

Cross Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement/Y Grŵp Trawsbleidiol ar Angladdau a Phrofedigaeth

24 November 2022

Draft minutes

1. Attendance

- Mark Isherwood MS (chair)
- Deborah Smith (Secretary)
- Ryland Doyle (office of Mike Hedges MS)
- Darren Millar MS
- Ahmed Alsis (White Rose Funerals)
- Grainne Connolly (EYST)
- Kathy Riddick, Humanists UK
- Terry Tennens (SAIF)
- Rachel Bradburne (NAFD)
- Carol Humphreys (Care for the Family)
- Stephen Tom (Phillip Tom & Sons)
- Martin Birch (Cardiff City Council)
- Philip Blatchly (PR Blatchly)

2. Introduction

Mark Isherwood began the meeting by welcoming attendees both in the room and online, saying what a pleasure it was to finally be able to meet at the Senedd once again – and to trial a hybrid format that would provide Group members easy access to participate in meetings.

3. Apologies

Apologies were received, prior to the meeting, from:

- Janette Bourne, Cruse Bereavement Care
- Kate Edwards, NAFD tutor
- James Tovey, Tovey Brothers
- Llyr Gruffydd MS
- Kim Bird, independent/consumer representative

No further apologies were recorded during the meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting in June were sent to attendees ahead of the meeting.

There were no comments or changes suggested during the meeting and acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Phillip Blatchly and seconded by Stephen Tom.

5. Matters Arising

There were five matters arising:

- Comments on the Draft Annual Report were requested to be sent to Deborah, to help inform the final version. The Report is now finalised and published on the Senedd website.
- On the re-use of graves discussion, Deborah Smith was asked to find out what powers the Welsh Government has on the topic. This was on the agenda for the meeting and is covered later in these minutes.

- Deborah Smith was also asked to make contact with the Archbishop of Wales to seek his input. This was done and the Archbishop's representative, Chaplain Revd James Tout, was present online for the meeting.
- As part of the re-use of Graves survey we were asked to engage with Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales and Diverse Cymru. This was done; EYST contributed to the survey and have been invited to attend future CPG meetings, with Grainne Connolly in attendance for this meeting. Diverse Cymru has also been contacted but has not contributed to date.
- On funeral planning, the group resolved to write to Treasury Minister John Glen. Unfortunately, Mr Glen was removed from post in July and there were significant further changes to ministerial positions over the Summer, as we all know. Mr Glen has recently been reappointed to the position under Prime Minister Sunak, but this topic has moved on somewhat and so the nature of any letter will now be slightly different. The Group resolved that a letter should still be sent and this was immediately actioned.

6. Findings of the informal survey on the re-use of graves in Wales

Deborah Smith presented a summary of the recent informal survey undertaken by the CPG on the reuse of graves in Wales.

There were 25 responses to the survey, including faith organisations, funeral directors, trade associations, local authorities, a palliative healthcare provider, an EDI outreach group, a bereavement support organisation and a bereaved individual/former supplier to the sector.

90% of responses are informed comments or draft policy, not published policy position and more than half of all respondents say more work is needed before their organisation would be able to arrive at a published policy position.

There is a lack of national guidance on this issue and so local practice is evolving, with responsibility devolved to local authorities in Wales, some of whom are already putting in place a form of grave re-use due to lack of space.

Deborah said that while the survey indicated support from the majority of respondents for the re-use of grave space in Wales, it is a complex subject for faith, cultural, legal and emotional reasons and sensitivity (even in communicating and exploring the issue) is important. This was emphasized by Ahmed Alsisi, who explained some of the faith considerations that would be important to explore as part of taking this issue forward. The Group also explored the concept of a final resting place – and what it means (and has meant) to different communities and beliefs.

Even if the re-use of graves were to be an agreed solution, it was generally agreed that there would be a myriad of issues to consider and having a robust legal, ethical and practical framework would be critical. Importantly, not all respondents to the survey believed that it is the answer to burial space shortage.

All respondents believe that comprehensive public consultation/communication must be at the heart of the development of any future re-use of graves policy and this was echoed in the meeting. Martin Birch noted that it is important that there is a clear definition of what grave re-use means and that this is clearly understood by the public.

Darren Millar MS noted that some graves contain family members of different generations, making it hard to arrive at a straightforward guideline as to when a grave would become suitable for re-use.

He also questioned what would happen to the graves of notable individuals, whether they would be excluded as their graves form part of Wales's heritage and national story.

Legal and regulatory issues were also discussed, with questions around what levels of power the Welsh Government has on this matter.

Kathy Riddick suggested that, in the future, noting down people's views and intentions regarding their grave could form part of end of life conversations – perhaps in a similar approach to the approach taken to organ donation. Rachel Bradburne noted the forthcoming Law Commission review of burial and cremation law, which the Group may wish to feed into on this and other relevant topics.

Following the presentation, there was a discussion covering next steps, including who else should see this presentation, what engagement with the Welsh Government on this issue should now take place and what further work should (and could) the CPG engage in, on this issue.

ACTION: It was resolved that the Group would write to the appropriate contacts in the Welsh Government to understand their views on the subject.

ACTION: Deborah Smith will draft a position statement for the CPG on this issue and circulate for comments.

ACTION: Martin Birch also offered support in taking this issue forward and Deborah Smith will pick this up with Martin directly.

7. Bereavement Pathway following the loss of a child

Emma Kneebone of 2Wish provided the Group with an update on the Bereavement Pathway following the loss of a child.

She reminded the Group of the work done by 2Wish CEO Rhian Mannings to highlight the issue of support for bereaved parents through a petition, which was debated in the Senedd and backed by the Welsh Government before being included in the Draft Bereavement Framework and included in one of the framework steering groups, which had led to the development of a specific pathway following the loss of a child. The next one will focus on baby loss.

Mark Isherwood asked if the CPG could provide any support. Emma Kneebone thanked Mark and asked if the help could be stored up for future use as the pathway is being rolled out to Health Boards and this would prove a point of reflection, after which assistance might be valuable. Emma will bring an update to the next meeting.

Before having to leave the meeting, Emma also asked for advice on the issue of financial support for grave digging charges levied on a child's funeral taking place on privately owned land. Martin Birch suggested that it was still worth putting in a Child Funeral Fund claim, even though it wasn't taking place on council land.

8. Fuller Inquiry

Terry Tennens and Rachel Bradburne updated the Group on the Fuller Inquiry into care of bereaved people, following the crimes of hospital electrician David Fuller.

In 2023, the Inquiry will expand its scope from the Kent hospital where the crimes were committed to include all settings where deceased people are cared for – including funeral homes and other community settings.

They noted that this second phase will undoubtedly be a topic the CPG would wish to pay close attention to in the year ahead. While the scope of the Inquiry is limited to England, the recommendations that may result from it could very well pave the way for additional oversight of the sector by Government, potentially involving the Human Tissue Authority, which would include Wales in its scope, and could include recommendations such as increased security in/access control to mortuaries, training, how the dignity of deceased people is preserved, the use of CCTV and how the connections between regulated and unregulated spaces are managed.

ACTION: Rachel Bradburne noted that the Group may wish to provide evidence to the Inquiry at the appropriate stage and Deborah Smith will keep a watching brief for this opportunity.

ACTION: Mark Isherwood suggested that there may be benefit in a joint meeting with the CPG on Hospices and Palliative Care to discuss this subject. Deborah Smith will take this forward.

9. Launch of the Bereavement Commission report: 'Bereavement is Everyone's Business'

Deborah Smith updated the Group on launch of the Bereavement Commission's report 'Bereavement is Everyone's Business' which was held on Tuesday 11 October both online and in London.

The Commission surveyed more than 1,000 adults bereaved in the last five years. It also consulted with 99 bereaved children and young people, surveyed 130 organisations and professionals, received evidence from 33 experts, and engaged with 31,000 school and college students in classrooms.

The main headline in the report is that people are not getting the right support at the time they need it the most, with potentially serious consequences for their health, education and employment.

- It is estimated that 750,000 more people were bereaved than usual between March 2020 and December 2021.
- This is based on official figures which show that around 150,000 more deaths than usual took place in the UK during this period, compared with the average for the previous five years.
- It reached the 750,000 estimate by using a measure of five people being bereaved on average by a person's death.
- 187,000 people were estimated to have been bereaved in Wales in 2020, compared with 166,000 in 2019, pre-pandemic

The Commission also found that:

- 40% of adult respondents who wanted formal bereavement support did not get any, while 37% said they did not know how to access such help.
- Half of bereaved children responding said they did not get the support they needed from their schools and colleges.
- Particular attention needs to be devoted to improving support for black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

During the launch, the Commission said it would like to see a cross-department strategy for bereavement from UK government, campaigns to increase understanding and normalise conversations about death, dying and bereavement, legislation to require employers and education settings to have a bereavement policy and bereavement-related financial support to be increased in line with rising costs and extended to groups which currently miss out.

The Commission also said it is working with the National Institute of Health Research to investigate the barriers preventing ethnic minority groups from accessing these services.

Specifically for Wales, the Commission said the Welsh Government must implement its National Framework for the Delivery of Bereavement Care using a cross-departmental approach, to encompass all aspects of public policy affecting bereaved people and involve the voices of bereaved people. It would also like to see the Welsh Government invest 79p annually per person in the population for transforming bereavement services over the next 5 years, with a particular focus on better supporting Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities, and others who are poorly served.

The Commission said it would also like to see the Welsh Government commission further research to better understand the support needs of people affected by bereavement with a particular focus on understanding how services can be improved for Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities and other groups whose grief is disenfranchised. The voice of people affected by bereavement must be central to this research.

ACTION: It was resolved that the Group would write to the Welsh Government acknowledging their work to date on the National Bereavement Framework, asking for comment on the requests from the Commission for additional focus in this area and noting areas of non-alignment.

10. The Quality Statement for palliative and end of life care

Mark Isherwood MS noted that the Quality Statement for Palliative and End of life care for Wales, which describes what good quality palliative and end of life care services should look like, was published on 7 October 2022 and it was circulated to Group members shortly afterwards.

The statement aims to ensure that those who need palliative care receive treatment that is safe, timely, effective, efficient, person-centre, and equitable.

The Welsh Government has committed to implementation of the statement through health board enabling plans, as well as collaborations with other networks and programmes – for example it is also linked to the Wales Bereavement Framework and the recent UK Commission on Bereavement recommendations for Wales that we discussed earlier.

ACTION: There were no immediate comments from the Group but it was resolved to put it on the agenda for the next meeting, along with further discussions on the Bereavement Commission's recommendations for Wales, to enable other members of the Group with a bereavement focus to join the discussions.

11. AOB

There were no matters raised during any other business.

12. Next meeting

To maintain the three meetings a year pattern, the next meeting will be in Spring 2023, date to be confirmed. It was agreed that the hybrid format had worked, although those in the room were very distant from the camera.

ACTION: The Group resolved to continue to blend meetings in person with hybrid and fully virtual meetings and Deborah Smith would also explore other times of day that the meeting could be held, such as during the early evening, to see if these would make it easier for people to attend.

DS/December 2022