

Cross Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement

Thursday 9 June 2022

Draft Minutes

Attendees

- Mark Isherwood MS (chair)
- Deborah Smith, Wordsmith Communication (Secretary)
- Altaf Hussain MS
- Martin Birch, Cardiff City Council
- Philip Blatchly, PR Blatchly
- Stephen Tom, Phillip Tom & Sons
- Terry Tennens, SAIF
- Jon Levett, NAFD
- Lorraine Barratt, Humanists Wales
- Janette Bourne, Cruse Wales
- Gethin Rhys, Churches Together in Wales
- Carol Humphreys, Care for the Family
- Rachel Bradburne, NAFD
- Kim Bird
- Cllr Ryland Doyle, Swansea
- Alex Hughes-Howells (Office of Altaf Hussain MS)

Apologies

- Llyr Gruffydd MS
- Jane Dodds MS
- Lewis Clark, Ty Hafan
- Rhys Price, Gwilym Price
- Jane Dodds MS
- Kate Edwards, NAFD tutor
- James Tovey, Tovey Brothers
- David Beamer, Brevia Consulting

Approval of Minutes

Draft minutes of the previous meeting were provided ahead of the meeting.

There were no amendments. Acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Jon Levett and seconded by Philip Blatchly and voted through with no objections or abstentions.

Matters Arising

There were two matters arising. Firstly, circulation of a suggested list of potential future speakers for CPG meetings, which was emailed prior to the meeting and additional requests were made for a presentation by the Scottish Government on licensing of FDs, an update from the CMA/Ministry of Justice and Terry Tennens requested an opportunity to present the work SAIF is doing to reshape its standards monitoring/inspections work.

The second matter arising was to invite the Independent Funeral Standards Organisation IFSO to present to a future meeting of the CPG – which they did at the meeting.

Annual General Meeting, including election of Officers

Mark Isherwood advised the group that CPGs are required to hold an Annual General Meeting within 12 months of the previous AGM.

He invited Deborah to oversee the election of a Chair for this Group for the forthcoming year and indicated that he would stand for re-election. Having asked if there were any other candidates, which there were none, Deborah asked for a proposer and seconder.

Terry Tennens acted as proposer and Lorraine Barratt as seconder. The vote was carried through with no objections or abstentions and Mark was duly re-elected as chair for the coming year.

As Chair, Mark Isherwood oversaw the election of a Secretary for the Group for the forthcoming year. Deborah Smith indicated that she wishes to continue in the post.

Having asked if there were any other candidates, which there were none, Mark asked for a proposer and seconder.

Jon Levett acted as proposer and Lorraine Barratt as seconder. The vote was carried through with no objections or abstentions and Deborah was duly re-elected as chair for the coming year.

Mark noted that the Group was required to publish an Annual Report and Financial Statement within six weeks of this meeting summarising activity over the past year and that a draft would be emailed to you after this meeting. He asked for any comments on it to be sent to Deborah, to help inform the final version.

Speaker: John Withington, Director of Regulation, the Independent Funeral Standards Organisation

Mark welcomed John Withington, Director of Regulation, the Independent Funeral Standards Organisation to the meeting.

The Independent Funeral Standards Organisation was established in January of this year to provide an independent standards monitoring service for funeral firms in the UK. It subsumed all of the inspections and standards work of the National Association of Funeral Directors, but is also open to non-members of the NAFD too.

John Withington shared the early work of IFSO to date and discussed his view on the importance of independent, risk-based regulation of funeral firms to provide quality assurance to consumers. He also shared that IFSO would be opening up to non-NAFD members from June as it seeks to provide an independent quality standards monitoring service that is accessible to all firms in the funeral sector.

Janette Bourne asked if IFSO had considered standards of care of bereaved people as part of IFSO's monitoring and Martin Birch asked if environmental standards formed part of the monitoring criteria. John Withington explained that at present the only requirements were to meet those of other regulators, but they would be looking into these issues in due course.

Mark Isherwood MS said he recalled the problem for Government previously with voluntary regulation [in other markets] had not been with cowboys [not] signing up, because they did, but that they then carried on as before as there was no enforcement. Therefore statutory regulation had been needed.

John Withington said that he was confident in IFSO's processes, but the acid test would be how many non-NAFD or SAIF member firms would choose to sign up to scrutiny.

Discussion: re-use of graves

Mark Isherwood MS introduced the discussion with a summary of this issue, which has come to the table several times in recent months.

He advised that he had attended meetings of the All Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement in Westminster which is campaigning to address the shortage of grave space in many parts of England and Wales.

He provided the following background to the meeting.

Some locations, including in Wales, have now completely run out of new space, requiring residents to travel further afield to access a burial service. Many others only have a limited supply of new graves left.

The 1857 Burial Act makes it an offense to disturb human remains unless proper consent is obtained. Although updated, this legislation is still in place and at present requires consent to move any remains in Wales which is provided by a Home Office licence.

The result is a confusing system with regulations pertaining to the reuse of graves differing even within burial grounds themselves. There are also important faith issues to consider.

Outside of London, in England and Wales, no provision is given for removal of remains to create additional burial space, however the problem of cemetery space is not exclusive to London and the above legislation only applies to publicly owned burial grounds.

Mark noted that there is no formal policy position held by the Welsh Government and, having now met with the All Party Group's secretariat specifically on this in April, we are exploring perspectives in Wales, so that we might encourage development of a policy position by the Welsh Government.

Deborah Smith updated the group on the survey that had recently been sent out to gather the views of members of the Group – and also the wider funerals, faith and bereavement communities. She urged those yet to take part to do so, in order that a comprehensive draft position could be prepared for consultation.

Martin Birch highlighted that a consideration the CPG should include in their work is how long should it be between the most recent use of the grave before reclamation could be considered. He explained that the land the grave was in was not sold, only the right to use it for a period of time (up to 100 years).

It was also asked what powers the Welsh Government has on this issue and Deborah Smith was asked to find out and report back.

Deborah Smith was also asked to make contact with the Archbishop of Wales to seek his input. She committed to doing so and reported that the Church in Wales was also contributing to the survey in other ways too.

Altaf Hussain discussed some of the issues which made support for re-use of graves challenging, but not impossible, for Muslims and asked that the Muslim Burial Council was also approached for comment as well as the existing channels being explored through the Muslim Council for Wales.

Lorraine Barrett, representing Humanists UK, asked that the term faith funerals be expanded to faith and belief funerals, to encompass those who do not practice a religion but hold beliefs which shape their approach to funerals.

Update: Faith and belief considerations for the Welsh Government's Bereavement Framework

Gethyn Rhys, Churches Together in Wales and Altaf Hussain MS, updated the group on a meeting held in May with Abdul Ahmed, from the Muslim Council for Wales, to discuss access to bereavement support by faith and belief communities as part of the Welsh Government's Bereavement Framework, with a particular focus on Muslim communities.

The aim was to make faith and belief more central to the Welsh Government's Bereavement Framework and to ensure both that all communities were able to access bereavement services and that there was a good understanding, from those providing the services, of the particular needs of each community. Gethyn Rhys added that they had also considered the Welsh Government's

strategy on death by suicide as part of their discussions as there was no reference made to faith or belief considerations within that document and it is particularly important in such cases. Altaf Hussain MS stressed the importance of a consistent approach across Wales and good dialogue with faith bodies and organisations.

There is a possible public consultation over the summer and Altaf and Gethin reported that they were pleased that a rethink had been prompted by their intervention.

Janette Bourne noted that meeting the needs of diverse communities and educating organisations providing bereavement services had been a specific requirement for the £1m bereavement funding allocation made recently by the Welsh Government to 22 organisations.

She also asked that the group engage with the diverse communities support organisation Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales, with Diverse Cymru.

Martin Birch explained the approach taken at Cardiff City Council which includes 7-days a week services, same day services and specific Sikh and Hindu scattering areas. He highlighted though that there was a cost associated with providing these services which is likely to represent a challenge for some local authorities, particularly the smaller ones. He felt cross-boundary working and support would be beneficial.

Lorraine Barratt said that there was often an assumption that a funeral would be religious and this was not always the case, and that professionals supporting bereaved families should adapt their ways of working to be respectful of all beliefs and faiths.

Any Other Business.

Rachel Bradburne, Terry Tennens and Gordon Swan provided an update on the imminent introduction of regulation to funeral plan sales and failure of Safe Hands funeral plans. There was particular discussion about the affected customers of Safe Hands and the potential issues for other plan holders or plan provider failure to secure authorisation. The group resolved to write to Treasury Minister John Glen.

Stephen Tom explained that as a funeral director they were being approached by worried Safe Hands plan providers and they were doing all they could to reassure them.

Next meeting date

The next meeting will be in person and will be held in the Autumn.