

Funeral and Bereavement News



Contents

- 03** Foreword
- 06** Bereavement Guide
- 06** Annual Report and Launch Event
- 08** Media Update
- 10** Member Spotlight
- 11** Member Update
- 12** Behind the Scenes
- 13** News in Brief
- 14** Looking Forward

Foreword



Sir John Hayes MP

I am delighted to welcome you to the second edition of Funeral and Bereavement News. This month we look back at the recent success of both the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement and the Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG). This Newsletter celebrates our recent accomplishments, highlights member activity, and outlines upcoming objectives.

Over the past year, the sector has been on the frontline of the Coronavirus pandemic and witnessed first-hand the strain placed on its workers and clients. By working together, we have managed to lift restrictions on mourners and fought diligently to promote the rights of those working in the industry. The group also liaised with 41 Police and Crime Commissioners to avoid Covid fines and held a successful child bereavement roundtable.

We have also published our inaugural annual report. The report brings together the peak organisations in the sector to explore the bereavement process and examine the sector's response to the pandemic. It also shows how the sector is focusing on the development of its people, through a raft of training opportunities, how it is adapting to a changing regulatory climate, and how it is using new technologies to advance its green credentials. The report and corresponding parliamentary event have served to open a relationship with my colleagues and a platform from which to launch further objectives.

I am incredibly proud of the changes we have achieved together, and I look forward to our upcoming campaigns. By keeping the bereavement and funeral sector on the government's agenda we have successfully established DMAG as the go-to authority on matters of bereavement. Having circulated our bereavement guide, published the annual report and through the submission of parliamentary questions, many of my colleagues have approached the APPG and DMAG for assistance.

On top of this, I took part in a Westminster Hall debate on: Regulation of the provision of funeral director services. I mentioned that the sector was working towards better regulation and that sector responsibility straddled multiple departments, therefore the creation of a cross departmental working group would be beneficial to the groups objectives.

I would urge all Parliamentarians to take an active interest in finding out more about the numerous issues facing the sector. I warmly invite you all to join the All-Party Parliamentary Group, which meets on the last Tuesday of each month. We will all at some point in our lives need to call upon the services of the sector. Ensuring that the sector is rightly celebrated for its work, not just over the last twelve months but for the work it has done and continues to do, will benefit us all.

The Rt Hon. Sir John Hayes CBE MP

Chair of the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement



Fleur Anderson MP (APPG Officer)

I want to start by commending the work of everyone in the funeral and death care sector for adapting to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is such an important sector, providing comfort and security to those dealing with the pain of bereavement. I certainly recognise the considerable contribution made by the industry during this pandemic.

In my local authority area of Wandsworth, over 500 people have died with COVID listed as a cause on the death certificate. There are now over 160,000 deaths in the UK as a whole.

Last year, nearly 6,000 people had a public health funeral in the UK. Previously known as a pauper's funeral, a public health funeral is a basic ceremony funded by local councils. It is there for people who die without the money to pay for a funeral or for those without any next of kin. That number represents around one in every 100 people who died in our country last year and is an increase of 26% on the previous year.

The findings of a report by Quaker Social Action in July of this year make for a shocking reading. It found that of 27 local authorities investigated, ten were turning people away when they couldn't afford to pay for a funeral. Of 40 local authority websites surveyed, two local authorities indicated that they could cremate someone against their wishes, and 14 had no information available online at all. This is a dereliction of their legal duties, and it is something that I am keen for us to work on in the coming months. I would like to work towards every council offering a very dignified but simply costed and affordable funeral which is easy to find on their website, advertised by and offered in conjunction with one or more local funeral directors.

It is also important that we look at the rising cost of funerals. The average cost of a funeral in the UK has been rising for nearly two decades and now amounts to over £4000. On the 8 April 2020, the value of the capped portion of the Social Fund Funeral Expenses Payment rose from £700 to £1000. This still falls far short of covering the cost of a funeral and, in answer to a written question, I was told that the Government has 'no current plans to increase this'.

Many constituents have contacted me because they are struggling to pay for the funeral of a loved one. Some have had to pay for more than one funeral at once, and others have had to rely on borrowing money from friends and family. This is harder than ever as living costs are rising and many more people are unemployed or in more precarious employment because of the pandemic.

There are few certainties in life but, sadly, that we will lose loved ones and people close to us is one of them. Everyone deserves to be able to grieve in peace, unburdened by additional stresses like worrying about how to pay for a funeral and increasing debt. I am so pleased to be a part of this important APPG. There are many issues that need to be addressed in this area, and I look forward to working with Members to find solutions to these problems

Fleur Anderson

Fleur Anderson MP
(Putney, Roehampton and Southfields)



Dr Lisa Cameron MP (APPG Supporter)

Funerals and Bereavement Group in the House of Commons

Dr Lisa Cameron MP has joined a new group in the House of Commons that has been configured as a result of the pandemic. The APPG for Funerals and Bereavement will play an important role in promoting better regulation in the funeral and bereavement sector.

The groups hard work has achieved some impressive results in recent months, such as lifting restrictions on mourners attending funerals, which has allowed families to grieve in peace and without undue worry.

The sector still faces many challenges in its efforts to better support bereaved families across the UK and Dr Cameron looks forward to supporting the group achieve this goal. She has written to all funeral directors across the constituency to thank them for caring for bereaved families during Covid19 and beyond.

Dr Lisa Cameron MP for East Kilbride Strathaven and Lesmahagow said "Ensuring dignity in dying and bereavement for families is vital, and often staff in this sector were at the frontline of the trauma experienced by so many during the pandemic. I am pleased to join the APPG Funerals and Bereavement to lobby Government for better regulations and support for this crucial sector".

Lisa Cameron

Dr Lisa Cameron MP

*SNP Spokesperson on Mental Health
Chair of the APPG on Health*

Bereavement Guide for Parliamentarians

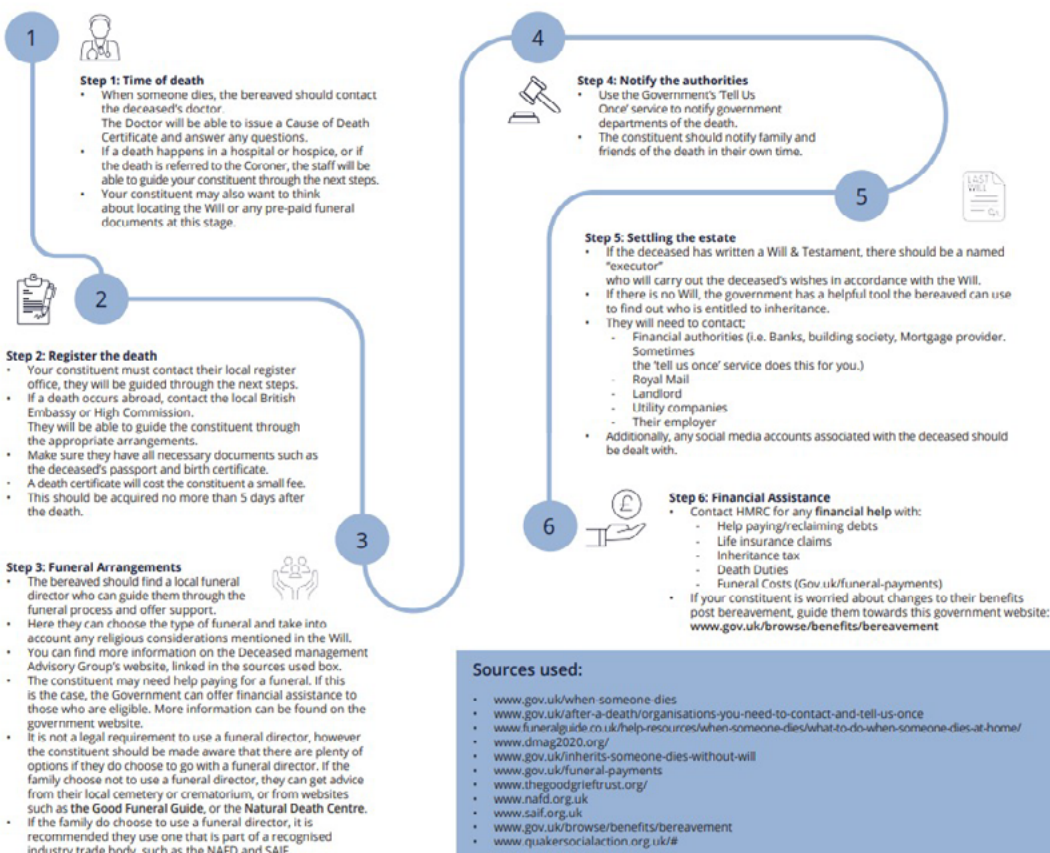
Introduction

In the last year we have seen the sorrow of bereavement pushed to the heart of our thoughts. Covid-19 has exacerbated the grieving process and complicated an already complex, challenging matter. As parliamentarians, we often engage constituents when they are most in need or feeling most desperate. This bereavement guide is designed as a very simple supplement for Members to use when required. No bereavement is ever simple or easily reduced to 6 simple steps, however I believe it is important to relay the basic information effectively and accurately.

There is no linear route to escape from grief. Indeed, grieving is a necessary part of coming to terms with loss. Nevertheless, there are a series of essential administrative steps one must take to facilitate the process. This guide is designed to inform parliamentarians of the essential steps and be used as a resource to help constituents as and when it is needed. These steps are not intended to be chronological.



Sir John Hayes MP



Earlier this year we created and distributed the Bereavement Guide for Parliamentarians. The guide acts as a quick reference point for MPs – and their staff – when dealing with constituents who are experiencing a bereavement. Sir John Hayes MP noted the need for an easy-to-follow document which would help guide constituents towards the relevant service.

After being distributed to all 650 MPs, the guide now performs exactly what it was designed to do. DMAG members and their industry expertise played a crucial role in creating this document. Not only has this guide helped support MPs on how to respond to bereavement enquiries, but it has also raised the profile of the APPG and DMAG within parliament.

Annual Report and Event

"The APPGFB annual report offered a valuable insight into this vitally important but at times under-appreciated sector. It has helped my office with our constituency work, especially understanding the sector's challenges over the past year. Regulation of prepaid funeral plans deserves further discussion."

– Mark Garnier MP

"The APPGs annual report and its event was a great opportunity to learn about the sector. The report's information and statistics have been useful with constituency enquiries"

– Office of David Simmonds MP

In September, the APPG launched its inaugural annual report in the House of Commons.

Written in conjunction with the APPG's associate member, DMAG, the annual report looked at the sector's response to COVID-19 and its role as a critical responder. The launch was well-attended by a wide range of stakeholders, including members of DMAG, representatives from faith communities, bereavement charities, and over 22 Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum.

Speaking at the event, the Chair of the APPG, Sir John Hayes CBE MP, thanked those working in the sector for the compassion, dedication, and resilience they have shown over the past eighteen months. Sir John highlighted the incredible response by the sector to the Covid-19 pandemic and went on to discuss the key themes that the APPG will be focusing on throughout the next parliamentary session.

We were joined by James Chorley, the youngest funeral director in the UK, and his mentor Simon Helliard-Moore, at Crescent Funeral Services, who addressed those at the launch and reflected on their experiences throughout the pandemic. James, who was inspired to join the profession to follow in the footsteps of his late father, graduated from the Independent Funeral Director's (IFD) College in 2020.

In addition to setting out the sector's response to Covid-19, the report also explored the urgent need to address outdated legislation and the wider regulatory framework around funerals and deathcare and considered what lessons have been learnt over the last eighteen months.



Media Update




Since March, the APPG has worked tirelessly to apply pressure and achieve change. Engaging with the media has been a crucial element towards achieving this goal. The APPG was able to amplify its voice to bring about changes to restrictions which unfairly impacted the funeral and bereavement sector. Harnessing the power of the national media was one of the pivotal steps taken to improving regulation.

The APPG demonstrated its skill and reach through a coordinated approach to Government and the Daily Mail, calling for the sector to be exempt from vaccine passports. The exemption was granted following Sir John and the APPG's letter to Health Secretary Sajid Javid. This was also featured in the Daily Mail articles – calling for the funeral and bereavement workers to be excluded from any future plans for vaccine passports.

The idea of imposing vaccine passports on pubs is bitterly opposed by many in the hospitality industry.

Pub bosses say the measure is not wanted by drinkers, and warn it would be impractical to staff the doors of venues throughout the day.




© Shutterstock / Syda Productions

Chairman Sir John Hayes urged Mr Javid to recognise the 'unique and vital nature' of funerals and suggested that weddings and baptisms should also be exempt (stock image)

The Mail has called for an urgent review of the cap on mourners as well as for a flow tests to reduce the need for social distancing and for the lifting of all limits open-air services.

It came after the Queen was pictured sadly sitting alone at Prince Philip's funeral.

Tory MP Sir John Hayes, chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement, said the opening up of funerals and other 'sacred' events should take priority over 'recreational' occasions such as sports matches.



Some people have called for the cap of 30 mourners at funerals to be lifted before June

Arguably our most effective media engagement came from the Daily Mail's campaign to lift the 30-person cap on mourners attending funerals. The APPG was able to quickly pivot and galvanise public support, which had been rising since the funeral of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. Images of the Queen sitting alone at the funeral whilst thousands attended football matches, unmasked and without social distancing upset many.

The APPG was able to use this sentiment to great effect, successfully convincing government to abolish the cap on mourners, with Sir John stating that "sacred events" should take precedence over "recreational occasions such as sports matches." This change was estimated to have helped 40,000 bereaved families.

Social Media Update

The APPG maintains its presence on social media and looks to grow its following. The launch of the Annual Report was a great opportunity to engage a wider audience online and promote the groups achievements to date.

Parliamentarians mentioned and tweeted about the APPG and the Annual Report after attending the launch event on 6 September 2021.

Below are posts from MPs websites and Twitter Pages:



Steve Baker MP FRSA @SteveBakerHW · Sep 6
In person meetings are back in Parliament.
Thank you to the @CPRE and the @APPGFB (Funerals and Bereavement) for your annual reports.



3 comments, 2 retweets, 17 likes

Show this thread



David Simmonds MP 20 September
Pleased to meet with constituents at the APPG for Funerals & Bereavement Annual Report launch in Parliament recently. It was a useful meeting and I am grateful for those who took the time to speak with me.



Robert Goodwill MP attended the APPG for Funerals & Bereavement

Monday, 6 September, 2021



On Monday 6th September I attended the APPG for Funerals & Bereavement Annual Report launch. The report examines the sector's work over the past year and highlights how individuals and organisations have responded to the pandemic. Importantly, it examines how the sector is adapting, and how it will continue to do so into the future.

Rt Hon Robert Goodwill MP

Member Spotlight



Cllr David Marren *FBCA President*



The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities was formed in 1924 and represents over 85% of Cremation Authorities across the UK, both local authority and privately owned, along with a number of

Burial Authorities. In a normal year, members of the Federation support around 400,000 funerals, involving 12 million mourners attending crematoria and cemeteries.

As a result of the pandemic during 2020/21, the Federation had to concentrate its resources on support for its members to enable them to continue providing dignified caring services to bereaved families through the most difficult of times; a key priority being the ongoing delivery of training for Crematorium Technicians. As members sought to increase their resilience through training additional staff, the Federation responded by doubling the number of courses available during the pandemic.

As we approach the latter stages of 2021, we are planning for 2022 and shaping the new normal, to enable our members to adjust their services to the changing needs of the bereaved.

We will continue to develop our Crematorium Compliance Inspection scheme, which not only checks statutory administration and cremation equipment, but also looks at the facilities that are important for the bereaved, the chapel/celebration hall, memorialisation, and grounds maintenance. Having inspected more than 60 crematoria in 2021 we will be reviewing the process and introducing an annual report centred on the inspection results.

Awareness of the environment has always been important to members of the Federation because they understand how the bereaved are comforted from well-maintained grounds which reflect on the care and dignity shown to the deceased.

However, with the onset of the climate emergency it is increasingly recognised that a new approach is necessary, one which will enable crematoria to become more sustainable whilst continuing to meet the needs of the bereaved.

In tandem, despite the pandemic, the Federation introduced its Environmental Awareness Report, reviewing 16 areas of crematorium operation which have an impact on the environment. Making individual members aware of their service impact on the environment is the first step in a culture change towards and delivery of a more sustainable service. During 2021, 50 crematoria have been inspected and received an Environmental Awareness Report, details of which will be collated and used for research purposes.

In support of its environmental agenda, the Federation, working with its partner OpusXenta, delivered a series of webinars looking at various aspects of sustainability through the summer of 2021.

In June 2021, the Federation, partnered by the Cremation Society delivered an extremely well attended virtual Joint Conference.

The virtual conference substituting for the annual Cremation and Burial Communication and Education event, which was deferred for a second year because of concerns around Covid-19. Both organisations look forward to a Joint Conference in 2022 at the Hilton at the Ageas Bowl, Southampton 20th – 22nd June 2022.

Throughout the pandemic, the Federation has worked closely with kindred organisations and played a major role in the formation of the Deceased Management Advisory Group and the Environmental Stewardship Group. The Federation will continue to support its members through these organisations and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement.

Member Update



SAIF was established in 1989 in response to a desire among independent funeral directors to belong to a trade association solely dedicated to the needs of smaller, family-run businesses.

What began with a handful of firms in the South East of England has grown to an organisation of some 1,000 companies who,

between them, operate around 2,000 funeral homes the length and breadth of the UK. SAIF membership also extends to supplier businesses, such as coffin makers, digital death care platforms for obituaries and in-memoriam donations, carriage masters, clothing providers and more.

In a fast-changing world, SAIF's core aim is to ensure small businesses are able to thrive and meet a range of evolving challenges, from regulation and personalised funeral trends to the pandemic and the growth of direct cremation. And although people's lives are increasingly managed digitally, SAIF believes that when it comes to bereavement the caring human touch should always trump electronic processes.

It is for this reason SAIF is an enthusiastic partner in the Deceased Management Advisory Group and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement; it's essential that amid an accelerating race to modernise, we don't lose sight of the importance of quality of care for the deceased and family, as well as service and professionalism. Indeed, a motto for SAIF members is "our family, caring for your family".

In the coming years, SAIF will continue to petition for a form of regulation that is sensitive to the needs of small businesses, which conduct nearly 70% of UK funerals, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. The ideal outcome will be a balance

between delivering the highest standards of care and transparency to bereaved people and avoiding a set of rules that add unnecessarily time-consuming processes and costs to businesses or result in unfair competition. Examples here include the need to ensure an alignment between statutory codes of practice across the UK and a requirement for non-affiliated funeral businesses to receive inspections.

SAIF's campaign to shape a new regulatory future that works for all segments of the funeral profession has continued throughout what has undoubtedly been the toughest period in living memory for funeral directors. The coronavirus pandemic has thrown up immense challenges for SAIF members who, like everyone working on the frontline during the emergency, served with dignity and dedication despite risks to themselves. They stepped up for families at their time of need and we should be proud of them.

Gaining access to reliable information was a key issue during the first lockdown. To help independent funeral directors, SAIF launched a Covid-19 bulletin. This covered topics such as coronavirus health and safety advice, changes in regulations affecting public gatherings, and best practice in supporting families. The bulletin proved a huge hit with funeral directors and demonstrated the importance of timely digital communications to SAIF members during a crisis.

Additionally, SAIF launched a UK Contingency Plan to support members in the event that their staff resources were impacted by the four nations' government directives on self-isolation following contact with people with Covid-19.

As the pandemic recedes (albeit slowly), SAIF anticipates fresh challenges and opportunities for independent funeral directors in the coming years. Complying with regulations such as the Competition and Markets Authority Order represent a culture change for the profession and SAIF will continue to engage with the Authority and help businesses understand their legal obligations.

Alongside this, preparations are underway to make SAIF's Quality Assurance programme the most independent level of scrutiny - through certification by an external Government body. This will serve to regulate the quality and standards of SAIF member firms, as well as those businesses that opt to be inspected, demonstrating to consumers that they comply with the SAIF Code of Practice as non-members.

The funeral profession, like other sectors, will also need to play a role in tackling the climate and nature crises. This is likely to result in structural changes in how we use energy, travel to funerals, and ultimately disposal of the dead.

Advances in digital technology are likely to disrupt funerals in the coming decades, with new entrants potentially offering applications that could threaten the direct relationship between the funeral director and their client. This means the business models of today will need to evolve if we are to meet the bereaved families' needs of tomorrow.

One thing's for sure, SAIF will play a leading role in supporting family-run businesses through this extended period of transition, ensuring we don't lose sight of the importance of human-to-human interaction and care at life's most difficult time.

Behind the Scenes

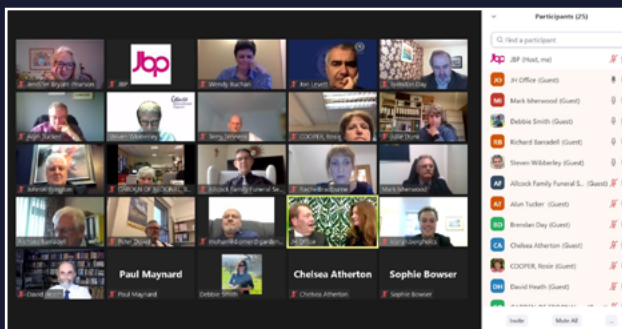
Behind the scenes the JBP team have been working hard to facilitate requests and queries from groups outside the organisation as well as parliamentarians.

We have been approached by MPs such as; Dr Lisa Cameron, Marsha De Cordova and Mark Garnier, regarding information about the funeral and bereavement sector. Additionally, the team are working to use the momentum created by the annual report to engage with new members of parliament who have spoken on bereavements and funerals.

So far, this effort has led to 7 new members joining the group. On top of the day to day running of the APPG the team have been building relationships throughout Westminster, with the hope of fostering good working relationships with MPs offices.



News in Brief



APPG meeting 26th October

On 26 October the group held its monthly APPG meeting. The group was well attended by both members and parliamentarians. Following a brief introduction, Sir John Hayes MP touched on the Group's priorities for the coming 12 months. These include; exploring the reuse of graves in parliament, prepaid funeral plans, the creation of a cross-departmental working group, environmental progress. The Minister for Bereavement, Gillian Keegan MP was also in attendance. Ms Keegan informed the group that she was a newcomer to the bereavement and funeral space and that she was keen to learn and noted that she would come to the APPG for information and resources in the future. We see this as an excellent opportunity to build on and will aid the creation of a cross departmental working group in the near future.

Judicial Review and Courts Bill update

Dominic Raab: *The Bill will streamline procedures in the use of remote hearings in coroners' courts, which will speed up and simplify the inquest process and reduce the distress for bereaved families.*

There have been 2 reports published by Julie Rugg and Sarah Jones who form the University of York's Cemetery Research Group.

The Cemetery Research Group (CRG) at the University of York aims to expand an understanding of current and past burial culture in the UK and internationally, by studying the ways in which social, emotional and religious concerns have interacted with economic and political imperatives to frame burial practice.

You can find both reports below:

[Care of the body in funeral directing services](#)

[Funeral experts by experience: what matters to them](#)

1. Simon Fell MP (Conservative, Barrow and Furness)
2. Paul Maynard MP (Conservative, Blackpool North and Cleveleys)
3. Philip Dunne MP (Conservative, Ludlow)
4. Karin Smyth (Labour, Bristol South)
5. Baroness Finlay of Llandaff
6. Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat, Oxford West)
7. Apsana Begum (Labour, Poplar & Limehouse)

Parliamentary Questions

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he plans to issue exhumation licences to civil service officials. (58295)

Answer:

Tom Pursglove: The Secretary of State has delegated authority to issue exhumation licences, and they are now being issued.

Heather Wheeler joins Government

On behalf of the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement, we would like to extend our thanks to Heather Wheeler MP who has been a vocal and committed member of our Group.



Heather has now been given ministerial responsibilities and can therefore no longer remain a member of any APPG. In her new role as Assistant Whip, she has already helped the Group by sending a letter to Steve Barclay MP in the Cabinet Office inviting him to our November APPG meeting and outlining the groups objectives.

The next APPG meeting will take place on the **30th November** at **5pm** and will be via Zoom.

Details and an agenda will be circulated in due course.

Looking Forward

In the next twelve months the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement and DMAG have an ambitious plan to build on its success over the past year. This will involve working with government on lessons learned, driving forward its policy objectives and growing its reach in Parliament.

Re-use of Graves

The sector is aware of the acute lack of burial space, particularly within urban areas. Exploring solutions, such as the reuse of graves, will be examined throughout the coming year.

Prepaid funeral plans

Beginning in July 2022, companies who sell prepaid funeral plans will have to register with the FCA. DMAG is concerned consumers will be adversely affected, and it will work with government and the FCA to highlight the reputational risk caused by firms who do not register with the FCA.

Establishment of a cross-departmental working group

The Death Management Programme, created during the pandemic, fortified links between the sector and government. Building on this cooperation, the sector wants these links to be strengthened further through the establishment of a cross departmental working group. This will help the sector to better work with government departments ensuring a coordinated voice across Whitehall.

Once established it is hoped that the group will be able to host a ministerial/departmental roundtable to discuss suggestions and improvements to the sector and its methods of working.

Environmental progress

Environmental practices, as seen at Redditch Crematorium's successful project, should provide a benchmark for the sector going forward. DMAG will ensure Parliamentarians are aware of these practices and encourage these projects in their constituencies.

Further examples include the electrification of hearses and the reduction in the use of harmful chemicals when embalming.

National Resilience Strategy Consultation, CCA, Competition Markets Authority

Responding to the National Resilience Strategy Consultation. It is important to recognise the sector's work in ensuring the UK is resilient to future threats and is included within flexible response structures.

Gaining recognition as Category 2 Responders would prevent many issues faced by the sector over the past year from reoccurring. Most notably, this recognition would have provided the sector with adequate PPE during the outbreak of the pandemic, access to vaccinations in higher priority groups and free coronavirus testing kits. As the UK emerges into the 'new normal', ensuring timely access to booster vaccine doses and free testing kits is key to ensuring the sector can continue to perform its vital work.



Westminster Hall Debate



On 17 November there was a Westminster Hall debate on the regulation of the provision of funeral director services. The debate was tabled by Jake Berry MP after receiving a concerning letter from a constituent, regarding an incident at a burial site. The main sentiment of the debate was the need for better regulation in the funeral sector, to stop rogue operators from providing a sub-optimal service to consumers. The incident in Jake's constituency of Darwen, where the lowering straps snapped exposing the deceased, highlighted the need for better regulation. It was noted that the funeral directors in question, KC Funeral Directors, were not a member of either SAIF or the NAFD. All those in attendance agreed that whilst this event was shocking, the majority of providers operate in a safe and highly respectable manner, with Jake Berry and Tom Pursglove highlighting the valiant role providers played during the pandemic.

Sir John Hayes MP attended the debate on behalf of the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement and made the case that the sector was making great strides towards self-regulation. Sir John also used this opportunity to highlight the need for a cross-departmental working group, as many of the sector's responsibilities and assets straddle multiple government departments, making progress towards regulation even more difficult. In his role as chairman of the APPG, Sir John invited Justice Minister Tom Pursglove MP to attend one the APPG meetings to discuss these issues further, which he willingly accepted. When pressed by Sir John, the Minister made it clear that he was in favour of fostering a closer working relationship between government and the deathcare sector. The Minister also confirmed that the Government continue to favour the self-regulation approach rather than statutory government regulation.

The Parliamentarians present were:

- Jim Shannon MP
- Damien Moore MP
- Sir John Hayes MP
- Jake Berry MP
- Julie Marson MP

Sir John Hayes in the House Magazine

“We need a more co-ordinated approach to funeral and bereavement matters”

FUNERAL INDUSTRY



Sir John Hayes
Conservative MP for South Holland and The Deepings
and chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement

We need a more co-ordinated approach to funeral and bereavement policy matters

It's axiomatic that the Covid pandemic has brought pain and fear, heartache and loss. It's meant unexpected challenges for all kinds of people in all kinds of spheres. Placement among those who have died with the worst of Covid's effects, alongside hospital and care workers, has been the funeral and bereavement sector. With this ever in mind, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement has worked hard over the past year to support the sector and ensure its voice is heard at the very heart of government.

Previously, the group has led on a campaign to persuade ministers to remove the arbitrary limit on the number of mourners who could attend funerals. This included other commemorative events during lockdowns, making an easier going ground for an estimated 40,000 families. Furthermore, the group engaged with every Police and Crime Commissioner after reports emerged that funeral directors were being fined for mourners breaking pandemic restrictions, to ensure no one in the sector was penalised for a situation out of their control.

The funeral and deathcare sector approached the challenges of the past 18 months with its customary dedication and commitment. The devotion professionals showed to their communities epitomises the very best of Britain and we should, as a country, thank them for it. Even though the initial shock of the pandemic is behind us, and pressure on the sector has begun to recede, we must maintain our focus on supporting funeral and deathcare workers in communities up and down the country.

As chair of the APPG, I have heard first hand of the work the sector has done over the past year - it has been a privilege to do so. Having gained an understanding of the scale and character of the issues they faced, I encourage all parliamentarians to read the APPG's annual report, published in September, that documents the efforts of the sector since the onset of the pandemic. Looking forward, the APPG has several policy priorities that aim to build on our achievements over the past year.

For too long, the particular responsibilities of separate government departments, with little connection between them, has led to an in-co-ordinated approach to funeral and bereavement policy matters. This has resulted in time-sensitive issues which impact bereaved families not being responded to swiftly. One of our main objectives is to establish a cross-departmental working group that brings together relevant departments to respond to critical needs. This would not only ensure the sector's voice is heard, but also make sure that bereaved families going through some of the most difficult times in their lives continue to receive the support they deserve.

The group is working with its associate members, the Decedent Management Advisory Group (DMAG), an umbrella body comprising the key organisations in the funeral and bereavement sector, to make sure funeral and deathcare managers and workers gain recognition as Category 2 responders within the Civil Contingences Act. This recognition would guarantee that the sector can adequately react to future crises through inclusion in critical responder decisions at local level. We cannot, and must not, return to a situation where those on the frontline meeting emergency needs do not have the equipment needed to secure their personal safety.

These working in the sector will continue to serve communities across the UK. We should, parliamentarians, support them as they continue to support our constituents. Given the nationwide reach of this sector, and its salience to those we represent, the APPG and DMAG welcome the participation of colleagues in all we are trying to achieve.

The funeral, bereavement and deathcare sector comprising well-regarded businesses across the country, is vital to our constituents in their time of need. I invite interested colleagues to join the APPG. To find out more about our work, and of the sector more widely, please do visit www.appgfunerals.co.uk.

34 | The House Magazine | 15 November 2021



Join the APPG today
www.appgfunerals.co.uk



The All-Party Parliamentary Group for
Funerals and Bereavement