



**South
Staffordshire
Council**

Public Health Act Funerals

South Staffordshire Council's
Approach During Covid-19

Rebecca Morgan

r.morgan@sstaffs.gov.uk



www.sstaffs.gov.uk



What is a Public Health Act Funeral?

- Local authorities, under Section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984, have a statutory duty to make funeral arrangements for those who die within their area where no other arrangements have been or are being made
- There is also a moral responsibility to treat all cases with dignity and respect and to make sure that the funeral cannot be distinguished from any other
 - It is assumed, sometimes incorrectly, that people needing a Public Health Act funeral have no money, family or friends
- Each case is very different but they are almost always complex and time consuming



Introduction to South Staffordshire

- Bereavement Services was set up in 2009 when we opened the first of our two cemeteries and Public Health Act funerals were passed to us in 2011
- South Staffordshire is a rural district on the outskirts of Wolverhampton with a population of approximately 112,000
 - No towns – made up of 27 parishes
 - Considered to be an affluent area and levels of unemployment and homelessness are lower than the national average



South
Staffordshire
Council

Sytch Lane Cemetery





South
Staffordshire
Council

Strawberry Lane Cemetery





Public Health Act Funerals in South Staffordshire

- Number of cases taken on has steadily increased from 2011 where we had just one, to 2019 where we had seven
- In 2020 so far we have had eight referrals and taken on five of those as cases
- The number of cases where there are family members that can't afford to or don't want to make the arrangements has increased





What would usually happen?

- Referrals can come from a variety of sources e.g. police, Coroner, care home, family member, friend
- Find out as much information as you can at the initial referral stage
 - Obtain as much information as possible about the condition of the inside of the property
- Prepare to carry out a search of the deceased's place of residence





What issues did Covid-19 present?

1. How would I deal with the 'paperwork' and death registration?

2. Property searches – could or should they still go ahead?

- If yes, (a) what additional risks, if any would we be facing?
(b) what additional PPE, if any, would we need and would we be able to get hold of any?
- If no, would we be doing enough to: (a) locate relatives and friends? (b) find out funeral wishes? (c) find out if funds are available to claim our costs back?



Finding Solutions

1. 'Paperwork' could be dealt with electronically and death registrations could take place by telephone
2. Property Searches
 - (a) Discussed with line manager and asked for advice from our Health & Safety Team
 - (b) Contacted various industry organisations and other local authorities for advice





Conclusions

- Continue to carry out searches on a case by case basis
- Ensure that before entering at least 72 hours had passed since the deceased had been removed from the property
- Carry out usual risk assessment prior to and on arriving at the property
 - Ensure our kit has sufficient PPE items
 - Take photographs of relevant documents
- Ensure proper disposal of waste and used PPE items



Final Thoughts



- Covid-19 has certainly made us think about the way we do things and whether there are alternatives that work better
- Consideration given to possible safety risks for staff, being able to provide the most dignified and respectful outcome for the deceased and the financial implications for the council
- Better prepared with steps in place ready for a possible second wave of the virus
 - Working together and supporting each other!



Thank you very much for listening

Any questions?



r.morgan@sstaffs.gov.uk

07966 255150