

Title of Report	Introduction of a Policy on Public Health Funerals (Hackney Public Dignity Funerals)
Key Decision No	AHI S289
For Consideration By	Cabinet
Meeting Date	22 April 2024
Cabinet Members	Cllr Christopher Kennedy, Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Leisure and Cllr Susan Fajana-Thomas OBE, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Regulatory Services
Classification	Open
Ward(s) Affected	All
Key Decision & Reason	Yes Significant impact on all communities of Hackney
Implementation Date if Not Called In	30 April 2024
Group Director	Helen Woodland, Group Director for Adults, Health and Integration

1. Cabinet Members' introduction

- 1.1. This policy will assist Hackney council in ensuring the deceased are treated with dignity and respect by clarifying when and how a public health funeral will be provided.
- 1.2. To reflect the council's commitment to ensuring all residents are treated with dignity and respect we are proposing to refer to public health funerals as Public Dignity funerals as we feel this better reflects the importance of these funerals to our community regardless of personal circumstances of the deceased.

2. Group Director's introduction

- 2.1. The council is required to provide for a public health funeral in specific circumstances.
- 2.2. A draft local policy that seeks to reflect national guidance and local circumstances was written and a statutory 12 week consultation was

undertaken. The consultation and members briefing session were both supportive of the local policy.

- 2.3. A recommendation for an amendment to the policy to provide for processes to be expedited where the deceased was of a religious faith that requires burial without delay was requested. This has been accommodated within the policy.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. **To agree to the adoption of the policy to cover when and how a public health funeral will be provided.**
- 3.2. **To agree to the name of the policy and provision of such funerals to be called Public Dignity Funerals**

4. Reason(s) for decision

- 4.1. The government guidance on public health funerals recommends a local policy be implemented to cover when and how these funerals will be provided. Although Hackney council provided these funerals there was no written policy to provide guidance as to when and how these will be provided.

5. Details of alternative options considered and rejected

- 5.1. Not to have a local policy- this will continue to lead to potential delays in determining when a funeral should be provided by the council which is contrary to the legal requirement for the deceased to be treated with dignity and respect.
- 5.2. To maintain the name public health funerals - although these funerals are provided in order to comply with the Public Health Act it was felt that the term Public Dignity Funeral better described the nature of the arrangements being made and the council's commitment that all residents be treated with dignity and respect irrespective of their circumstances.

6. Background

Policy Context

- 6.1. Hackney Council has a legal requirement to provide for a funeral where the next of kin can not be identified, where the next of kin express no interest in organising the funeral, where there is insufficient means to cover the costs of a funeral or when a response to confirm funeral arrangements has not been received.

- 6.2. The policy sets out clear time frames for when arrangements for a funeral need to be confirmed and what steps Hackney council will take before determining a Public Dignity Funeral will be arranged.

Equality impact assessment

- 6.3. The policy will help ensure the council meets its commitments to treat people equitably by clarifying when a decision to provide for a funeral will be made.
- 6.4. The religious practices associated with the deceased have sought to be accommodated within the policy by providing for burial rather than cremation and by seeking to expedite enquiries to allow for a burial without undue delay.

Sustainability and climate change

- 6.5. The adoption of the policy will reduce circumstances where the deceased are kept in the mortuary for long periods and so reduce the climate impact of providing for such storage.

Consultations

- 6.6. A formal 12 week consultation was held on the draft policy and an all members briefing session.
- 6.7. A full consultation report was produced and is included as an appendix.
- 6.8. The responses to the consultation were supportive of why a policy was required.
- 6.9. Although the majority of responders felt the timelines for identifying and seeking a response from next of kin where appropriate a small number of responders felt that more time should be provided for such enquiries. This was carefully considered but felt to be contrary to the requirements to treat the deceased with dignity and respect.

Risk assessment

- 6.10. A policy that lays out when and how the council will decide if a funeral is required to be provided reduces the risk that the council is seen to be making arbitrary decisions.

7. Comments of the Interim Group Director, Finance

- 7.1. The Council has developed a local policy to explain the provision of public health funerals, which will now be referred to as "Public Dignity Funerals" to better represent their significance and the Council's commitment to treating all people with dignity and respect. This policy was prepared in response to government instructions and went through a 12-week consultation period, during which it gained support. The policy offers measures for expediting processing for members of religious faiths who require immediate burial. The

establishment of this policy intends to guarantee that funeral arrangements are made in a timely and dignified manner, while following legal requirements and promoting equity.

- 7.2. The information provided does not specifically suggest that the policy's implementation will have a direct financial impact. However, it is possible that developing defined norms and practices for public dignity funerals will result in more efficient use of resources, potentially lowering expenses associated with prolonged mortuary storage and expediting administrative procedures. Furthermore, adapting religious activities may incur additional costs, yet it is believed vital to maintain the principles of decency and respect.
- 7.3. Overall, while there may be some costs associated with implementing the policy, the emphasis is generally on meeting legal requirements and improving service delivery.

8. **Comments of the Acting Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services**

- 8.1. In accordance with the Council's constitution, the Elected Mayor and Cabinet shall carry out all of the Council's functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council. This includes as outlined in Article 5.5 (b) setting priorities that contribute to the life and development of the Borough and Article 5.5 (h) in which Cabinet decisions should aim to support and improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the Borough's inhabitants. The recommendations as set out in section 3 of this report are made in line with these obligations.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Public Dignity Funeral Policy
Appendix 2: Consultation Report

Background documents

None

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