

Cross Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement

Tuesday 11 July 2023

Draft Minutes

1. In attendance

- Mark Isherwood MS (Chair)
- Deborah Smith, Wordsmith Communication (Secretary)
- Darren Millar MS
- Andrew Judd, NAFD
- Philip Blatchly, PR Blatchly
- Rachel Bradburne, NAFD
- Terry Tennens, SAIF
- Ahmed Alsisi, White Rose Funerals
- Kathy Riddick, Humanists UK
- Gethin Rhys, Church in Wales
- Selima Bahadur, EYST
- Rhys Price, Gwilym Price
- Kim Bird

2. Welcome and apologies

Mark Isherwood began the meeting by welcoming attendees to 2023 Annual General Meeting and explained that the meeting would not now also include a discussion with representatives from the Law Commission, regarding their review of burial and cremation law in England and Wales, due to personal circumstances for the chair of the review, which had arisen in the minutes immediately prior to the meeting.

The discussion will be rearranged as a separate, single-issue virtual meeting, for a date in the next couple of months.

It was reported that apologies had been received from:

Llyr Gruffydd MS
Stephen Tom, Philip Tom & Sons
Gordon Swan, The National Association for Funeral Plan Providers
Janette Bourne, Cruse Bereavement Support
Jane Dodds MS
Martin Birch, Cardiff City Council

3. Approval of Minutes

Mark Isherwood noted that the previous meeting was held, virtually, on 27 March 2023 and draft minutes had been supplied with the meeting papers.

Acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Philip Blatchly and seconded by Kathy Riddick.

4. Annual General Meeting

Mark Isherwood advised the group that CPGs are required to hold an Annual General Meeting within 12 months of the previous AGM, but that this meeting fell outside that timeframe due to the challenges in securing a date to also include the Law Commission discussions in a timely manner.

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 had been provided with the meeting papers. He asked for any comments on it to be sent directly to Deborah, to help inform the final version.

Action: CPG members to provide any comments on draft report to Deborah Smith by no later than 29 July 2023.

Mark Isherwood then invited Deborah, as outgoing Secretary, to oversee the election of a Chair for the 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, Darren Millar MS acted as proposer for Mark's re-election, and it was seconded by Phillip Blatchly. Mark was duly re-elected as chair for the coming year.

Darren Millar MS thanked Mark for his work to develop such an effective cross party group. He noted its achievements under Mark's stewardship and emphasised that its work is valued by members of the Senedd and, even when members were unable to attend its meetings, they continue to stay up to date with its work through Mark's communication with them. He also thanked the National Association of Funeral Directors for continuing to provide Secretariat services for the Group through Wordsmith Communication.

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.

Darren Millar MS acted as proposer and Kathy Riddick acted as seconder and Deborah was duly re-elected as secretary for the coming year.

5. Law Commission

Although the Law Commission was not present at the meeting, as planned, Mark Isherwood MS briefed the CPG members on the background to the planned session and current review, saying that the laws pertaining to burial and cremation in England and Wales have been long overdue for a review, as much has changed in respect of how we care for our dead in this country in recent decades. He noted that we now sometimes find ourselves held back from being able to do the right thing by deceased people and bereaved families by laws that do not take account of changes in practical circumstances, potential choices, or consumer preferences that have occurred in the decades since many of these laws came into force.

Action: The Group resolved to reinstate a meeting with the Law Commission as soon as possible.

Andrew Judd noted the work that had been done to create greater cohesion and collaboration between different organisations in the funeral sector, in order to facilitate productive discussions with governments in all four UK nations, and expressed a frustration at the fragmented approach to oversight of the death management sector by government, highlighting that one of the Deceased Management Advisory Group's asks of the Law Commission, in its review, is that it consider a recommendation for a single government department, in both Westminster and at the Senedd, to take lead responsibility for the sector.

Mark Isherwood MS asked Rachel Bradburne for her thoughts, given her involvement in the APPG in Westminster and suggested Deborah Smith investigate a possible joint letter from the APPG in Westminster and CPG in Wales to the UK Government on this subject, as well as direct communication with the relevant minister in the Welsh Government.

Action: Deborah Smith to investigate communication on this topic with both the UK Government and Welsh Government.

6. Matters Arising

Deborah Smith reported on Matters Arising from the meeting held in March 2023.

Following an invitation to Mark Isherwood MS to attend a meeting with the Law Commission in the House of Commons, there was an action to arrange a meeting for the Wales Cross-Party Group. This had been achieved, although will now be re-arranged for a suitable later date.

Regarding the action to research the provision of digital autopsy in Wales and to invite iGene to a future meeting of this Group, Deborah has made an approach to iGene and will invite them to a future meeting.

Ahmed Alsisi noted that there was ongoing discussions regarding this from a faith perspective, leading to a forthcoming meeting with the First Minister's Office Manager and discussion with a senior coroner, and offered to put Deborah Smith in touch with his contacts to connect the different conversations.

Action: Deborah Smith to contact Ahmed Alsisi to discuss further.

There was also an action for Deborah Smith to pursue a discussion with the CPG on Hospices and Palliative Care regarding a joint meeting. This has now been confirmed for 18 October and the arrangements for this meeting will include inviting a minister from the Welsh Government to join the event, to discuss active areas of inquiry for the CPG.

Finally, there are several actions relating to discussions on bereavement matters from the November 2022 and March 2023 meetings. Deborah proposed that the 18 October meeting focused on the topic of bereavement as it is of interest to both CPGs and a draft agenda for this meeting is currently being prepared for Mark Isherwood MS to consider.

7. AOB

Andrew Judd noted his appreciation of the work of a number of statutory bodies in Wales to create platforms for discussion on important bereavement issues, highlighting meetings that both he and Terry Tennens from SAIF were involved in, on an ongoing basis, including the Suicide and Self Harm Steering Group.

Mark Isherwood MS responded that he hoped at a future meeting, representatives from some of those bodies might be in attendance, to allow Andrew to convey his gratitude directly.

Rachel Bradburne noted the launch of the second phase of the Fuller Independent Inquiry into care for deceased people, which had occurred earlier the same day and drew CPG members' attention to a press release that had been circulated by Deborah Smith. She urged members of the Group to share their professional experience of care of the deceased with the Inquiry.

8. Next meeting date

Deborah Smith advised that plans for the joint meeting with the CPG on Hospices and Palliative Care, at the Senedd, on 18 October at 11.30am were now advanced and further information would be provided as soon as possible.

ACTION: Deborah Smith to provide further information of the 18 October meeting as soon as possible.

DS/July 2023

