

For information only. Parts of this correspondence will have changed since its issue.

Dear Funeral Directors/Arrangers,

As the COVID-19 situation worsens in the UK and in particular the London area, we at Putney Vale have made decisions to minimise the risk of infection at our site. Please be assured that we have not taken the following decisions lightly and that this policy is being put in place to help to protect the public, your colleagues and our staff - who are vital in the future delivery and operation of the service.

We have looked at the guidance issued today by both the British Funeral Sector and the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities. We have also considered staff responses to developing strategies.

It will not be a surprise if the Government enforce closure of indoor public facilities in the very near future, although I am sure this will not affect funerals (for at least immediate families). We all need to do our part in reducing transmission rates - and with a difficult, often unknown situation in a difficult business, it is not easy to change from the norm – especially so quickly.

It pains me to deliver such a 'no, no, no', or restrictive approach, when we have worked hard to change the culture here to 'if we can – we will', but I am sure you will appreciate that we need to do this and act fast to protect all.

**From Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March...**

1. All funeral services (burials and cremations) are limited to the attendance of no more than 25 people. Please contact your families and sensitively ask that they reduce the number of mourners.
2. The cost of a standard live webcast of a funeral has been reduced to £20 until further notice to assist those who are unable to attend. Obitus has advised that they have the capacity to cope with an increase in webcasts nationally, however due to the nature of the internet (bear in mind that more people are working from home and taking up bandwidth) we and Obitus cannot accept liability if for some reason any aspect of the service is unavailable. Please book webcasts in the normal way at obitus.com.
3. West chapel will close. This will enable us to concentrate on cleaning between services and have West chapel available for if there are any technical issues. We will review this after a short time.
4. Hymn books have been removed from East chapel to reduce the risk of contamination however the words to most hymns will now be sympathetically displayed on the screens. Please see the attached list of hymns. You will need to provide printed sheets or order of services if the required hymns are not on this list.
5. We are withdrawing the option of witness charging of the coffin in the crematory. Unlike most other crematoria we do not have a designated witness room. In the past some families have accepted the coffin leaving the chapel through the doors to the lift as an acceptable mode of committal where technical issues have prevented a witness charge, so this might offer a solution to some families.
6. Until further notice we will not take weekend bookings for burials or cremations. This is to ensure staff are rested. Like everyone there is a heightened level of anxiety and staff welfare is a high priority to maintain their health and business continuity.
7. We are suspending or postponing the burial of cremated remains, scattering of cremated remains and other similar services to reduce public contact with staff and to enable us to

concentrate on providing funeral services. Staff will contact families who have existing bookings.

There may well be further restrictions in due course as the situation is constantly changing.

#### **In summary..**

- Maximum of 25 mourners at burial and cremation services
- Webcasts now £20 to help those who cannot attend
- West chapel closed
- Hymn books replaced with on-screen lyrics
- No witness charging of coffins into a cremator
- No weekend services
- No burial or scattering of ashes

#### **What you can do to support us.**

- Please contact families who already have bookings to sensitively advise them of the changes relevant to their needs. Please explain that we need to do this to ensure continuity of the business over the next few weeks or even months AND to limit transmission of COVID-19 alongside the current government advice.
- Please advise new clients of the limit on the number of mourners at the point of enquiry.
- Please feel free to circulate this to ministers/celebrants that you have contact with.
- For non-urgent enquiries please email [bereavement@enablelc.org](mailto:bereavement@enablelc.org) to help us deal with the increasing number of calls to the office from the public. We will answer these as soon as we can.
- If you have the facility – please scan cremation and burial papers to [bereavement@enablelc.org](mailto:bereavement@enablelc.org). Please bring the original green certs on the day of the funeral.
- Please forward to other branches in your organisation. If you have received this communication from another branch please email [bereavement@enablelc.org](mailto:bereavement@enablelc.org) and ask to be added to our mailing list for future updates.

#### **What you can expect from us.**

- **We will offer all affected families the opportunity to hold a memorial service at a later date – for no charge.**
- On Thursday, 19 March we will contact all funeral companies who have bookings with us. If this is you, please do not call us on Thursday morning – we will call you. If you have not heard from us by 1pm please then call the office. Priority is by date of funeral.
- We will do all that we can to provide a solid reliable and professional service through these hard times.
- We will communicate with you as much as possible through email with information on our website [putneyvale.org](http://putneyvale.org) – Under the 'Putney Vale Crematorium' tab click on 'Resources for Funeral Directors'. We will also put advice for families/visitors on our homepage as soon as possible.
- Be assured that all we do, is in the best interest of the bereaved and you, our stakeholders. Once this is over – its back to normal.
- We will continue to offer that friendly Putney Vale smile – at a distance, of course!

**Timescales.**

To be honest, at the moment we just do not know. We may need to bring in further restrictions based on Central Government or local Resilience Forum advice, but as and when we can, we will at the appropriate time ease restrictions and this will be communicated appropriately.

**Feedback.**

Like you, I am consumed by scenario and resource planning and enquiries on the ever developing situation etc. and I am sure many of you will want to provide some feedback on this so please may I ask, that if you have any questions, you email them to me directly at [ktaylor@enablelc.org](mailto:ktaylor@enablelc.org) and I will provide answers to questions in a further update to all.

Thank you for your support. Please stay well and safe. We will get through this by supporting each other in this important and empathetic service and community.

Yours sincerely

Kelvin.