



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA
All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement

Attendees

Sir John Hayes MP (Chair), Peter Dowd MP, Jeremy Balfour MSP, Sir Robert Goodwill MP, Deborah Thomas (Mark Isherwood MS), Rachel Bradburne (NAFD), Alun Tucker (FFMA), Julie Dunk (ICCM), Richard Barradell (APCC), Brendan Day (FBCA), Terry Tennens (SAIF), Wendy Buchan (Cremation Society), Paul Allcock (SAIF), Mohamed Omer MBE (Gardens of Peace), Jennifer Bryant-Pearson (JBP), Kieran Bergholcs (JBP)

Apologies

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering, Martyn Day MP, Simon Fell MP, Layla Moran MP, Sir Edward Leigh MP, Matthew Offord MP, Jamie Stone MP, Lord Taylor of Warwick, Mark Pawsey MP

Introductions

Sir Robert Goodwill MP opened the meeting and introduced Mohamed Omer MBE to speak about the Islamic response to the Covid-19 inquiry.

The Islamic response to Covid-19 Inquiry

Mohamed Omer MBE presented the five components of the Muslim burial process. First, a Muslim must be buried as quickly as possible and the body is cleaned to begin the process before it is shrouded. A final prayer is then said, a simple prayer for all of humanity, before the burial. The body is reunited with the earth and faces Mecca, and a small mound is made to ensure others do not step on the grave. This is a reminder to respect our peers.

Mohamed Omer MBE noted that there had been two key challenges to the process during the pandemic. First, Muslim funeral directors were at times advised not to clean the body as this may spread Covid-19. Second, the virus itself and health inequalities meant a disproportionate impact on the Muslim community.

Sir Robert Goodwill MP asked how frequently specialist Islamic funeral directors were used for the process. Mohamed Omer MBE replied that the vast majority of cases did use Muslim funeral directors, but where this was not the case the process was usually handled expertly.

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Vice Chairs: Sir Robert Goodwill MP, Rosie Cooper MP, Gavin Robinson MP and Baroness Garden of Frognal
Officers: Dame Diana Johnson MP, Mark Pawsey MP, Fleur Anderson MP and Baroness Ludford

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John Levitt raised the issue of new regulations from the Competitions and Market Authority (CMA). He asked what particular challenges these presented the Muslim community. Mohamed Omer MBE noted that the CMA did not take the advice of Muslim funeral directors. Muslim funeral directors were concerned by a standardised price list that included services such as cremation that were not permitted in Muslim burial ceremonies.

Update on Tom Pursglove MP meeting

Sir John Hayes MP reported back to the group on his meeting with Tom Pursglove MP. It had been a very useful and productive discussion.

Sir John Hayes MP noted that the meeting had first focused on the re-use of graves. He had outlined challenges local authorities faced due to the lack of burial space. Tom Pursglove MP had committed to look at the issue further.

The two then discussed Financial Conduct Authority regulation of pre-paid funeral plans. Tom Pursglove MP suggested that this issue be raised with the treasury. Sir John Hayes noted that this was an excellent example of an issue where a cross-departmental working group for the deathcare sector would be very useful. He believed that establishing this group was very important for the APPG.

ACTION: Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG) to feedback to the Covid-19 Inquiry, as per Tom Pursglove MP's request.

FCA Regulation

Sir John Hayes MP welcomed comments on FCA regulation of pre-paid funerals plans. He noted that he would write to John Glen MP to request a meeting to discuss the matter further.

Sir Robert Goodwill MP asked if there was a problem of consumers losing money due to unstable providers. Rachel Bradburne explained that consumers would be protected by the FCA's compensation team from July. The main concerns of the industry were cases in which providers did not achieve or had no plans to seek FCA authorisation. It was unclear what would happen to consumers. Paul Allcock added that providers rarely fail and should not fail if they perform best practice with consumers' money.

Sir John Hayes MP noted concerns that the sector might be skewed towards larger providers by the changes.

ACTION: Sir John Hayes MP to write to John Glen MP on FCA regulation.

Re-use of graves strategy

Sir John Hayes MP introduced a new strategy to create publicity around the re-use of graves and engage key stakeholders within parliament, the Law Commission, and other useful advocates. Sir

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Robert Goodwill MP suggested that they both write to colleagues in constituencies with limited burial space to generate support.

Julie Dunk stated that it had been clear for some time that the re-use of graves was the only viable option due to limited space. She added that this was supported by the Church of England. Alan Tucker noted that action was now needed.

Mohamed Omer MBE stressed the importance of the issue for the Muslim community as cremations were not an option.

ACTION: Secretariat to distribute the strategy for feedback from the group.

Amendments to the Coronavirus Act

Terry Tennens noted concerns that the electronic registration of deaths would be removed as practice was normalised after the pandemic. The Deceased Management Advisory Group had petitioned to retain electronic registration of deaths as this provided an option for those shielding and minimised distress.

Sir John Hayes MP asked if it would be possible to change this without an amendment. Terry Tennens noted that the Cabinet Office advised the only alternative would be new legislation. Sir John Hayes MP suggested that DMAG could feed into the civil contingencies secretariat and proposed that an action be formed ahead of the next APPG meeting.

ACTION: Action plan to be formed on amendments to the Coronavirus Act.

AoB

Rachel Bradburne raised two issues that arose in the past week. First, a number of local authorities had chosen not to allow funeral directors to continue electronic transmission of documents. This was disappointing. Second, the industry had concerns around changes to the cremation form. She would send details on these points to the secretariat.

ACTION: Rachel Bradburne to provide details to the secretariat who will follow up on these issues.

With no other business, Sir John Hayes closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

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