

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement
Virtual Meeting
24th February 2021, 2pm

Attendees

Sir John Hayes MP, Wayne David MP, Peter Dowd MP, Jon Levitt (DMAG, NAFD), Terry Tennens (DMAG, SAIF), Alun Tucker (DMAG, FFMA), Richard Barradell (DMAG, APPC), Wendy Buchan (DMAG, The Cremation Society), Colin Rickman (DMAG, The Cremation Society), Jennifer Bryant-Pearson (JBP), Marc Pooler (JBP), Sam Webber (JBP), Archie Ratcliffe (JBP), Charlie Souster (JBP)

Apologies

Brendan Day (DMAG, FBCA), Julie Dunk (DMAG, ICCM)

Minutes

Sir John Hayes MP welcomed all attending the APPG, particularly the two new MPs who have recently joined.

New Members of the APPG

Two new members of the APPG were present, and Jennifer Bryant-Pearson informed the meeting of a further 14 new Parliamentarians who had also joined the Group and the number continues to grow. Whilst this meeting was short notice for many, it is hoped and expected they will come to future meetings.

Monthly Newsletter

A monthly newsletter is to be published on the second Monday of the month, starting in March. This will provide updates on the latest developments in the industry and provide content for the Twitter page and website. The newsletter will also be sent to MPs and Peers.

Update on Parliamentary Questions

Marc Pooler informed the group that eight questions have so far been submitted on behalf of the APPG. This includes five by Sir John Hayes MP and three by Mark Pawsey MP.

It was raised during the meeting that engagement with the devolved administrations would be beneficial.

Sir John suggested that we continue to make good use of the route that Parliamentary Questions offers the group.

Attendance at funerals – Home Office next steps

Jon Levitt updated the meeting of a recent incident in Watford, with the funeral director in question expecting up to 500 guests. Through clear dialogue with relevant police forces, resources were made available to stop attendees entering the cemetery. This strategy was successful and should become best practice, to ensure that there is consistency on the guidance issued to all police forces.

Sir John Hayes MP noted that constabulary independence allows some police forces to adopt different approaches.

Richard Barradell gave further examples of funeral directors being placed in unacceptable positions, including some being threatened with knives.

The challenges funeral directors are having entering care/nursing homes

Terry Tennens updated the meeting that some care homes are preventing funeral directors and others from entering care premises, even if they have already had a negative lateral flow test on the same day and they are wearing full PPE. Guidance issued by the Department of Health and Social Care recognises other carers, such as chiropodists, but not funeral directors.

Inclusivity and Skills Inquiry

Jennifer Bryant-Pearson explained the framework on the inquiry; a draft framework will be issued for the next APPG meeting on March 24, evidence will be taken between April and June and the findings will be presented at a House of Commons event in September.

Colin Rickman endorsed the report and highlighted the industry has a wide range of skills opportunities, including in stonemasonry, floristry and management.

Richard Barradell noted that the CMA has published their report and a government response will be issued. There is also work already being done by the Law Commission on reform of burial and cremation laws.

Sir John Hayes MP emphasised that apprenticeships should recognise the wide-ranging experiences within the industry. There are opportunities for small, start-up firms as well as larger corporations. It is important to standardise apprenticeships, so they are the same irrespective of the size of firm.

Any other business

Sir John Hayes MP is meeting Oliver Dowden MP and Michael Gove MP in the coming weeks and will raise the issue of a cross-departmental working group for the funeral and death care sector and how best to approach it.

Actions

- Agree a framework for the newsletter with members of the Deceased Management Advisory Group and agree first edition content;
- Identify and engage with relevant members of devolved administrations;
- Write to the Police Chiefs Council highlighting best practice so that becomes the norm rather than the exception;
- Write to Police and Crime Commissioners as they have a regular communication with Chief Constables;
- Make enquiries on the further easing of lockdown and how this will impact the sector;
- Write a letter to the relevant minister on the issue of funeral directors and access to care homes;
- Create a framework for the Inclusivity and Skills Inquiry;
- Biography of MPs who have joined.