

FUNERALS WITHOUT A FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Information

It is often assumed, quite wrongly, that funerals can be completed only with the use of a funeral director. Although a funeral director will be invited to organise the majority of funerals, some people prefer to organise funerals themselves. The details in the individual sections of this Charter give sufficient information to achieve this. Your Charter member will also supply a leaflet giving you local information.

The funeral director typically organises the funeral by collecting and moving the body, arranging embalming and viewing of the deceased, providing a coffin, hearse and other elements. Carrying out these services relieves the bereaved from doing what they may feel are unpleasant and difficult tasks. Ultimately, the funeral director must operate commercially and in charging for his or her services, funerals can be expensive. In addition, the funeral director imposes him/herself on the arrangements to a greater or lesser degree.

Some people do not wish to use a funeral director. This can be for a wide variety of reasons. They may feel that passing the body of a loved one over to strangers is wrong. Some feel that personally organising the funeral is their final tribute to the deceased person. Others may simply wish to save money by doing everything themselves or may have used a funeral director on a previous occasion and found the experience unsatisfactory. Some may feel that funerals arranged with a funeral director are routine and processed, and may desire an innovative and different approach. It is, of course, your right to make this decision without giving a reason.

The bereaved family can handle the entire funeral and Charter members are able to assist in facilitating this. Such a funeral is referred to as "Personalised" or "Independent", rather than the possibly offensive term "DIY" funeral. These funerals will be different because traditional funeral elements may be unobtainable. Currently, many funeral directors will not sell coffins separately, neither will they offer a hearse for use, unless the entire funeral package is purchased (see Charter item Appendix A "INFORMATION ON USING A FUNERAL DIRECTOR"). Consequently, personalised funeral arrangers use their own vehicles or hire vans in lieu of a hearse. They may also make their own coffin or use a biodegradable type.

These actions often attract comments that such funerals lack "dignity". It is important to refute this comment. Firstly, dignity is defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as "true worth" and where a personalised funeral accords with the wishes of the deceased or the bereaved, it obviously possesses this quality. Secondly, dignity is too often ascribed to standards set by commercial organisations. Consequently, using this argument, the more you spend, the more dignity you can obtain. This is evident in funerals, where the use of a Rolls Royce hearse is perceived to possess a higher level of dignity than, say, a Ford hearse. It is important not to allow such sentiments to deny any individual the right to arrange a funeral without commercial involvement. Funerals arranged by the bereaved contain a far higher personal input, which evokes more emotion and often celebrates the life of the deceased in a more moving and individual way.

It is possible that the dominant and traditional role of funeral directors is diminishing, as new approaches are sought. A new type of "green" funeral director is emerging, promoting biodegradable coffins and a more personal approach. Funeral facilitators are also appearing. They are people who will assist the bereaved in organising a funeral for a fee. They may offer a vehicle to carry the coffin and assist in handling the body. Other people, such as nurses, may offer laying-out or body preparation services, to avoid people having to do this themselves. This may be particularly relevant when a person dies at home within a "hospice at home" scheme. These changes are evidence of a return to past times, when various members of the community helped in the completion of a funeral.

Charter Rights

- (a) It is your right to organise a funeral without the use of a funeral director.
- (b) It is your right, as executor (or next of kin) to be given the body by a mortuary, hospital, etc, in order to carry out a funeral without a funeral director.
- (c) It is your right to obtain a coffin (minimum bio-degradable type) via your Charter member.
- (d) It is your right to obtain a Personalised or Independent funeral leaflet from your Charter member describing how to arrange a funeral without a funeral director.

Charter targets

- (a) Charter members should ensure that the bereaved are aware of these rights, that Personalised or Independent funerals offer social as well as financial benefits to the community.
- (b) Charter members should increase coffin choice wherever possible. The availability of a standard chipboard coffin is recommended, as well as a biodegradable option. Coffins need not be stocked, provided a reliable source is identified. Where green burial options are offered, a biodegradable coffin should be available.
- (c) Charter members may need to consider introducing a fee for Personalised or independent funerals, to reflect any additional work arising over the absence of a funeral director.
- (d) Charter members should consider whether new funeral options can be offered to the bereaved, which reduces the monopoly control of funeral directors. The following services have been suggested for further consideration taking into account the limitations (ultra vires) imposed on local authorities.

A body collection service without a traditional hearse, followed by cremation and the return or placement of the cremated remains.

Having a hearse (or equivalent estate car) available for hire, to enable people to carry out funerals.

To view a PDF copy of the Charter for the Bereaved, please click [here](#).