I would like to raise the following matters in relation to the above Bill.

Many of the technicalities of the burial law are out with the scope of my day-to-day work. However, within this, I would like to see a basic standard set for grave preparation and presentation, including the presentation of burial authority staff, who while doing outdoor manual work, are also taking part in a funeral service. The presentation both of graves and cemetery staff can vary vastly from one authority to another.

Similarly, with burial (and cremation) costs, there should presumably be reasonable justification if two different local authorities set vastly different price models. Private companies of course may be free to charge as per their commercial model.

Regarding funeral directors and their licensing.

I would welcome any steps, which raise standards of service, which the bereaved are given, and most importantly reduce the chance of a bereaved family having the misfortune to employ the services of a so-called funeral director who has neither the ability, the facilities nor the appropriate manner to provide this service.

This however is a very difficult matter to pin point. A company can have the greatest of facilities, but operate with a poor attitude towards clients. Similarly, a poorly resourced funeral director could work extremely hard, with great integrity, experience and first class intentions and in so doing, provide an excellent level of service to a bereaved client.

Firstly, I would like to suggest that a more robust definition of funeral director is given than the one used in the Bill, copied from the death certification Bill, which was not directly about funeral directors.

A Funeral director could make all arrangements with a client, and conduct the ceremony on the day, however if they subcontract all vehicles and use of premises, they would not come under your licence scheme. (their supplier might)

A carriage master, could assist with funerals, transport the deceased, both locally and nationally, and not come under this regulation despite their considerable involvement with funerals.

What about DIY funerals or potentially community operated funeral schemes? While not common, at what point is someone deemed to be carrying out the duties of a funeral director? Would it become illegal for a deceased person to be transported by a non-licenced operator? (i.e. repatriation company) If relating to the storage of deceased, what about deceased resting in church, or in the family home?
While you say every property of the funeral director would need a licence, what about separate garage facilities which have neither deceased or members of the public in them, or office premises which are used only for administration and arranging of funerals but have no rest room or storage of the deceased?

In the event that a funeral director in a rural or island community who is the only operator fails to obtain a license, what service would be available to that community?

Local authorities currently consider buying funeral director services with no regard to standards, or even membership of the existing NAFD and SAIF. Would it not make sense to immediately to say that no public sector organisation can but funeral services from a firm not adhering to a recognised code of practise?

Within the licence process, there must be considerable thought to the volume of funerals being conducted. How would this be policed, especially if a licence costs more, the more funerals you declare yourself to be conducting? A firm doing 30-40 funerals which has a single cold blanket would seem well resourced for refrigeration. A firm doing say 500 funerals with a 3 space fridge is woefully under resourced with refrigeration.

What value is placed on the quality and choice of goods supplied by the funeral director? Would there be a minimum level of coffin choice for example? You can have great facilities but if you only offer the client one coffin or lining for the coffin, then this is restrictive on the client.

Is 24 hour service mandatory to obtain a licence? For a family having a home bereavement late on Friday night, it would not be reasonable for them to wait till Monday to speak to a funeral director.

Can the Bill recognise that members of SAIF and NAFD have undergone inspection, offer clients a course of re-dress in the event of complaints?

Within this Bill, is it appropriate to consider the ever growing role of Pre Paid Funerals. Who is selling these plans? What do clients believe they are buying, and in years to come when a plan which was not sold by a funeral director reaches “maturity” who is responsible if there is a dispute between the funeral director (Who did not sell the plan) and the plan holder – or their representative. This is going to become a massive trading issue for the public, and for reputable funeral directors who have had no control on what services are being sold on their behalf.

At present funeral directors act as agents on behalf of their client, and in so doing process payments to local authorities for cremations and burial facilities. In the event that the client does not pay, the funeral director is however held personally liable for these expenses. Should it not be agreed that the funeral director is no more than an agent and is therefore not liable for these costs. It is well and good to say the money should be obtained prior to the funeral but this is often not possible. In cases where there is no money, and the DWP
later refuse the small amount which they might have paid, then the funeral
director becomes liable to pay a local authority as a result of the decision of
another government body. This surely does not make sense. These costs
must therefore be passed on indirectly to other bereaved families. Resolving
this matter would go a long way to easing the growing issue of funeral
poverty.

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