



House of Commons

London SW1A 0AA

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement

26/10/21

Attendees

Sir John Hayes MP (Chair), Gillian Keegan MP – Minister for Bereavement, Baroness Garden of Frogmal, Robert Goodwill MP, Peter Dowd MP, Rosie Cooper MP, Paul Maynard MP, Wendy Buchan (The Cremation Society), Jon Levett (NAFD), Brendan Day (FBCA), Alun Tucker (FFMA), Richard Barradell (APCC), Terry Tennens (SAIF), Julie Dunk (ICCM), Steven Wibberley (Cruse Bereavement Care), John Withington (IFSO), Paul Allcock (SAIF), Rachel Bradburne (NAFD), Mohamed Omer (ICCM), David Heath (IFSO), Debbie Smith (NAFD), Mark Isherwood MS, Office of Jeremy Balfour MSP, Chelsea Atherton, Sophie Bowser, Jennifer Bryant-Pearson (JBP), Kieran Bergholcs (JBP)

Introduction from Sir John Hayes MP

- Sir John Hayes started the meeting by introducing the 7 new members of the APPG, who have joined since the launch of the annual report in September. He noted that the launch event for this report was very well attended.
- A number of members have approached the APPG for information as a result of the annual report launch, positioning the Group well within the Commons as the 'go to' source for information on matters of bereavement and funerals.
- Sir John then highlighted the Group's objectives for the next 12 months which are:
 - The establishment of a cross departmental working group. Sir John invited attending Parliamentarians to co-sign a letter to the new Cabinet Office Minister on this issue.
 - Gain recognition as Category 3 Responders within the Civil Contingencies Act
 - The re-use of graves campaign
- The Minister for Bereavement, Gillian Keegan MP, noted that the sector covers a very broad brief and ministers are often bound by jurisdictions that limit their ability to affect change.

Chair: Sir John Hayes

Vice Chairs: Robert Goodwill MP, Rosie Cooper MP, Gavin Robinson MP and Baroness Garden of Frogmal

Officers: Dame Diana Johnson MP, Mark Pawsey MP, Fleur Anderson MP, and Baroness Ludford

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- Sir John noted the quick resolution of the granting of exhumation licenses is a good example of the impact the Group can have. As a result, bereaved families were able to hold funerals without any further delays.

Statement and discussion from Minister for Bereavement, Gillian Keegan MP

- The minister noted that she has only recently become the Minister responsible for the sector and she looks forward to working with the APPG going forward. She thanked those from the sector for their work during the pandemic.
- The minister noted that improving support for bereaved families was high on her agenda.
- Both the minister and Sir John Hayes MP agreed that MPs were now more involved with the sector after the pandemic, which is a positive step.
- Sir John noted that this is a sector that affects every MP and touches everyone at some point in their lives.
- Steve Wibberley from Cruse Bereavement Care noted he looks forward to working with the Minister. He thanked the Government for the additional funding charities received during the pandemic and highlighted the positive relationships many charities have with civil servants. He commented that he was worried about the focus shifting away from death and bereavement as the threat of the pandemic recedes. He called for a sustainable funding model to support bereavement charities and a cross government approach to improve experiences for the bereaved.
- Mohamed Omer (ICCM) congratulated the Minister on her appointment and noted that the Government need to recognise and support different faith groups. Mental health issues in faith communities need to be addressed. Furthermore, the Government must be proactive and prepare for the next pandemic or bereavement crisis.
- Paul Maynard MP advocated for regular ministerial roundtables on funerals, which would look at issues like the cost of funerals. He urged the Minister to think about a ministerial roundtable to review issues and improve the sector.
 - The Minister responded asking what a good outcome of this roundtable would look like.
 - Paul Maynard MP responded that a good outcome would better support families who cannot finance funerals at present.
 - Sir John suggested a post pandemic roundtable which could be used to influence changes and highlight lessons learnt from the pandemic. He noted that there is a lot to reflect upon to inform policy.
- Mark Isherwood MS commented that a lack of accessible communication is a barrier to ethnic minority communities gaining support. Support that is religiously sensitive is needed.

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- The Minister reiterated the need for funeral and bereavement care to be inclusive.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Report and The Independent Funeral Standards Organisation (IFSO)

- Rt Hon. David Heath noted that IFSO was created in response to the CMA report on the regulation of the funeral sector. IFSO is an independent body that will help to ensure better standards across the sector. IFSO are keen to work with the devolved administrations to streamline the regulatory process. Funerals are one of the biggest purchases consumers will make in their lives and at a time of great distress. All aspects of the market need regulation which will help to achieve confidence from consumers. It is hoped that at some point in the future IFSO will gain statutory powers to ensure consumers can access the best levels of service.
- Sir John noted that the pandemic has brought many of these issues to the fore and emphasised the need for an independent regulator.

Response to the Marie Curie consultation

- Sir John Hayes asked Jennifer Bryant-Pearson to provide an update on the Marie Curie consultation, which is focusing on how to better support bereaved people.
 - It was agreed that the APPG will submit a response to this inquiry alongside individual DMAG members.

Reuse of graves campaign update

- Sir John Hayes MP invited Jennifer Bryant-Pearson to provide an update on the reuse of graves campaign. Sir John will organise a meeting with Jessica Morden MP, Chair of the Statutory Instrument Select Committee as we hope to achieve regulatory change through the use of a Statutory Instrument.
 - Sir John will also arrange a meeting with Tom Pursglove MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice. Sir John noted he is responsible for death management and Statutory Instruments which is highly relevant for our campaign.

AOB

- Christian Wakeford MP met with Guy Opperman MP and confirmed that John Glen MP is the relevant minister on the Financial Conduct Authority's regulation of prepaid funeral plans.
 - Christian Wakeford is seeking to meet John Glen to discuss the issue further.

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- It was noted that the next meeting will be held virtually on 30th November given the House of Commons have reduced access onto the Parliamentary Estate. The APPG hope to welcome DMAG into the House for the January 25th meeting.

The meeting closed at 6.10pm

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