Table 28 shows, two-thirds (65 per cent) of respondents said that they did not have a formal agreement, compared to 35 per cent who did. All district councils that responded to this question said that they did not have a formal agreement. Half (53 per cent) of single-tier councils said they did have a formal agreement, and 47 per cent said they did not.

**Table 28: Does your council have a formal agreement with them to provide this service?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Yes	0%	53%	35%
No	100%	47%	65%
Don't Know	0%	0%	0%

Unweighted base: all respondents (15)

## Additional information

Councils were asked to what extent their staff were familiar with the Government's good practice guidance on public health funerals. As Table 29 shows, more than four-fifths (84 per cent) of respondents said that their staff were familiar with this guidance to a great or moderate extent. When looking at the data broken down by type of respondent, single-tiers answered to a great or moderate extent more than districts.

**Table 29: To what extent are your staff familiar with the Government's good practice guidance on public health funerals?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
<b>To a great or moderate extent</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>84%</b>
To a great extent	32%	33%	32%
To a moderate extent	49%	55%	52%
To a small extent	15%	9%	12%
Not at all	4%	0%	2%
Don't know	0%	3%	1%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

As Table 30 shows, 63 per cent of councils reported having a webpage which explains what public health funerals are and how to access them. When looking at the data broken down by type of council, 36 per cent of district council respondents said they did not have a webpage, compared to 21 per cent of single-tier councils. Thirteen per cent of single-tier councils did not know if they had a webpage explaining this.

**Table 30: Does your council have a webpage which explains what public health funerals are and how to access public health funerals?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Yes	61%	65%	63%
No	36%	21%	29%
Don't Know	3%	13%	8%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

Councils were asked to share any good practice with us. Forty-five councils provided examples of good practice, which fell into the following areas:

- Procedure and policies: property searches and contracted services councils have with funeral directors and genealogists
- Respect and dignity: handling deceased with care, family involvement and personalised services, for example religion, with music
- communication and support: keeping next of kin updated, offering support to families, communication between council and other parties
- Legal and administrative: estate recovery and registering deaths
- Challenge and improvement: issues with resources



As Table 31 shows, 79 per cent of councils said that the LGA could contact them for any follow up work regarding public health funerals.

**Table 31: Can we contact you if we have any follow up work regarding public health funerals?**

	Districts	Single-tier	Total
Yes	83%	76%	79%
No	11%	11%	11%
Don't Know	6%	13%	9%

Unweighted base: all respondents (105)

## Annex A: Questionnaire

Under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984, when a resident passes away outside of a hospital and there is no one willing to pay, councils will make the necessary arrangements for a public health funeral. Councils will do everything in their power to try to locate living relatives or friends of the deceased, and in some cases, pass the responsibility on to them.

If a council cannot find a friend or family member willing to deal with the deceased's estate and pay for the funeral, the councils will try their hardest to establish the faith of the deceased and arrange a dignified service. If not, then a simple ceremony takes place followed by a burial or a cremation. The council is obliged to deal with all aspect of a state-assisted funeral, including registration of the death, dealing with the undertakers and organising the details of the funeral, involving where possible, friends and relatives of the deceased in the process.

This survey asks local authorities to share information about their public health funeral provision to help the Local Government Association understand the prevailing trends around public health funerals at a national and local level. The survey follows a similar survey we conducted in 2011, which can be see here: [Public health funerals 2011 final report](#).

**Please amend the details we have on record if necessary.**

- Name
- Authority
- Job title
- Department
- Email address

## Public Health Funeral Provision

**How many public health funerals did your local authority carry out over the last eight financial years?**

Column headings

- 2019/20
- 2020/21
- 2021/22
- 2022/23

Row headings

- Total number of public health funerals
- 16-64
- 65+

**In your council, when carrying out a public health funeral, what are the most common cited reason over the last four years what are the most common cited reasons? *Please only tick up to three options***

Column headings

- 2019/20
- 2020/21
- 2021/22
- 2022/23

Row headings

- Lack of friends or family to provide a funeral
- Family of friends unable to contribute to a funeral
- Family or friends unwilling to contribute to a funeral
- People dying without any assets or income with no

**In general, when family and/or friends are unwilling to pay for a funeral what are the reasons given?**

*Please select up to three:*

- Family and /or friends not eligible for social fund funeral payment
- Family and/or friends unwilling to take money from social fund funeral payment
- Family and/or friendship breakdown
- Family and/or friends believe it is someone else's responsibility
- Other
- Don't know

**How much of an adverse impact, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic had on the delivery of public health funerals?**

- A great deal
- A fair amount
- Not very much
- None at all
- Don't know

**Please tell us how the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact.**

**To what extent, if at all, do you feel that the rise in the cost of living has led to an impact in public health funerals?**

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

**Please tell us how the rise in the cost of living has led to an impact in public health funerals.**

### **Families and Friends**

**To what extent do council officers liaise with family members when planning a public health funeral?**

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

**In what way do relevant council officers liaise with family members?**

- Family (and/or friends) are informed of date, time and location of funeral but cannot make any amendments
- Family (and/or friends) are informed of date, time and location of funeral and can make amendments
- Other (please specify below)

**Are families / or friends allowed to personalise public health funerals e.g. with flowers or music?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

**In cases where there are no family/friends**

**How often has your council been unable to identify family and/or friends of the deceased do you advertise information about the deceased or their funeral on your council's website?**

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know

**How often does your council use genealogical researchers to identify next of kin where you have been unsuccessful in identifying family and/or friends in other ways?**

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know

## **Costs of Public Health Funerals**

### **What is included in your council's public health funeral?**

- Notice in newspaper
- Viewing of deceased
- Funeral director
- Coffin/casket
- Funeral parlour
- Venue of funeral service
- Floral tributes/flowers
- Music
- Funeral service
- Cremation
- Burial fees
- Right of burial
- Ashes urn
- Fees for maintenance of plot
- Other (please specify below)

**What has your council spent on public health funerals in the past four financial years?**

*Please do not include admin or staff costs.*

*Please write DK if you don't know.*

*Please complete the actual or estimate spend as necessary. There is no need to provide both, as the estimate row is for cases where you are unable to provide an exact figure.*

Column headings

- 2019/20
- 2020/21
- 2021/22
- 2022/23

Row headings

- Total spend (actual)
- Total spend (estimate)



**How often has your council been able to reclaim the costs of a public health funeral from the deceased's estate?**

Column headings

- All or most of the time
- Very often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know

Row headings

- Some of the costs
- All of the costs

**What is the total net cost of public health funerals you have not been able to reclaim over the last four years?**

Total net cost (£)

**In the course of organising a public health funeral, how often, have you ever found it challenging to ascertain what funds are available in the deceased person's bank or building society account prior to carrying out the funeral?**

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know

**Does your council provide information regarding other options for low cost funerals?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Can you please share what information your council share on low cost options for funerals including options available through the council such as direction cremation etc.**

**When someone contacts the council for assistance with a relative's funeral, how do they approach the council?**

*Select up to three*

- Via the registrar's office
- Via social services
- Via the local hospital
- Via a funeral director
- Directly to the relevant service
- Other (please specify below)

## **NHS Bereavement**

**Does your council carry out public health funerals on behalf of your local hospital?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Does your council have a formal agreement with them to provide this service?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Additional Information**

**To what extent are your staff familiar with the [Government's good practice guidance](#) on public health funerals?**

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

**Does your council have a webpage which explains what public health funerals are and how to access public health funerals?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Please provide a link**

**In the space below could you please share any good practice with us.**

**Can we contact you if we have any follow up work regarding public health funerals?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Once you press the 'Submit' button below, you will have completed the survey.

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. You are in control of any personal data that you have provided to us in your response. You can contact us at all times to have your information changed or deleted. You can find our full privacy policy here: [click here to see our privacy policy](#)



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