

# Cross-Party Group on <Funerals and Bereavement >

Date and Time: 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022, 7pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Jeremy Balfour MSP  
Colin Beattie MSP

Invited guests

**None**

Non-MSP Group Members

Jon Levett, NAFD

James Blackburn - Scotmid Co-operative, Edinburgh

Rachel Bradburne, NAFD

Gordon Swan Golden Charter Ltd.

Rose Jackson, Scottish Pensioners Forum

Gerry Boyle, Dignity

James Morris, SAIFCHARTER Scotland

Nick Britten, Secretary

Andrew Brown NAFD Scotland

Paul Cuthell, NAFD

Howard Pickard, Resomation Ltd

Brian Corrigan, Cruse Scotland,

Declan Maguire SAIF,

Eileen Cawley, Scottish Pensioners Forum,

Sandy Sullivan Resomation Ltd

Terry Tennens, SAIF

Mark Hazelwood, Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care

## Apologies

Colin Beattie MSP

Rhoda Grant MSP

Gillian Mackay MSP

Alexander Burnett MSP

## Agenda item 1

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

Jeremy Balfour (JB) welcomed the group to the first of the cross-party groups for 2022, both in person and online.

## Agenda item 2

### **2. Approval of the minutes from previous meeting**

Previous minutes were agreed unanimously.

Nick Britten (NB) updated on previous action points:

- The Burial and Cremation team has provided a list of local authorities which offer funeral packages. They are unable to update on uptake on the services.
- Cheryl Paris provided the details for the Scottish Bereavement Benchmarking Group. NB said he had spoken to Tim Purves around issues at Midlothian Council which fed into a general narrative around local authorities introducing measures that were not necessarily to the best benefit of bereaved people, and raised the question whether these would be kept in place post March 21<sup>st</sup> when all Government restrictions were lifted.
- NB said as per a request by Mark Hazlewood, Kevin Stewart will be invited to the September meeting, as Ben Macpherson is attending the next meeting, on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

JB said the Government was keen to keep some Covid-related emergency powers and asked the group whether they had any thoughts about keeping some permanently. Remote registration is a benefit that is worth keeping; it is not being kept in England and Wales.

James Blackburn said he would welcome a mixture on both face to face and remote registration. Rose Jackson concurred. Electronic logging of documentation is very useful as well.

JB asked the group to send any further information to NB.

Action point: Nick Britten to write to each to ascertain costs.

Action point: Nick Britten to write to COSLA to ask about councils' plans for procedures around burial practices post-March 21<sup>st</sup>.

Action point: Terry Tennens and Nick Britten to send SAIF/NAFD briefing note to JB

## Agenda item 3

### 4. Evidence session, lessons learned from Covid-19 pandemic

JB said it was important, before everything is lost that has happened in the last two years, to reflect what society had learned positively and negatively around the Covid-19 pandemic. There will be a public inquiry later in the year, looking at public health, education and the number of deaths that occurred and what happened around that. It is not just a reflective piece of work, it will be an inquiry about "if this happens again, what did we get right, what did we get wrong".

To that end, the CPG had decided to hold an evidence-gathering session, split into two areas, taking in perspective from the Funeral sector and Grief counselling and support sector.

Evidence was taken from Declan Maguire (SAIF), Boyle (Dignity), Jon Levett (NAFD), Brian Corrigan (Cruse Scotland), with input from James Blackburn (Scotmid).

JB said that the evidence document will be held on file and sent to the Government inquiry when details of it are published.

Action point arising: Following extensive discussions in December 2021, funeral directors were designated key worker status. NB to write to Scottish Government to put into writing the fact that funeral directors are key workers.

## Agenda item 4

### 5: Any other business

JB: The Westminster Government are doing some work around the reuse of lairs; JB asked whether that was an issue in Scotland. Members of the group responded by saying that it was not an issue in Scotland.

Gerry Boyle noted that the Funeral Expense Payment was being paid in full for people opting for Direct Cremation, meaning that the payment was covering the entire cost of the funeral, which was not its intention. JB responded by saying it would be a question for the next meeting, which will be attended by Ben Macpherson, Minister for Social Security and Local Government

JB asked that the group submit any questions to Ben Macpherson two to three weeks ahead of the June 15<sup>th</sup> meeting to allow him time to prepare answers.

James Morris raised an issue with new build East Lothian community hospital not having appropriate entry and exit access for funeral directors to collect a deceased person with dignity and without having to pass through public areas.

**Action point: JB as Lothian MSP will raise it with the relevant authorities.**

James Blackburn said he would raise the issue with the Burial Regulations Working Group.

James Blackburn said that funeral plans, from 29<sup>th</sup> July, they will be regulated by the FCA. It will affect a lot of people who will have plans. The FCA have gone back to the Treasury to amend the legislation. He asked JB, on the understanding it was not a devolved issue, whether there was any leeway to delay the introduction of the legislation to give everyone time to get the legislation sorted. JB said he would raise it with the Scotland Office.

Gordon Swan said it was statutory regulation, so the likelihood of a delay is very low. A lot of representation is being made to the Treasury. He said he had raised some of the concerns with a Cabinet Minister, so the Scottish Government were aware of the issues.

## **Agenda item 5:**

### **5. Date and time of next meeting**

June 15<sup>th</sup>, 7.00pm. JB thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.