



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement

## Attendees

Sir John Hayes MP, Heather Wheeler MP, Robert Goodwill MP, Lord de Mauley, Baroness Ludford, Freddie Evans (Office of Fleur Anderson MP), Yuliya Prosyanyk (Office of Robert Goodwill MP), Steven Wibberley (Cruse), Terry Tennens (DMAG, SAIF), Paul Allcock (DMAG, SAIF), Alun Tucker (DMAG, FFMA), Richard Barradell (DMAG, APPC), Julie Dunk (DMAG, ICCM), Jon Levett (DMAG, NAFD), Jennifer Bryant-Pearson (JBP), Sam Webber (JBP), Charlie Souster (JBP)

## Apologies

Wendy Buchan (DMAG, The Cremation Society), Brendan Day (DMAG, FBCA), Hannah Bardell MP, Bob Blackman MP, Stephen Timms MP, Tom Tugendhat MP, Carolyn Harris MP, Mark Pawsey MP, Baroness Garden, Nick Fletcher MP, James Sunderland MP, Lord Rennard The Lord Bishop of Bristol, Emma Lewell-Buck MP

## Government Response to the CMA report and its implications

Sir John Hayes MP informed the meeting that the response is not as bad as first feared, and many of the initial fears have not come to pass.

Jon Levett informed the Group that the NAFD was pleased the Ministry of Justice is going to give the sector some time to get its own house in order before taking any intrusive regulatory measures. The NAFD and SAIF have worked together to create a new code of practice to govern their own membership. Both organisations are having discussions with the Ministry of Justice about this code of practice and whether it could be adopted on a sector-wide basis. Overall, the report was very positive and treated the sector in a mature and responsible way.

Terry Tennens agreed that SAIF was pleased with the response, particularly regarding the absence of statutory inspections, which would be disproportionate against smaller firms, and online pricing, with the caveat that that this needs to be done on a level playing field.

Robert Goodwill MP asked whether Co-Operative Funeral Care or Dignity had given a response to the report, to which Jon Levett replied that they were broadly supportive of the

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measures, although they are more likely to be pro-Statutory Regulation than small independent funeral directors.

### **Cross departmental response – Penny Mordaunt MP**

Sir John Hayes MP is to meet the Cabinet Office tomorrow (Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup>) and will raise this matter with them then. This could potentially lead to a letter outlining a more detailed proposal.

### **Funeral Attendance**

The Daily Mail has begun a campaign on funeral attendance, arguing that death care sector restrictions should ease as national restrictions ease. Sir John Hayes proposed that immediate representation should be made to the Government asking them to engage with the sector and look into ways of how the sector can return to some form of normality.

Robert Goodwill MP argued that there should be a reference to the size of the venue, echoing regulations in Wales and Northern Ireland. Most venues are able to hold more than 30 individuals and still maintain appropriate social distancing.

Sir John Hayes MP noted that most funerals are quite small and do not have hundreds of people in attendance.

Steven Wibberley mentioned that he had been approached by the Daily Mail a week ago on this issue, and it was the position of Cruse that the Government should urgently review the restrictions in line with the changes to national guidance. It was also noted that worshippers can attend a church service with higher numbers of attendees permitted, but in the same venue, only 30 can attend a funeral.

Heather Wheeler MP noted that there is little appetite within Government to review this, as June 21, the proposed end date of legal restrictions on gatherings, is not far away.

Sir John Hayes MP reiterated that in these terms, a week will affect thousands of funeral services, and a modest, reasonable approach based on capacity and testing mourners should be well received by Government.

It was agreed that a letter will be written to the Prime Minister urging the Government to follow models in Wales and Northern Ireland, where the number of mourners able to attend is dependent on the size of the venue. There would also be a pre-requisite for mourners to be tested before services. It was noted that funeral directors and venue owners have made

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the current arrangements work successfully, but for larger families that would like 40 people to attend, difficult choices can cause unnecessary distress at an already sensitive time.

## **Annual Report**

Jennifer Bryant-Pearson thanked DMAG members for their comments on the framework for the annual report. These will be incorporated, and a more detailed framework will be circulated shortly. It is hoped that this will be launched at an afternoon tea event on the Parliamentary Estate on the 6<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Bereavement Guide**

The Bereavement Guide is being progressed, but it is important to get this right as it is to be used as a Parliamentary resource. Again, DMAG members were thanked for their constructive comments.

## **Child Bereavement Services**

Jennifer Bryant-Pearson introduced comments from Fleur Anderson MP, who was unable to join this meeting, on this issue:

*I would like to look at what support services there are for children who have been bereaved, and how children know about where to go to access them. Are there lots of services, are they overwhelmed, are there services available but not being taken up, have bereavement services received additional government support to enable to them to cope with the increased need for them? What is the experience of children who are bereaved at the moment and compared to pre-COVID? A disproportionate number of young people bereaved by COVID are BAME – do our child bereavement services meet the needs for BAME young people?*

Steven Wibberley argued that this has been an area that has been largely ignored throughout the pandemic. Data shows that children who experience bereavement at an early age and do not get the right support have poorer levels of mental and physical health, lower exam results, are more likely to be unemployed. They are also more likely to be part of the criminal justice system and have lifelong behavioural problems. There is currently no Government funding for children's bereavement services and the Department for Health and Social Care has been opaque in providing details. There is some funding from local NHS Trusts. To help solve some of the problems, better data is required on the support available for children, how well-trained teachers are and the availability of access to external services. Steven Wibberley closed his remarks by saying that this is an important area that has not

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been given the spotlight that it needs, and any work that the APPG can do to help raise the profile of this issue would be welcome.

Sir John Hayes MP noted that it would be useful to establish a roundtable on the topic with individuals of differing experiences and expertise. It would also be useful to raise it in the House, particularly regarding the range of different experiences depending on geography.

Heather Wheeler MP noted that she had not, since being elected in 2010, had a constituent raise this matter with her.

Steven Wibberley responded that it should not be based on the number of complaints received, as the current available data suggests that with good early intervention, it is easier to mitigate against long-term risks to bereaved children. It is not possible to prevent child bereavement, but we can help to mitigate the risks.

Sir John Hayes MP reiterated the need for a roundtable to discuss this issue, and that there was no downside to having one.

### **Any other business**

Jon Levett raised the issue of funeral plans falling under Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) control from July 2022. Discussions with funeral directors had resulted in agreement that this was a very tight timeframe, which may in the long run disproportionately impact small providers, leading in some to potentially leave the market. Jon informed the Group that this timeframe had been set by the Treasury and discussions centred around whether this would be an issue the APPG could push back on.

Sir John Hayes MP agreed that the APPG should submit some Parliamentary Questions on the topic to gauge the Treasury's response.

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