

CPG for Funerals and Bereavement

16 June 2020

Via Video Conference

Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

Mark Isherwood MS (Chair)	James Tovey (SAIF Charter)	David Beamer (Secretary)
Darren Millar MS	Terry Tennens (SAIF)	Ahmed Alsisi (White Rose /
Janette Bourne (Cruse)	Patrick McGlinchey (Golden	Acceptance)
Kate Edwards (NAFD)	Charter)	Emma Kneebone (2 Wish Upon A
Jake Smith (Marie Curie)	Philip Blatchly (NAFD)	Star)
Jon Levett (NAFD)	Jean Letton (BASW)	Gemma O'Driscoll (Past President,
		SAIF)

Item 1: Apologies

Russell George MS	Gordon Swan (Golden Charter)	Wendy Hobbs (Dreams & Wishes)
Janet Finch-Saunders MS	Martin Birch (Cardiff City	Sarah Hughes (Maggies Centre)
Paul Davies MS	Council)	Lorraine Barrett (Humanist
Neil Hamilton MS	Tony Curtis (Dreams & Wishes)	Celebrant)
Kim Bird (About the Funeral)	Nigel Lymn Rose (NAFD)	Morgan Harris (NAFD)

Item 2: Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Item 3: Update

The Secretary circulated response letters from the following:

- John Glen MP (HM Treasury) – regarding pre-paid funeral plans
- Baroness Stedman-Scott (DWP) – regarding social fund funeral payment processing times
- Martin Coleman (CMA) – regarding the funerals market investigation

Patrick McGlinchey thanked the Chair for the correspondence with HM Treasury regarding pre-paid funeral plans and stated that he would contact the Group with any follow-up to the letter.

Jean Letton welcomed the letter from Baroness Stedman-Scott and the importance of the rise in the capped element of the funeral expense payment from £700 to £1,000 on 8 April. However, Ms Letton stated that the capped element needed to be index-linked to inflation.

Item 4: COVID-19

Modelling of a Second Peak and the impact on Wales (Europe Economics research)

Jon Levett presented the findings of research undertaken by Europe Economics that was commissioned by the NAFD. Mr Levett presented a slide that showed the impact of a second peak in Wales depending on how the lockdown was lifted. Mr Levett said that the modelling was commissioned due to a lack of data being made available by government. The NAFD has made the research publicly available at the following website address:

<https://nafdcovid19.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-Future-Path-Modelling-Update-27.05-sent.pdf>

A video presentation of the modelling could also be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3s_Ax-0rQkg&feature=youtu.be

Ahmed Alsi stated concerns about how COVID-19 was perceived and its impact on BAME communities in Wales.

Impact of COVID-19 on the funerals sector / revised timetable of the CMA Funerals Market Investigation

Jon Levett discussed the recent revision of the CMA Funerals Market Investigation timetable and the impact that COVID-19 was having on funeral directors and their ability to respond to CMA output. He also highlighted the changes that had occurred to funerals due to COVID-19 and the uncertainty that its impact will have on the sector both on businesses and the preferences of bereaved people after the pandemic has ended. As a result, the pre-pandemic data being used by the CMA to inform their decisions now needed to be revised.

Terry Tennens, on behalf of SAIF, endorsed the concerns of the NAFD and discussed the immense pressures faced by funeral directors due to the pandemic and how the CMA timetable was now fixed due to legislation despite the fact that the UK had been badly impacted by an ongoing global pandemic.

It was agreed that the Chair would write to BEIS highlighting the Group's concerns.

Bereavement Support for the BAME Community

Ahmed Alsi raised concerns about the lack of bereavement support for the BAME community. This was not just for bereaved people due to COVID-19 but also for other non COVID-19 deaths that occurred in Wales. He highlighted long waiting lists for support and the need for broader training of counsellors to ensure that they were able to support a wide cross section of different faiths and cultures who experienced bereavement.

Janette Bourne outlined the work of Cruse in Wales and the diverse set of volunteers available to provide bereavement support. Ms Bourne encouraged bereaved people needing support to contact Cruse where there is support for BAME communities available. Ahmed Alsi stated that he would be happy to assist in getting more BAME volunteers recruited to provide support. It

was agreed that Mr Alsisi would contact Janette Bourne and Emma Kneebone after the meeting and the Secretary would provide contact details.

Service provider discrimination to BAME / faith funerals

Ahmed Alsisi stated that there continued to be discrimination against particular BAME communities from a number of service providers. He reported that families attending funerals were upset by comments made by cemetery staff. There were also examples of inappropriate behaviour including walking on Muslim graves and smoking during funerals.

Mark Isherwood MS stated that he was very concerned about such discrimination and the conduct of cemetery staff that had been reported. A discussion was held on where such discrimination was being experienced and it appeared to be in the Cardiff area. The Chair stated that we would write to Cardiff Council, Jane Hutt MS (the Deputy Minister) and the Wales Race Forum.

Janette Bourne highlighted the vital importance of training to understand cultural and religious differences and discussed the role of bereavement officers in hospitals. A wider discussion was held about the need for this training in coroners' offices and in acute hospital settings.

Support for Families in Financial Hardship / Funeral Crisis Loan proposal

The Chair stated that he had signed a letter supporting the introduction of a funeral crisis loan. Jon Levett thanked the Chair for his support and updated the Group on the need for additional financial support due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A general discussion was then held on the impact of COVID-19 on funerals. Philip Blatchly outlined his experiences regarding families being able to visit graves and the implications of social distancing at 2m. Ahmed Alsisi also discussed the challenges for families due to restrictions in the number of funeral attendees.

Item 5: AOB

The Group was informed about the sad passing of Mohammad Asghar (Oscar) MS who sat next to the Chair in the Senedd and Group members expressed their condolences.

Item 6: Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 10 November 2020 at 6pm. Depending on COVID-19 developments, the meeting may be held again by video conference.