



The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement

Meeting: Wednesday 2nd December 2020, 1pm

Attendees:

Chair: Sir John Hayes MP

Officers in attendance: Robert Goodwill MP and Rosie Cooper MP

Apologies: Mark Pawsey MP and Sir David Amess MP

Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG):

Jon Levitt, CEO, National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD); Julie Dunk, CEO, Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM); Terry Tennens, CEO, Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF); Brendan Day, Secretary, Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA); Alun Tucker, CEO, Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers' Association (FFMA); Richard Barradell, Secretary and Treasurer, Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries (APCC); and Wendy Buchan, The Cremation Society (TCS)

JBP:

Jennifer Bryant-Pearson, Director and Founder; Marc Pooler, Director of Public Affairs; and Archie Ratcliffe, Senior Account Executive

Notes:

Introduction

Sir John Hayes was delayed due to technical issues so Jennifer Bryant-Pearson began the meeting by welcoming officers and DMAG representatives, and explained that this was a new and refreshed approach for the Group which would include wider engagement and action on issues affecting the industry including those relating to the COVID-19 situation.

New website review

Marc Pooler led a review of the APPG's new website. He outlined that the new website would hopefully act as the first point of call for parliamentarians and the public, offering the latest information about the funeral industry, providing guidance and information on developing policy. The website provides details about the Group's Officers, as well as the organisations which form DMAG. The aim is to position the APPG as the leading authority for guidance and information, acting as a public interface, offering help to communities and individuals.

New action led approach

As well as the website launch, a brochure is also being created which will be used for wider engagement with parliamentarians. The aim is for the brochure to encourage more parliamentarians to become involved in the Group. JBP will manage the Group's website and produce the brochure.

The website will be shared with Officers and DMAG representatives for further feedback. It is hoped that the website will be launched before Christmas.

It was agreed that the Secretariat would work closely with the Officers to maximise media coverage and making use of the parliamentary tools available to them, including Westminster Hall Debates, Adjournment Debates and Parliamentary Questions.

The funeral industry is one which everyone will have need for at some point and all MPs will have funeral industry businesses in their constituency. JBP is set to launch parliamentary engagement, targeting every MP with information tailored to their individual constituency to encourage them to become involved in the Group.

COVID-19 related issues

Robert Goodwill MP asked the group what tangible evidence there was of the impact of COVID-19 on the industry. It was submitted that track & trace and self-isolation had played a major role in shutting down sections of the funeral industry, creating backlog and delay. This has been a particular issue for small, independent funeral directors and crematoriums.

It was argued that the funeral industry is often overlooked, and DMAG has had to fight for key worker status. DMAG asked that efforts are made to raise the status of funeral staff to 'Category two' under the Civil Contingencies Act. They also asked that those employed within the funeral industry are priorities once the COVID-19 vaccinations become available. On this issue, DMAG have already written to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. It is also unclear whether funeral workers would require vaccination certification. This will be kept under review.

Sir John Hayes identified three actions:

- 1) The APPG will write to Nadhim Zahawi MP regarding key worker status and vaccinations for funeral workers.**
- 2) The APPG will invite Nadhim Zahawi MP to a meeting of the APPG.**
- 3) Officers of the Group will raise the issue in the House.**

Terry Tennens led discussions concerning extending the VAT holidays for PPE. He gave the example that the price of a pack of 100 gloves has risen from £3.75 +VAT to £12.95 +VAT. DMAG asked for support in extending the VAT holiday through to March 2021.

Alternatively, it is thought that there are 10 million units of PPE that the Government has in stock. It was hoped that this could be distributed to those which need it.

It was agreed that:

- 1) The APPG would write to Jesse Norman, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to ask for an extension on VAT on PPE.**
- 2) If this was not possible the Group would request that the Government stockpile of PPE is made available to those who need it.**

Next meeting date

It was agreed that future APPG meetings would be shorter and more frequent. Issues of longstanding concern will be addressed once ministers have more time following the COVID-19 vaccination roll out.

The next APPG meeting is scheduled to take place on 19th January 2021.

AOB

Julie Dunk highlighted that in any engagement the emphasis should be placed on the industry as a whole and not just funeral directors.



Funerals and Bereavement

Jesse Norman MP
Financial Secretary to the Treasury
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

December 2020

Dear Jesse

As the Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement I must ask for you to consider extending the temporary VAT exemption on PPE, which ended on 31 October, until March 2021.

The temporary VAT exemption on PPE during the first wave of the pandemic provided essential support at a time of increasing demand and reduced incomes as a result of ongoing restrictions. The exemption saved many firms significant VAT costs and allowed them to procure the essential PPE the funeral industry needed.

However, the exemption came to an end on 31 October and has not been extended which has caused significant pressures, particular on small businesses, which make up most of the sector. These businesses are not in a position to bulk buy and store the levels of PPE that will be required across the entire winter, and so will be required to regularly re-order, which means they will be subject to the huge variations in price and supply that we have seen in recent months.

The Government also recently granted an exemption enabling COVID-positive or symptomatic people to leave quarantine to attend a funeral without breaking the law, which has also increased the risk of transmission and heightening the need for PPE even further.

We therefore ask that the Government reinstate the VAT exemption until at least March 2021, when it can be reviewed against what we all hope will be an improving public health situation.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter and would warmly invite you to attend our next meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement in January to discuss this matter further with our members.

Yours sincerely

Sir John Hayes MP
Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Funerals and Bereavement



Funerals and Bereavement

Nadhim Zahawi MP
Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

December 2020

Dear Nadhim

We appreciate the current pressures on your time but as the Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement I must raise with you the need for representatives of the funeral sector who are working on the frontline, to be treated as a priority for a COVID-19 vaccination.

It must be acknowledged that at this time, representatives of the UK's funeral industry have a key role in the management of excess fatalities caused by COVID-19. We were very concerned to learn that funeral operatives will not be classed as priority workers, along with NHS staff and care workers, for the vaccine and daily testing. Frontline funeral operatives, mortuary technicians and embalmers, are amongst the first to be called upon when a death occurs and therefore have to attend and regularly enter private homes, hospitals, care homes, and other settings, which puts them at very high-risk of being infected, particularly with the COVID-19 virus.

The nature of their work exposes them to a greater risk of infection. These extremely important and overlooked workers need to be protected, along with their families.

Furthermore, if funeral staff do become infected, without the vaccine, there is a high risk of the infection spreading rapidly through the sector, including to crematoria and cemetery staff as well as nursing and care homes. This could result in funeral homes, crematoria and burial grounds having to close which would severely reducing available capacity and cause a very serious public health issue.

We would therefore ask that, firstly, you immediately ensure that frontline funeral staff are treated as a priority along with care workers to receive the vaccine and daily testing. Secondly, that consideration is given to changing the Civil Contingencies Act so that funeral sector workers are treated as Category Two Responders.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter and would warmly invite you to attend our next meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement in January to discuss this matter further with our members.

Yours sincerely

Sir John Hayes MP



Funerals and Bereavement

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Funerals and Bereavement