

Cross-Party Group on Funerals and Bereavement

Date and Time: 5th March 2025 6.30pm

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Jeremy Balfour MSP
Beatrice Wishart MSP

Invited guests

None

Non-MSP Group Members

Nick Britten – Secretary

Julia Shillito – Jeremy Balfour's office

Jane Matheson – Edinburgh City Council

Paul Cuthell - Thomas Cuthell & Sons/NAFD

Andy Brown – Coop Funeralcare/NAFD

James Blackburn - Scotmid/NAFD

Andrew Purves – William Purves/NAFD

Gerry Boyle – Dignity/NAFD

Joseph Murron – SAIF Scotland

Terry Tennens - SAIF

Amanda Reid - CHAS

Alison Wilson – Golden Charter

Gordon Swan – NAFPP

Chistine McLintock – Cruse Scotland

Reid Stillman – Funeral Link

Eileen Cawley – STUC

Mairi Handy – Celebrant

Rose Jackson – Scottish Pensioners' Forum

Sandy Sullivan – Resomation

Apologies

Fiona Arnott-Barron – Cruse Scotland

Agenda item 1

Welcome, minutes of previous meetings, matters arising, correspondence

Jeremy Balfour welcomed attendees to the meeting.

No matters arising

Correspondence: Following the previous meeting, a further letter was sent to Falkirk Council and response received.

Jeremy Balfour, convener of the CPG, had an opinion piece published in The Times following a request from the group to publicise the risk of harm to bereaved people of councils imposing high price hikes for burial and cremation.

Following correspondence around a Cruse Scotland initiative to promote education in schools around death and bereavement, Jeremy Balfour has a planned meeting with the Minister. He will report back at the June meeting.

Agenda item 2

Regulation in the Funeral Sector.

Members raised early issues with funeral sector regulation, which came into operation on March 1st.

Nick Britten (NB) said a register of funeral directors will be live on April 1st, and was voluntary. He said he had asked the Government how funeral directors who do not sign up are monitored.

Paul Cuthell (PC) said it was a shame that the new burial forms were not more succinct and that an opportunity had been missed.

Andrew Brown (AB) said that Co-op Funeralcare had met with the Burial and Cremation team who had said that inspectorate are independent and a phased

approach to inspections would be taking place. There remained unanswered questions.

Andrew Purves (AP) criticised the decision to implement new burial forms so late, only a few days before they came into force. It had led to chaos. Some burial authorities had asked for a place of death before accepting the application, but there was no place on the form for this to be completed, leading to potential delays. AP said costs of a lair transfer were now approximately £250 – an Edinburgh City Council charge of £100 and lawyer fee £150.

Jane Matheson said the Scottish Government was aware of the place of death situation, and was addressing it, with place of death to be added to the new form. JM said that councillors at Edinburgh City Council always offer the opportunity to sign a lair transfer for free.

Joseph Murren raised an issue highlighted by a funeral director in North Lanarkshire whereby the local authority was now requiring the weight of coffin at the time of booking, and that any coffin weighing more than 100kg would require 2 extra funeral director staff to be present. This presented two problems; while a booking can be made as soon as a death is registered, often the weight of coffin cannot be confirmed several days after that, which could lead to 3-4 days of delays before a funeral can take place. Also, smaller funeral director businesses may not have two extra staff and with the average weight of deceased and coffin being 97kg, there will be many funerals where this rule might be applied. These extra staff would push up costs for funeral directors and bereaved families.

Jane Matheson said she would speak to North Lanarkshire Council to seek clarification. Gerry Boyle (GB) said Dignity had had similar concerns raised with them about this situation.

Jeremy Balfour said a wider review of how regulation was affecting the sector would be relevant for the September meeting.

Agenda item 3

Pathology Services in Aberdeen.

Following discussion on this at the December meeting, the BBC had reported that pathology services would be taken over by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

JB said that he had spoken to Douglas Lumsden MSP who had said the issue was being raised at a Grampian Health Board meeting and he would report back to the June meeting to update.

Agenda item 4

Possibility of introduction of bereavement, death and dying in schools' health and wellbeing content. This item was covered in Agenda item 1 - correspondence.

Agenda item 5:

Alkaline Hydrolysis update

NB said a Government working group on Alkaline Hydrolysis has been established and met for the first time in early March. James Blackburn had been invited to sit on it and the NAFD and SAIF had now been invited.

The next meeting of the working group is set for May, with Alkaline Hydrolysis regulations expected to be laid before Parliament in 2025.

Agenda item 6

Any other business

None

Agenda item 7

Next meeting: June 4th.