



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Simon Clarke MP
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**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government**

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17 April 2020

Dear Leader,

I am writing to thank you for all the work you are doing to support your communities during the coronavirus pandemic. It is a difficult time for us all and I do not underestimate the important work you are doing to keep the country moving.

Losing a loved one is difficult and painful at any time, but during this pandemic it is even more so. Families should have the opportunity to pay their final respects to those they love, and it is important that people can be laid to rest with dignity and that their final wishes are respected.

Funerals are an important part of the grieving process for the bereaved to allow families and loved ones to say goodbye and respect the wishes, religion and beliefs of the deceased. At this time, it is important to strike a careful balance between enabling families and mourners to witness the funeral, and ensuring the health and safety of mourners and crematorium and funeral staff. We understand there are difficult decisions which need to be made, which may make funeral services look and feel different to normal, and I welcome the PHE *Guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic* being published on 18 April. By working in partnership with the bereaved and local partners, including faith groups where relevant, you can identify ways to deliver services in a safe, practical and meaningful way, allowing the bereaved to mourn their loved ones while maintaining the safety of staff.

It is important that mourners still have the choice to attend the funeral of their loved ones. There will be instances where this will be a very small group, smaller than the bereaved may have wanted. But at this time, it is a necessary precaution to ensure workforce and mourners are kept safe from infection risk. Mourners should still be provided with the opportunity to attend a funeral as close family and members of the household of the deceased. If the deceased has neither of these in attendance, it may be possible for friends to attend. I also urge you to consider innovative ways of making the funeral accessible to mourners who cannot physically attend.

This is an incredibly difficult time not only for family and friends of the deceased, but also funeral and mortuary service providers. It is an incredibly pressing time and it is important that people do not delay funerals to ensure organisations managing funerals are able to cope with the increased number of deaths. We understand how difficult this will be for the families and friends of lost loved ones. However the current guidance will be in place for the foreseeable future for public safety reasons and where there are delays it could compromise our resilience.

Today, the Government has also published additional guidance on Schedule 28 of the Coronavirus Act. This sets out additional powers that can be delegated to councils, allowing them to step in if the system becomes overwhelmed. It sets out how and when these powers may be activated, and how they should be used by local authorities. The guidance also sets out how

national and local authorities should have due regard to the deceased's wishes, religion or beliefs in any decisions made using these powers – we know this is a hugely sensitive and important issue for many people and communities across the country. These powers however should only be used in exceptional circumstances, as a last resort when all other efforts have been exhausted, and I truly hope we never have to activate these powers.

Thank you once again for the work you are doing to help ensure local systems are as resilient as possible and I ask that you continue to work closely with us.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

SIMON CLARKE MP