

## CPG for Funerals and Bereavement

25 November 2020  
Annual Meeting Minutes  
(Virtual meeting)

### In attendance:

Richard Lyle MSP (Co-Convener)	Terry Tennens
Jeremy Balfour MSP (Co-Convener)	John Halliday
Johann Lamont MSP	Morgan Harris
Jon Levett	James Morris
Andrew Brown	Paul Cuthell
James Blackburn	Rose Jackson
Sandy Sullivan	Gordon Swan
Nick Britten	Howard Pickard
Eileen Crawley	David Beamer (Secretary)

### Item 1: Apologies

Colin Beattie MSP	Gerard Boyle
Alex Rowley MSP	Brian Corrigan
Fulton MacGregor MSP	Susanne Cameron-Nielson
Miles Briggs MSP	Patrick McGlinchey
Willie Coffey MSP	Nigel Lymn Rose
Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP	Mark Hazelwood

Rose Jackson informed the Group that Maureen Gardner, a non-MSP member of the Group, had sadly passed away. Richard Lyle MSP passed on the Group's condolences to her family and recognised the work that she had done on the Cross Party Group.

### Item 2: Approval of the minutes from the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

### Item 3: Election of Officers

The following officers were re-elected:

- Richard Lyle MSP (co-Convener)
- Jeremy Balfour MSP (co-Convener)
- David Beamer (Secretary)

The Group was informed that from 1 January 2021, the Secretariat would be provided directly by the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD). David Beamer would stand down as Secretary on 31 December 2020.

**Item 4: Group Membership**

In addition to the co-Conveners, the following MSPs were recorded as Members of the Group:

- Colin Beattie MSP (Scottish National Party)
- Miles Briggs MSP (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)
- Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP (Scottish Liberal Democrats)
- Johann Lamont MSP (Scottish Labour)
- Fulton MacGregor MSP (Scottish National Party)
- Alex Rowley MSP (Scottish Labour)

The Secretary confirmed that the Annual Return for the Group would be submitted following the meeting.

**Item 5: Update**

The Secretary stated that representatives from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) were invited to attend the meeting today but had declined as they wanted to wait until the Final Report of their Funerals Market investigation had been published before attending a meeting.

It was agreed to cover any further updates in the remaining agenda items.

**Item 6: COVID-19**

Andrew Brown set out a range of challenges faced by the funeral industry and bereaved people due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, the higher death rate, and the upcoming Christmas and New Year holidays.

Andrew stated that this year's Christmas and New Year holidays spanned full weekends, with the recognised holidays being on the Friday/Monday, meaning a full 4 day close down for most Crematoria, Cemeteries, Registrars and Doctor's surgeries. In any other year where the holidays straddled a weekend, there was an increased impact on bereaved families having to wait longer for funerals to take place. But this year posed an extra challenge with additional deaths predicted due to COVID-19 at the same time as the usual seasonal peak. As a result, bereaved families would be impacted as they would have to wait extended periods of time for funerals to take place. These delays would also lead to capacity challenges for Funeral Directors and NHS facilities as they would have to care for deceased people for longer, whilst potentially experiencing a higher than normal death rate.

The Group agreed to write to Robert Swanson, the Inspector of Crematoria, outlining the Group's concerns about the impact of festive holidays on funeral delays. The letter should

include ideas for the Inspector to consider to resolve the situation. It was agreed that the Secretary would liaise with Andrew Brown to collate information needed for the letter. The letter would also be circulated to Cheryl Paris (Scottish Government) when sent to Robert Swanson.

Andrew Brown also identified the need for greater access to modelling and the importance of funeral workers receiving the COVID-19 vaccinations due to the requirement to enter COVID-19 positive environments. Jon Levett supported Andrew's comments and outlined the role of modelling in helping the funeral industry plan ahead.

The Group agreed to raise the need for vaccinations for funeral workers. Richard Lyle MSP recognised the valuable work that funeral directors were doing for Scottish communities and the risks they faced. The Secretary was asked to assist the co-Convenors in drafting suitable questions that could be put to the Scottish Government on the need for funeral workers to be given priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

Jon Levett stated that funeral directors had been using large quantities of PPE to protect their staff and customers from COVID-19, and to comply with government regulations. The UK Government had introduced VAT zero-rating on PPE on 1 May 2020 that helped reduce the financial burden placed on the funeral sector. However, a recent decision by the UK Government to restore VAT to 20 per cent on PPE from 1 November 2020 came at a time when funeral directors were needing to use large quantities of PPE again due to the growing number of deaths now being experienced in the second wave.

Richard Lyle MSP agreed to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to raise the matter and asked the Secretary to draft a letter.

#### **Item 7: CMA Funerals Market Investigation**

Jon Levett outlined the latest developments on the CMA Funerals Market investigation. The Provisional Decision Report (PDR) was published on 13 August 2020 and was followed by the release of nearly two dozen appendices on 17 August 2020. Parties were given until 10 September 2020 to respond to the PDR and its appendices.

In an updated Administrative Timetable, released on 13 August 2020, the CMA set the target date for the Final Report as December 2020. Jon Levett stated it was unclear about the legal basis of the CMA doing a supplementary investigation as set out in the PDR.

John Halliday raised the issue of funeral prices and the impact of COVID-19. A discussion followed on how the cost of PPE and body bags had increased, and the effect this was having on costs as well as the impact of COVID restrictions on the average price of a funeral.

The Group welcomed the CMA's offer to attend a future meeting of the CPG to discuss the Final Report. Richard Lyle MSP noted that due to the change in secretariat support, the NAFD would be arranging the next meeting of the Group and should liaise with the CMA to confirm their attendance when a date had been agreed.

**Item 8: Alternative methods of cremation in Scotland (update from Resomation)**

The Group discussed the answers to two written questions that Jeremy Balfour MSP had tabled since the last meeting of the Group. The two questions focused on the powers of the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 and the position of the Scottish Government on whether Resomation was an environmentally-sustainable end-of-life option.

Sandy Sullivan updated the Group on Resomation's plans in Scotland and how their solution was being used in other countries. Sandy outlined the delays that the Scottish Government's current position could have on the introduction of alternative methods of cremation in Scotland. Jeremy Balfour MSP stated that he would be happy to take this matter up again and Sandy Sullivan agreed to contact him following the meeting.

**Item 9: Future Speakers**

It was agreed to invite a CMA Representative to attend the next meeting of the Group to discuss the CMA's Final Report.

When the focus of meetings was no longer on COVID-19, it was also agreed that the Group would hold a dedicated meeting on financial support for bereaved people on qualifying benefits and alternative models that exist to pay for funerals. The minister Aileen Campbell MSP would be invited and the meeting was likely to happen later in 2021 following the May elections subject to the Group being reformed.

**Item 10: Date of next meeting**

Richard Lyle MSP stated that following the change in secretariat support, the NAFD would be arranging the date of the next Group meeting and he hoped that we could hold one meeting in 2021 prior to the Scottish Parliament's election. Following the election, the Group would need to be re-registered in line with all Cross Party Groups.

Richard thanked David Beamer for his secretariat support for the Group and stated that he hoped David would remain involved with the Group's work and attend the next meeting.

**Item 11: AOB**

Richard Lyle MSP and Jeremy Balfour MSP thanked members for attending the meeting and wished them a peaceful Christmas. Attendees thanked the co-Conveners for all their support and work over the last year.