

The Funeral Director Code 2026

‘Serving the public’



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Introduction

Definition of a funeral director

1. For the purposes of the Code, a funeral director is defined as:

'Any person or company who arranges for the lawful disposal of a body in exchange for money, goods or services.'

2. A client is defined as:

'Any person who enters into a contractual arrangement with a funeral director for the hire of their service.'

The Code

3. The Funeral Director Code 'Serving the Public' ('the Code') applies to all individuals and businesses carrying out the functions of a funeral director in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*
4. The Code has been informed by the knowledge and expertise of practicing funeral directors and is guided by principles of best practice. The Code is written in the public interest and is intended to ensure that those who have died and those who are bereaved receive the best possible care and service.
5. The Code requires funeral directors to adhere to minimum standards in their work and follow best practice which will provide reassurance and confidence to the public who entrust their person who has died to others.
6. A funeral director works in partnership with others to arrange the disposal of a body. This Code applies and is limited to services provided by the funeral director.

**Where the family and / or friends of a person who has died choose to arrange and conduct all or part of a funeral themselves without*

assistance from a funeral director, the Code does not apply. Minimum standards of care should, however, be observed and the separate Guidance document for The Care of the Dead in the Community should be followed.

Outcome

7. The Code aims to achieve the following outcome:

Implementation of best practice across the sector.

Accountability and compliance

8. The Code does not negate the responsibility of the funeral director to adhere to and take account of other legislation and guidance. It is the responsibility of each funeral director to ensure that they are operating in accordance with all relevant legislation.
9. The Regulator's inspectors will carry out inspections against the requirements set out in the Code. They will also investigate and address serious or significant complaints. Inspectors must not be obstructed or prevented from speaking to any staff member(s) during an inspection.

Existing codes and trade associations

10. The Code recognises there are existing trade association codes of practice and best practice guidance.

1. Engagement of the funeral director

11. It is expected that all funeral directors are transparent about the goods and services they offer.

If the funeral director does not offer the goods or services about which a person has enquired or requested, it is expected that the funeral director makes that clear and makes the person aware that those services can be accessed elsewhere.

All written and verbal communication must be clear and in plain language, avoiding jargon.

The funeral director must act in accordance with the instructions of the client, as far as reasonably practicable.

The funeral director must act in accordance with the requirements of this Code.

First contact

12. When the funeral director is contacted in relation to the death of a person, initial details must be gathered from the client (or other person who contacts the funeral director on behalf of the client or while the person who will be the client is not yet determined).

The funeral director at first contact must, whenever practicable, obtain and record the following minimum information:

- The name and contact details of the person contacting the funeral director and their relationship to the person who has died.
- The name of the person who has died.
- The address where the person is to be collected from.
- Confirmation that the death was expected and that a suitably trained

registered healthcare professional has confirmed or verified the death or pronounced life extinct.

- Where a person has died in a private residence, (not a care facility); any practical information that will assist staff – for example the general build of the person who has died (e.g., approximate size, weight), whereabouts in the property they are, and any relevant access or parking issues.

The funeral director should offer the following information in return:

- The names of staff who will be attending to collect the person who has died.
- The approximate time of arrival – this should be agreed with the client (or their representative). Advice should be given that there is no urgency to attend and that the family can take as much time with their person as they want before the funeral director staff attend.
- The address or location of the premises to which the person will be taken.

2. Collection of the person who has died

13. If a person has died at home, once death has been confirmed or life pronounced extinct by an appropriate professional, it is entirely the client's decision regarding when a funeral director comes to collect them. If a client wants the person to remain at home overnight or for a period of time, this is the client's right and should be facilitated.
14. If the final departure of a person is to take place from where they lived, this is a significant threshold moment and the funeral director must be sensitive to the importance of this moment. The client and/or family should be encouraged to lead and direct how this departure takes place.
15. Once a funeral director has been instructed to come and collect a person

who has died, they must attend at a mutually agreed time.

16. When funeral director staff collect a person, a client can be actively involved in assisting if they wish and this should be explained to them. Alternatively, the client may prefer to watch or to wait in another room. As a matter of course, a client should be invited to witness the final moment of departure from the property.
17. Before transferring a person into their care, the funeral director must ensure that:
 - the equipment they are using is suitable for the transfer of the person who has died and that it is clean, in good condition and well maintained
 - the staff involved in collecting the person are trained to do so
 - the vehicle used to collect the person is clean and well maintained
 - the person who has died is treated with dignity
 - any property with the person who has died is either removed and left with the client or detailed in paperwork which the client would be asked to countersign.
18. It is good practice to accurately make a note of the condition of the person at the point of their being taken into the funeral director's care.

3. Care of the person who has died

19. Each person brought into the care of a funeral director must be placed and kept individually in a temperature-controlled area (e.g., a separate rack, shelf, tray, drawer or coffin within a refrigeration unit or cold room).

A funeral director must never take more people into their care than can be accommodated in individual refrigerated spaces and / or in individual coffins in a temperature-controlled area.

20. During the time that a person who has died is in the custody of a funeral director, clients have the right to assist with or to carry out any care

procedures involving their person if they wish to. Staff assistance should be provided if required. Funeral directors must clearly offer this in their literature and on their website and must be properly equipped to support any clients who want to exercise this right.

21. No procedures involving the person who has died may take place without the client's express consent. All and any proposed acts should be fully explained to the client and permission obtained by written authorisation. A record of the discussion leading to any consent should be kept.
22. It is expected that funeral directors will clearly and sensitively describe to their client exactly how the person who has died will be cared for, and by whom. The client must also be informed of the exact location(s) where the person who has died will be kept. A record of this discussion must be kept.
23. Staff caring for people who have died must always treat the bodies in their care with the utmost respect. Any handling or movement of bodies must be carried out as though the bereaved family were present and watching. The dignity of the dead must be preserved at all times, with modesty cloths or other covering of intimate areas routinely used while the person is undressed during any care of their body.
24. Where any aspects of the care of a person who has died will be carried out by a third party, the funeral director must clearly and sensitively inform the client which aspects of the care these are and keep a record of having done so.
25. The funeral director must carry out regular visual checks of the condition of every person who has died that is in their care. A written record of these checks must be kept.
26. The funeral director must retain an accurate and comprehensive record of every person who has died who has been in their care. The record must be sufficiently detailed to record the time and date of the person's arrival at and departure from the funeral director's premises, with the

names of staff involved and all actions carried out involving the individual (e.g., washing, dressing, removal of medical implants or devices, suturing or embalming). The record must include details of where, when and by whom all actions were performed.

The record must be stored in an accessible form, in secure conditions and be retained for a minimum of 5 years. Where a record contains data about any person who is still living, funeral directors are required to comply with all relevant legislation (e.g., UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 etc.).

27. The funeral director must be able to demonstrate that they have assessed the activities undertaken by every staff member whose role includes duties relating to the care of people who have died. A record of each assessment, the outcome of the assessment and any training requirements / training undertaken must be kept by the funeral director and made available to inspectors on request.
28. Where the funeral director is using the services of another provider for any part of the care of a person who has died, a written Service Level Agreement (SLA) must be in place with that provider. Each SLA must be reviewed regularly and at least once per year.
29. The funeral director should familiarise themselves with the Health and Safety Executive's [guidance](#) on managing infection risks when handling people who have died. It covers the safe handling, storage and examination of bodies and pathological specimens in hospitals, mortuaries and post-mortem rooms. It also provides guidance for those involved in funeral services (including embalmers).

Embalming

30. Embalming is the preservation of a body from decay through injection of a chemical embalming fluid. The preservative solution (the embalming fluid) replaces the blood as well as treating the body cavity and organs.

31. Embalming may not take place without specific written confirmation from the client that they understand what the process involves and that they wish the funeral director to proceed with embalming the body of the person who has died.
32. Embalming is not a requirement for burial or cremation.
33. There is no requirement for the funeral director to offer embalming as a service.

Spending time with the person who has died

34. The funeral director must provide clear information to the client about whether they provide facilities for spending time with the person who has died.
35. If the facility to spend time with a person who has died is not normally offered as part of a service, for example where the funeral director only offers direct cremation, the funeral director must make it clear to the client, before the client engages them, that this is not included as standard.

If the client subsequently asks to spend time with the person who has died, the funeral director must take steps to facilitate this where possible, for example by agreement with another funeral director to use their facilities.

Any additional costs for facilitating a client's wish to spend time with the person who has died should be made clear to the client before that service is provided, in accordance with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) [Funeral Markets Investigation Order 2021](#).

36. Space used for clients and other bereaved people to spend time with a person who has died must be fit for purpose, private, clean, regularly inspected, and well-maintained.

37. Prior to any visitor arriving to spend time with a person who has died, the funeral director must ensure that the identity of the body is checked to ensure that the correct person has been brought into the visiting area. Records must be checked to ensure all client instructions or requests have been complied with.
38. The client has the right to determine who is and who is not permitted to spend time with the person who has died, and their instructions must be followed.
39. The funeral director must ensure that all visitors are afforded privacy when spending time with a person who has died. The funeral director or another trained and competent member of their staff must remain near and 'on hand' to answer any questions or requests.
40. In some rare circumstances, spending time with the person who has died may not be recommended by the funeral director, or some restrictions may have to be put in place, such as seeing the person who has died from behind glass.

In circumstances where the funeral director advises against the client seeing the body of the person who has died, the funeral director must provide the client with sensitively worded advice setting out their reasons. The funeral director must keep a record of this advice.

41. Where the funeral director has specifically advised the client against spending time with the person who has died, but the client does not accept that advice, the funeral director must keep a record of this.

4. Working with bereaved clients

42. Funeral directors must treat all clients and prospective clients fairly, with respect and dignity, keeping in mind that some will be vulnerable.
43. It is important that funeral directors give clients and prospective clients

unpressured time so that they can think through their options before making formal arrangements.

44. If a funeral director has already collected the person who has died, a client is under no obligation to use a funeral director's services and is still free to engage another company if they wish.
45. While reasonable charges may apply (collection of the person who has died and use of their mortuary facilities) a funeral director should make the transition to a different company as easy as possible.
46. In taking instructions and during the course of interactions with a client, the funeral director must have proper regard to the client's mental capacity or other vulnerability – such as vulnerability due to bereavement – and any potential disability, whether visible or not.
47. It is important for funeral directors to remember that when working for bereaved clients, not all spoken information is retained. Putting important information in writing/email will help clients keep track of everything they have been told.
48. People experience grief in different ways and funeral directors should have resources to hand to signpost people to if they think it is appropriate. Professional bereavement support service details should be made available to those who may require additional support.

5. The funeral director's premises

49. The funeral director must have on their premises, or have access to, sufficient clean and appropriate refrigeration facilities to store the people who are in their care.
50. Refrigeration can be a purpose-built refrigeration unit or temperature controlled cold room. Refrigeration units and cold rooms must be kept between 4 – 7 degrees Celsius and must be in a locked and secure

location.

51. Where refrigeration is provided by a third party, a SLA must be in place. Each SLA must be reviewed regularly and at least once per year.

Where refrigeration is being carried out by a third party, the funeral director must clearly and sensitively inform the client of that fact and of the whereabouts of the third-party facility.

52. The refrigeration capacity that a funeral director has on their premises, or has access to through a SLA, must be sufficient to accommodate all persons received into the funeral director's care. A funeral director must review their refrigeration capacity at least once per year.

53. All care of people who have died must take place in a location or locations specifically chosen for that purpose. The funeral director must ensure that their care facility or mortuary, or any care facility or mortuary used under a SLA is fit for purpose. This requires that:

- premises are lockable and accessible by authorised persons only.
- premises are clean, well-maintained and regularly inspected to ensure high standards of hygiene.
- the location of, and access to and from, the care facility or mortuary is suitable for the designated purpose.
- the funeral director has access to equipment that can accommodate all body types and care services offered by the funeral director. All equipment must be well maintained and appropriately serviced.

54. All funeral directors must fully comply with all relevant legislation, acts, regulation and guidance appertaining to their workplace.

6. Delivery of the funeral

55. The funeral director is responsible for managing the delivery of the funeral according to the wishes of the client, including:

- when instructed to do so by the client, making bookings, for example of requested venues, church or other place of worship, celebrant or minister, catering etc.
- ensuring that the client has completed the required statutory forms and that these forms are sent to the appropriate statutory authorities in good time.
- keeping and updating records and documentation and ensuring that the client's requests for goods and services are recorded accurately, including any changes made to the client's requests or instructions.
- ensuring that the person who has died is presented in accordance with the wishes and instructions of the client, as far as reasonably practicable.
- ensuring that any changes in instructions that result in additional charges are agreed by the client in writing (email).
- managing donations appropriately, transparently and as requested by the client.
- all funeral directors must have a written policy in place for managing donations which is understood/known by staff and is readily accessible to the client.

56. The funeral director must keep the following records which are accessible by authorised personnel only:

- a record of all the funerals provided, including requested services, estimates and invoice.
- a record of the advice given to clients in relation to spending time with the person who has died and the outcome of the advice.
- a record of the management and handling of any cremated remains

7. Post funeral care and contact

57. Permission should be sought from the client for any ongoing contact after the funeral has taken place, the invoice has been paid, and cremated remains have been returned.
58. No marketing material or promotion of other services may be sent to bereaved clients without their prior agreement.

8. Cremated remains

59. The funeral director must ensure the careful and appropriate storage, handling, recording and dignified management of cremated remains.
60. All records relating to cremated remains must be kept by the funeral director. Where a record contains data about a client who is still living, these must be kept in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.
61. The funeral director must have a written cremated remains management policy in place.
62. At a minimum, a cremated remains management policy must cover:
 - **Procedures for:**
 - storage in a designated, locked, clean, dry and well maintained location,
 - cremated remains and the cremation certificate to be stored together,
 - recording each individual set of cremated remains,
 - splitting of cremated remains including the transfer from one container to another,
 - transfer or release of cremated remains, including procedures for contacting the client and obtaining identification prior to the

- release of ashes to the client,
 - reporting lost or damaged cremated remains to appropriate management,
 - reporting lost or damaged cremated remains to inspectors within 48 hours of discovery,
 - keeping a record of the scattering or interment of cremated remains if undertaken by the funeral director, and
 - keeping a written audit trail of all actions taken with the cremated remains.
 - The funeral director must have a policy for management of any unclaimed cremated remains, i.e. how long they will be held for and what process will then take place.
- **The following matters:**
 - a clear description of the options available to the client e.g. scattering, interment, retention in an urn.
 - adequate safeguards to ensure cremated remains cannot be combined with other(s) i.e. only preparing one set of cremated remains at a time.
 - provision for a change of instruction by the client in respect of cremated remains.

63. Cremated remains may never be withheld for the purposes of securing payment.

9. Problems and complaints

64. The funeral director should run their business in a way that actively encourages and welcomes constructive complaints and criticism as well as positive feedback from clients as a way of continually improving service and of putting things right where necessary.

65. The business must have a written complaints policy which:

- is brought to clients' attention at the point of taking first instructions, and which includes advice on how to make a formal complaint, clear information on the address to which complaints should be addressed and any relevant time periods for this.
- is easy for clients to use and understand, allowing for complaints to be made by any reasonable means.

- enables complaints to be dealt with promptly and fairly, with decisions based on a sufficient investigation of the circumstances.
- does not involve any charges to clients for handling their complaints.

The complaints procedure must be available on the funeral director's website (where this exists) or must be made available as soon as reasonably practicable in paper or electronic form on request.

66. In the event that someone makes a complaint, the funeral director must provide them with all necessary information concerning the handling of the complaint.
67. Clients are informed, both at the time of engagement and at the conclusion of the complaints procedure, of their right to complain to any trade body that the business belongs to, the time frame for doing so and full details of how to do this.
68. Where a complaint made to a funeral director relates to a breach of this Code or the care of the person who has died, the funeral director must inform inspectors of the complaint within 48 hours of it being made.

10. Business continuity and managing risks

69. The funeral director must prepare and maintain a written contingency plan which contains provisions for:
 - dealing with any unexpected increase in the number of deaths.
 - contingency arrangements for any unexpected disruption to or loss of services.
 - contingency arrangements for the continuation of the business in the event of absences and emergencies.
70. The plan must be made available to inspectors on request and should be reviewed annually.

71. The business must have a clear 'whistle blowing' policy that encourages members of staff to come forward and raise concerns about suspected misconduct, illegal acts, non-compliance with policies concerning equality and diversity, health and safety and confidentiality and data protection or any serious non-compliance with this Code.
72. The business must have adequate professional indemnity insurance to ensure it is able to meet a potential claim. Professional indemnity insurance must be reviewed regularly.
73. The funeral director must notify inspectors of any serious business or service failures as soon as practicable e.g., fire, flood, break in or bankruptcy.
74. The funeral director should at all times behave in a way that promotes and maintains public trust, demonstrating professionalism, competence and ethical behaviour in all aspects of their work, including activity on social media.
75. The funeral director should encourage equality of opportunity and respect the diversity of clients and colleagues.