

WRS Board

Date: 25th September 2025

Report on Funeral Director Inspections in Worcestershire

Recommendation	<div>That the Board notes the Report.</div>
Background	<div><div>1.1 The Role of Funeral Directors</div><div><p>Funeral directors provide an essential service to bereaved families, ensuring that the deceased are treated with dignity and respect. Their responsibilities include preparing and storing the deceased, organising funeral arrangements, and offering emotional and logistical support to families. Given the sensitive nature of their work, funeral directors must uphold high standards of care and professionalism to maintain public confidence.</p><p>However, unlike other sectors that deal with public welfare, such as healthcare or social care, the funeral industry in England and Wales remains largely unregulated. There is currently no statutory requirement for funeral directors to be licensed, registered, or inspected, meaning that businesses operate with varying levels of oversight. This lack of formal regulation has led to significant variations in standards, with some funeral directors operating to exceptionally high standards while others fall short.</p></div><div><div>1.2 Why Funeral Director Inspections Were Introduced</div><div><p>A key incident that triggered government action was the case involving Legacy Independent Funeral Directors in Hull and East Riding. Investigations into this business uncovered serious failings in the handling and storage of the deceased, resulting in widespread distress among affected families. The scale of the failures at Legacy Funeral Directors led to the arrest of Robert Bush, the 47-year-old owner, who was charged with 64 offences, including preventing lawful burials, fraud related to cremated remains, fraudulent trading concerning funeral plans, and theft from charities. The alleged offences spanned from May 2012 to March 2024.</p><p>During a brief hearing at Hull Crown Court, funeral director Robert Bush, 47, who faces 65 charges in total, did not enter any pleas.</p><p>Judge John Thackray KC adjourned his plea and trial preparation hearing until 15 October 2025 and released him on bail.</p></div></div></div>

Report

This case has led to a national conversation about the lack of regulation in the funeral industry and the need for greater accountability.

In response to these concerns, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) issued the Local Authority Funeral Director Visits Guidance Pack in May 2024. This document provided guidance for local authorities to conduct inspections of funeral directors within their regions. The goal of these inspections was to:

- Assess whether funeral directors were operating to acceptable standards.
- Identify and address areas of concern.
- Support businesses in implementing best practices.
- Provide reassurance to the public that funeral services were being carried out with dignity and professionalism.

1.3 Implementation in Worcestershire

Following the release of the MoJ's guidance, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) on behalf of its partner authorities initiated a proactive inspection programme of funeral directors across the county. This was against the background of Environmental Health Officers having very few regulatory responsibilities or powers in this sector. The programme was proactive and designed as a preventative measure to ensure that Worcestershire's funeral directors were operating to the highest possible standards.

This report details the process of these inspections, the findings, and the actions taken to improve funeral services in Worcestershire.

2. What We Did

Between December 2024 and April 2025, a sample of 15 funeral directors in Worcestershire were inspected, from a total of 40. This included a mix of non-members/members of trade associations, chains and independents to give a broad picture. We covered all districts/boroughs in Worcestershire and followed the framework for inspections set out in the MoJ's guidance, which focussed on:

- The physical condition of funeral premises.
- The facilities used for storing and preparing the deceased.
- The maintenance of documentation and records.
- The training and competency of staff.
- Customer service standards, including pricing transparency.

Rather than being a punitive exercise, these inspections were designed to be constructive and were to advise and support our funeral directors in enhancing service standards and addressing any shortcomings.

3. How We Went About It

To ensure a consistent and thorough approach, the inspection process followed a structured methodology.

3.1 Preparation

Before conducting inspections, WRS:

1. Reviewed the MoJ's guidance document. This allowed us to follow a standardised inspection checklist to ensure all critical areas of funeral service provision were assessed.
2. Developed an inspection strategy to balance fairness and effectiveness while ensuring that findings were accurate and actionable.

3.2 Notification of Funeral Directors

All inspections were announced to ensure that no families were present at the time of our inspections. All funeral directors were also informed that visits were taking place across the UK. This ensured transparency and encouraged cooperation.

3.3 On-Site Inspections

Each inspection involved:

- A thorough examination of the funeral home's facilities, including mortuaries, storage rooms, and public areas.
- Assessment of documentation to ensure the correct handling and identification of the deceased.
- A review of customer service practices, including how pricing information was communicated to families.
- Inspections concluded with a face-to-face discussion with funeral directors, where initial feedback was provided.

3.4 Post-Inspection Reporting

- Following each visit, WRS compiled individual reports outlining:
- Commendations for best practices.
- Identifying areas of concern.
- Recommendations for improvement.
- A timeline for implementing changes (if necessary).

Funeral directors requiring improvements were advised of the actions required.

4. What We Found

4.1 General Findings

The inspections revealed that most funeral directors in Worcestershire are operating to a good standard.

- The majority of the 15 funeral directors inspected demonstrated good compliance with best practice guidelines.
- A very small number of establishments had minor compliance issues, which are being addressed through recommendations for improvement and one referral to The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF); a UK-based trade association that represents 1,000 privately owned, independent funeral homes.

4.2 Common Areas for Improvement

While no significant public health or safety concerns were identified, some recurring areas of concern were noted across a few establishments:

1. Documentation and Record-Keeping

- One funeral home lacked comprehensive records, making it difficult to track individual cases accurately.
- Improved paper records and/or digital tracking systems were recommended to enhance accountability.

2. Facility Maintenance

- A very small number of establishments required minor repairs or upgrades to their mortuary facilities, including one that had a wash hand basin which was not plumbed in, and another with minor structural issues.

3. Transparency in Pricing

- A number of the funeral directors lacked price lists on the front window, making it difficult for families to understand costs upfront.
- Greater pricing transparency was encouraged to align with consumer protection guidelines.

4. CCTV

Our findings revealed a varied approach to CCTV usage across businesses. While some had systems installed both inside and outside their premises, many had none at all, and others had CCTV only on the exterior. The presence of CCTV within mortuary areas emerged as a particularly sensitive and contentious issue. Funeral directors consistently expressed concern over this, highlighting a lack of clear guidance or consensus. This underscores the need for a broader discussion around the potential benefits and drawbacks of CCTV in such sensitive areas – especially in light of the serious issues recently brought to light at Legacy Independent Funeral Directors in Hull and East Riding.

5. Charitable Donations

Approaches to handling charitable donations varied between businesses. Some considered it a key part of their role in supporting bereaved families, viewing it as a duty carried out on their behalf. Others, however, were more reluctant to manage donations

due to perceived risks, including concerns around accountability and transparency. As a result, a small number of businesses chose not to handle charitable donations at all.

5. What We Did with This Information

5.1 Feedback to Funeral Directors

Each funeral director received feedback, including:

- Areas of excellence.
- Specific recommendations for improvement.

5.4 Reporting to the Ministry of Justice

The MoJ have been notified of our findings locally, contributing to national discussions on the future regulation of the funeral industry. Indeed, the matter of regulation of this sector was raised in The Commons during Justice Questions earlier this month.

6. Conclusion and Next Steps

The inspection programme successfully provided a comprehensive overview of the funeral services being provided in Worcestershire. Most businesses demonstrated good standards of care, with those identified as requiring areas for improvement being suitably advised. No formal action has been required.

Moving forward, WRS, if requested, would be happy to engage with government discussions on any potential funeral industry regulations.

Through this proactive inspection programme, WRS has sought to assure members and to strengthen public confidence in funeral services in Worcestershire and ensure that every bereaved family receives the compassionate and professional support they deserve.

We should like to acknowledge and express our sincere thanks to the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) county representative who kindly showed us around his premises in Kidderminster ahead of the inspection programme. This was incredibly helpful in enhancing our understanding of the process and in highlighting the key areas on which to focus during inspections.

CONTACT

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