

CPG for Funerals and Bereavement

15 February 2017

Pierhead Seminar Rooms

Minutes

In Attendance:

Mark Isherwood AM (Chair)	Mark Binnersley (NAFD)	Jean Letton (BASW)
Russell George AM	Kim Bird (About the	David Beamer (Secretary)
Jeremy Field (NAFD)	Funeral)	Will Smith (Secretariat)

Item 1: Apologies

Darren Millar AM	Simon Thomas AM	Janette Bourne (Cruse)
Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM	Paul Davies AM	Philip Blatchly (NAFD)
Janet Finch-Saunders AM	Julie Morgan AM	Martin Birch (Cardiff City Council)
Mandie Lavin (NAFD)	Neil Hamilton AM	Paul Harding (Marie Curie)
Nigel Lymn Rose (NAFD)	Roy Folland (NAFD)	
Lorraine Barrett (Humanist Celebrant)	Carys Moseley (EBCPCW)	

Item 2: Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Item 3: Update

All updates were covered in the agenda items.

Item 4: Death Certification reforms

A discussion was held on the consultation launched by the Welsh Government on 7 November 2016 entitled: "Changes to death certification and the introduction of medical examiners proposed in Wales". The consultation closed on 13 January 2017.

Jean Letton outlined concerns that additional costs on bereaved people resulting from the reforms would have an impact on funeral poverty. Jeremy Field stated that Wales was moving faster than England in progressing the reforms. Issues such as who will collect the Medical Examiners (ME) fee and who would be liable to pay the fee were yet to be resolved.

It was agreed that the Chair would write to Vaughan Gething AM with questions raised by the Group.

Item 5: Social Fund / Funeral Poverty

Jean Letton presented a BASW Cymru paper on Funeral Poverty.

A discussion was held that covered a range of issues including: attitudes towards a public health funeral, TCC campaigning, and the impact of rising local authority fees for burials and cremations.

Jeremy Field outlined the roundtable meetings hosted by Caroline Nokes MP, the DWP Minister, to discuss the social fund and funeral affordability issues. At these meetings, the need for greater transparency was highlighted and a request made for an online eligibility checker to help applicants considering if they would qualify for a Social Fund funeral payment.

Jeremy Field agreed to send to Jean Letton the Social Fund report by the DWP and forward an article on the case of a student nurse who failed to qualify for a social fund payment. Jean Letton stated the social fund form was very difficult to understand and it could well be deterring applications and leading to errors.

A discussion was then held on the role of local authorities. The Chair agreed to send a letter to WLGA on the Groups concerns about the rising cost of local authority burial and cremation fees.

Jeremy Field outlined the case of North East Lincolnshire and a discussion was held on state aid rules. Mark Isherwood stated that he would welcome further information on this.

The Chair also agreed to write to Caroline Nokes MP on the Groups concerns.

Item 6: Bereavement Benefits

The Group discussed the introduction of the Bereavement Support Payment (BSP). The BSP is to replace the existing bereavement benefits (the Bereavement Payment, Bereavement Allowance, and Widowed Parent's Allowance) for surviving spouses and civil partners widowed on or after 6 April 2017.

Concerns were expressed about the impact of the BSP on bereaved people. The Chair requested that a letter should be sent to Caroline Nokes MP asking for confirmation on how the impact of the BSP will be monitored by DWP.

Item 7: Coroners' provision in Wales

At previous meetings of the Group, concerns had been raised at the level of Coroners support in Wales.

Jeremy Field stated that the Chief Coroner was due to publish plans regarding the size of districts / creation of super districts.

Item 8: Coroners' removals – use of zero based tenders

Concerns have been raised at past meetings of the Group about the use by Coroners of zero based tenders for the removal of deceased people on behalf of the Coroner. A discussion was held on the position of the new Chief Coroner and his views on zero based tenders were awaited following correspondence from the Chair.

Item 9: AOB

Mark Binnersley raised staffing issues at Torfaen County Borough Council which, because of council cuts, was training staff to multi-task. That meant that staff from other departments who perhaps lack experience for working with bereaved people were finding themselves in public-facing roles in cemeteries and crematoria.

The Chair asked for this matter to be added to the WLGA letter.

Item 10: Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was to be confirmed but would return to an evening meeting schedule that was easier for Assembly Members.