



**Cross Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement
Inaugural Annual General Meeting - Monday 5 July 2021
Draft Minutes**

In attendance

- Mark Isherwood MS
- Jane Dodds MS
- Paul Allcock, Allcock Family Funerals/SAIF
- Gemma O'Driscoll, O'Driscoll & Daughters/SAIF
- Kate Edwards, NAFD/tutor
- Jon Levett, NAFD
- Rachel Bradburne, NAFD
- Georgia Henney, Golden Charter
- Philip Blatchly, PR Blatchly & Son
- Lynda Wallis, Chair Welsh Senate of Older People
- Martin Birch, Cardiff City Council
- Deborah Smith, Wordsmith Communication

Welcome

In his capacity as the previous Chair of the Cross Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement, Mark Isherwood welcomed attendees to the meeting which was held to reform the Group and elect new office holders.

Apologies

Apologies were received from:

- Llyr Gruffydd MS
- Mike Hedges MS
- Russell George MS
- Darren Millar MS
- Kim Bird, About The Funeral
- James Tovey, Tovey Brothers
- Gordon Swan, Golden Charter
- Terry Tennens, SAIF
- Stephen Tom, Phillip Tom & Sons

Approval of Minutes – 12 March meeting

Draft minutes of the previous meeting on 12 March 2021 were provided ahead of the meeting.

Attendees reviewed the matters arising, which were a response received from Home Office Minister Kevin Foster MP in respect of maintaining beneficial death registration easements permitted by the Coronavirus Act. In response, the Minister said that although a Private Member's Bill that was before Parliament on the subject was likely to fall (which it subsequently did), the UK Government would continue to consider ways in which it can modernise the service of death registration, within the confines of current primary legislation, whilst also seeking suitable legislative opportunities to bring forward reforms.

The minutes were proposed for acceptance by Jon Levett and seconded by Paul Blatchly.

Election of office holders

Interim Secretary Deborah Smith introduced the election of Chair of the Group and the intention of Mark Isherwood MS to stand for election. After ensuring there were no other candidates, Mark was proposed by Jane Dodds MS and seconded by Kate Edwards and was duly elected as chair.

As Chair, Mark Isherwood then introduced the election of Secretary to the Group and the intention of Deborah Smith of Wordsmith Communication to stand for election. There were no other candidates for the post and so Deborah was proposed by Jon Levett and seconded by Philip Blatchly and was duly elected as Secretary.

COVID-19 update

Mark Isherwood reported that, since the last meeting, the planned lifting of final restrictions, set at various dates in the four home nations, had been postponed until later in July and, in Wales, the number of people attending a funeral remains limited by venue size and a risk assessment – and by invitation only.

Jon Levett, Chief Executive of the National Association of Funeral Directors, was asked to provide an overview of the latest developments nationally. In his response, Jon noted that the ‘good sense of the Welsh model’ of funeral restrictions had prevailed in England – with funeral restrictions moving to a similar model to the one in Wales where numbers are determined by the venue COVID-secure capacity and by invitation from the bereaved family. Ongoing issues relating to staff having to self-isolate, causing capacity issues, were also discussed.

Martin Birch confirmed, however, that at present, the death rate was normal for the time of year, despite the rise in the infection rate.

There was a discussion about care of the deceased practices and whether these would lift as restrictions were eased. Paul Allcock advised that there should be continued adherence to the current HSE/PHE guidance for caring for the deceased during COVID – saying they were ‘sensible and safety conscious’.

CMA Funerals Market Investigation

Mark Isherwood advised the Group that publication of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Funerals Market Investigation Order 2021, which introduces statutory regulation to all funeral directors in the UK, took place in June 2021.

Jon Levett confirmed that the Order is enforced from 16 September, and there are a number of requirements that funeral firms must meet, including putting prices online and in branches and, if the firm has five or more branches, there will also be a requirement to report revenue to the CMA. The Order is extremely prescriptive and there will be significant penalties for non-compliance, however significant areas of ambiguity remain in how to comply with the Order. Paul Allcock, representing SAIF, agreed with this point and said he remained concerned that some funeral firms had a ‘head in the sand’ approach to the Order and its requirements.

The NAFD and SAIF confirmed that they were supporting members with questions or concerns they have over compliance and several webinars, including with the CMA in attendance, were planned for the summer.

Philip Blatchly highlighted that one of the key concerns was awareness of the Order among funeral firms that are neither NAFD nor SAIF members.

FCA regulation of funeral plans

Rachel Bradburne of the NAFD advised the Group that publication of rules and timetable for regulation of funeral plan sales in the UK was expected imminently. From July 2022, the regulation of funeral plan sales will come under the Financial Conduct Authority in 2022.

She also highlighted some potential unintended consequences of the new rules, including how consumers who have a funeral plan with a plan provider that is unsuccessful in securing FCA approval will be protected. Under the new rules they will have to cease trading. What will happen to the plans they have sold? It was noted that there is a potential reputational damage issue for funeral firms in these situations as plans are often sold through funeral firms – or with a named Funeral Director against the plan.

Discussion on work programme for the coming twelve months

Mark Isherwood noted that, in the papers for the meeting, a Legacy Report was attached, which summarised the key themes that this Group has sought to address during the last parliament.

To help inform development of a work programme for this Group, going forward, the Chair asked for contributions from the Group on additional themes and topics that they would like covered in future meetings.

Key issues raised included:

- The cost of developing new crematoria/planning restrictions
- Reuse of graves (Burial Act 1857)
- Environmental stewardship
- Role of the sector in Emergency Planning
- Financial support for bereaved people
- Alternative forms of disposal
- Full/unused graveyards that have been retained by the Church of Wales
- Cultural and religious needs of different faith and belief groups
- CMA recommendations on quality standards, including inspection of funeral homes, registration/training of funeral directors
- Continued collaboration with the CPG on Hospices and Palliative Care

AOB

It was noted that there were currently no Welsh language translations of the Competition and Markets Authority funeral market order documents. The Group was advised that this had been noted with the CMA and, if necessary, a letter would be sent to the CMA team from Mark Isherwood, on behalf of the Group.

As Chair of the CPG Mark has been invited to attend the Westminster All Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement in the future and will report back regularly on topics discussed. Deborah Smith advised that an APPG meeting was held in June 2021, which she attended on behalf of the Chair.

Of particular note, the meeting covered the reuse of graves, which has been the subject of discussion in London for some years, given the shortage of burial space and is also to be included in a future Law Commission review of burial and cremation legislation. APPG Chair Sir John Hayes MP (Con, South Holland and The Deepings Commons) had secured an answer to a written question on the topic from

Justice Minister Alex Chalk, who said: “The start date and detail of the Law Commission’s project will be agreed between the Law Commission and this Department and will be announced in due course.

“The reuse of burial space is a sensitive issue and any changes need careful consideration. The Government welcomes information from burial providers about the circumstances in their area.”

After discussion, the Group asked for this to be added to the list of additions to the Legacy Report and to be placed on the agenda for a future CPG meeting.

(Useful background note: [Reuse of graves \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/reuse-of-graves))

Next meeting date

After a discussion on how best to balance meeting frequency and virtual/in person meetings, Deborah Smith noted that the next meeting of the Group will be held in late September/early October 2021.

Appendices:

Cross Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement Legacy Report, Fifth Senedd, July 2021 (updated)