

Cross Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement

Thursday 20 January 2022

Draft Minutes

In attendance

- Mark Isherwood MS (chair)
- Deborah Smith, Wordsmith Communication (Secretary)
- Jon Levett, NAFD
- Rachel Bradburne, NAFD
- Gordon Swann, Golden Charter
- Philip Blatchly, PR Blatchly & Son
- Martin Birch, Cardiff City Council
- Lewis Clark, Ty Hafan
- Gill Tanner, St David's Hospice
- Tracy Jones, Ty Hafan
- Mark Jones, Cardiff and the Vale UHB
- Altaf Hussain MS
- Carol Humphreys, CFF
- Kate Edwards, NAFD Tutor and President
- Janette Bourne, Cruse Wales
- Kim Bird, About the Funeral
- Emma Kneebone, 2 Wish Upon A Star
- Gemma O'Driscoll, O'Driscoll & Daughters
- Bethan Edwards, Marie Curie
- Terry Tennens, SAIF
- Cllr Ryland Doyle, National Assembly for Wales
- Sam Swash, office of Carolyn Thomas MS
- Gethin Rhys, Churches together in Wales

Meeting location

Virtual (via Zoom)

Welcome

Mark Isherwood welcomed attendees to the first meeting of 2022 – and extended an especially warm welcome to some new attendees to the Group:

- Gill Tanner, St David's Hospice
- Bethan Edwards and Lowri Griffiths, Marie Curie
- Tracy Jones and Lewis Clark, Ty Hafan

The CPG also welcomed Mark Jones, Tracy's husband, who attended the meeting in a personal capacity to assist his new role working on mental health services for older people for Cardiff and the Vale UHB.

Apologies

After welcoming attendees to the meeting, Chair Mark Isherwood MS noted apologies had been received from:

- Stephen Tom, Phillip Tom & Sons
- Delyth Jewell MS
- Lynda Wallis Hawkins, Chair of Welsh Senate of Older People
- Jane Dodds MS
- James Tovey, Tovey Bros

Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 23 September were circulated prior to the meeting

Approval of the minutes was proposed by Janette Bourne and seconded by Jon Levett. They were approved by the members with a show of hands.

Matters arising

Mark Isherwood a couple of matters arising including the importance of future consideration of sustainability issues by the Group, following the previous meeting's presentation by Jon Cross of the Environmental Stewardship Group. Deborah Smith was asked to circulate a suggested list of potential future speakers.

He also reported back to the group on a meeting of the All Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement in Westminster, which is chaired by Sir John Hayes. He highlighted issues upon which they are focused including:

- The establishment of a cross departmental working group to better connect discussions on funerals and bereavement issues within government.
- Recognition of the sector as Category 2 Responders within the Civil Contingencies Act
- A re-use of graves campaign

The meeting also included a discussion with the then newly appointed Minister for Bereavement, Gillian Keegan MP. Although she has an extremely diverse agenda and portfolio, she emphasized that improving support for bereaved families was high on her agenda and it was good that MPs were now more involved with the sector, a consequence of the pandemic.

In the ensuing discussion, Mark reported it was commented that there was a risk that the focus would shift away from death and bereavement as the threat of the pandemic recedes and that there was need for a continued focus and sustainable funding model to support bereavement charities and a cross government approach to improve experiences for the bereaved.

Mohamed Omer, a Muslim funeral director and chair of the Muslim Burial Council, raised a concern about ensuring Government support for different faith groups.

Mark highlighted the issue that we have previously discussed as a Cross Party Group, relating to a lack of accessible bereavement support communication - which can create a barrier to ethnic minority or faith communities seeking and/or finding support which is sensitive to their religious or community needs. The Minister agreed that funeral and bereavement care must be inclusive.

The meeting also considered the idea of a ministerial roundtable on funerals, which would look at individual issues and involve the relevant Government department or policy team. For example, a post pandemic roundtable - which could be used to influence changes and highlight lessons learnt from the pandemic. Mark sought to ensure the CPG is well represented in, when it takes place.

The other presentation was from chair of the Independent Funeral Standards Organisation, the Rt Hon. David Heath, who introduced IFSO - noting that it was created in response to the CMA report on the regulation of the funeral sector.

Mark noted that we should invite IFSO to present to a future meeting of this Group to better understand their role and how they will operate. Deborah Smith agreed to make this invitation.

Speaker: Dr Emily Harrop, Cardiff University

Dr Harrop, a researcher at Cardiff University working in palliative care, with a background in the social sciences, provided an update to the meeting on the joint project between Cardiff and Bristol Universities to explore bereavement experiences during COVID-19.

Questions were asked about the proportion of respondents from Wales and whether the research would provide good evidence to be presented to the UK Bereavement on Bereavement Services. As a result of the discussion, a link to the UK Commission was provided to attendees in the meeting chat and it is replicated here: [UK Commission on Bereavement \(bereavementcommission.org.uk\)](https://bereavementcommission.org.uk)

Discussion: National Bereavement Framework for Wales and £1m Bereavement Support Fund - Janette Bourne (Cruse Wales)

At a previous CPG meeting, the importance of having a discussion about the at a future CPG meeting was noted.

Janette Bourne from Cruse Wales provided an update on the National Bereavement Framework for Wales as a member of the steering group, chaired by Dr Idris Baker (palliative care specialist) and with support from Gareth Hewitt (Head of Older People's Health and Chronic Conditions at Welsh Government).

She outlined the framework which had been published at the end of October and which seeks to support those commissioning or providing bereavement services and highlighted the creation of a £1m fund to support organisations delivering bereavement support projects across Wales. She noted that decisions were expected imminently and there has been a significant number of applications, some of whom are members of the CPG.

She also said the increased levels of investment and activity in bereavement services, by both the Welsh and UK Governments was encouraging to see.

Altaf Hussain MS asked whether faith groups were involved on the steering group. Janette responded that they were and it is clear that some communities are struggling to access bereavement support – and when they did, it was not necessarily appropriate to the ways they grieve as a community. There was also a discussion about access for disabled groups and the group was reassured that the standard for the delivery of bereavement services, but the chosen organisations, will include ensuring they are accessible.

Emma Kneebone highlighted that, just before Christmas, the 2Wish Upon A Star team had visited the Senedd to urge the Welsh Government to provide support to ensure families who unexpectedly lose a child or young adult would get the support they require immediately after the death.

Update: Death registration - protecting the easements introduced in the Coronavirus Act

Rachel Bradburne of the NAFD provided an update on the need to protect beneficial improvements to death registration in England and Wales made possible by the Coronavirus Act.

She noted that registering a death has traditionally been a paper-driven process and was often hampered by delays in the system, serving only to increase the gap between death and the funeral and add to the distress of the bereaved family. The easements allowed for the digital submission of documents and telephone registration -among other steps and these were extremely well received.

Given that the easements will end when the Coronavirus Act is rescinded, Mark Isherwood reminded attendees that he had written, on behalf of the Group, to the Home Office to seek assurances of steps

they would take to preserve the benefits they have brought to bereaved people. He had, at the time, received assurances of the Government's positive intentions in this area.

However, Rachel explained that, since then, while the Government had made its desire to retain the beneficial easements clear, a government-backed Private Members Bill designed to modernise the process and protect some of the easements had been talked out in parliament during its Second Reading in November 2021. It was likely therefore that some of the benefits may be lost – until the Government could find a mechanism to bring them before Parliament once more.

Martin Birch echoed Rachel's disappointment with the lack of progress from a local authority perspective, noting that a return to registration having to be done in person when the Act sunsets will prolong the process for bereaved people.

Update: FCA regulation of funeral plans - implications for consumers of authorisation issues

Along with Gordon Swan, Rachel Bradburne also provided an update on the forthcoming regulation of funeral plans by the Financial Conduct Authority highlighting the potential issues for consumers in Wales of funeral plan providers (and funeral firms as intermediaries) not being authorised in time to continue selling funeral plans when regulation comes in on 29 July 2022.

In terms of funeral directors being authorised to act as intermediaries, Gordon explained that Golden Charter had a large number of independent funeral firms to deal with and there was a significant pressure on everyone to get through the process in time as only around 25% percent of the firms were actively engaged in the process. He noted that the FCA has no experience of dealing with funerals and perhaps had not fully understood the sheer number of firms that would need to go through the process. FCA is struggling to meet their own deadlines. He agreed that there would be a significant impact on consumers if firms were not authorised in time.

Terry Tennens supported Gordon and Rachel's comments and highlighted the scale of the task for funeral firms to meet the timetable the FCA has set for itself. He raised a concern about the potential for unfair competition between those able and unable to complete the process in time.

Any Other Business

After discussion, the group resolved to continue to meet three times a way and that the next meeting should fall in or around June 2022.