

Deceased Management Advisory Group

UPDATE 24th APRIL 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference on 24th April 2020, with a representative from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) present for the first part of the meeting.

1. MINISTRY OF JUSTICE UPDATE

The MoJ asked DMAG if more evidence could be provided on the financial stability/vulnerability of the sector. The NAFD has asked consultants to examine the issue in greater depth. For smaller, independent funeral businesses, continuous very close monitoring is required as some pressures, eg cash flow, are beginning to come to the fore.

The CMA investigation into the funeral sector is currently suspended, and their findings to date are based on 2018 data. DMAG feel that they will need to re-visit their conclusions as well as taking the significant trends which appear to be gathering momentum throughout the sector into greater account, when they resume their study.

The MoJ asked DMAG about their view on funeral capacity. Although there were a few 'hotspots' where demand was high, research showed that crematoria capacity was generally good. The Sunday Times had asked for comments about capacity and this was reported to them, including thanks to families and funeral directors for making arrangements as quickly as possible to help with the flow of ceremonies.

The lack of detailed modelling data makes it difficult to forecast the position going forward. It was acknowledged that in some areas, one crematorium may be being favoured over others due to policies such as numbers allowed to attend. This could give a skewed picture of overall capacity in some areas, and could mean a longer waiting time for some families.



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DMAG informed the MoJ that a revised policy on the retention of ashes is due to be published. The advice was initially drafted to help reassure bereaved families that ashes would be suitably stored and cared for where it was not possible for them to be collected due to social distancing restrictions. The policy acknowledges that there could be a significant benefit to bereaved families to have the ashes so wherever possible arrangements should be made to accommodate this.

DMAG informed the MoJ that many cemeteries and crematoria grounds were now being opened following the amended regulations. Some cemeteries were remaining closed during working hours to allow gravedigging and funerals to take place unimpeded, but were opening in the late afternoon/evening. DMAG warned that there could be issues with people using cemeteries for reasons other than paying respects or taking appropriate exercise, and that burial authorities retain the right to close them in such circumstances.

2. GOVERNMENT BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT LEAFLET

The Bereavement Support leaflet issued by the Government was discussed. It was unclear which department it had been issued by. Further discussion will be held next week when colleagues from the DHSC can join a meeting.

3. STATUS OF COVID 19 ON THE MCCD

There is some confusion as to whether Covid-19 can appear in its own right as a cause of death on the MCCD. The MoJ undertook to find a definitive answer and will report back to a future DMAG meeting.

4. NOTES - MINUTES / MATTERS ARISING

JB reminded that the Group that it would be very helpful if comments on the new Government Web -page for the public looking for information on funerals could be received by close of business on Monday 27th April - especially on issues such as the order of the information, user friendliness of the site and the need or otherwise for more explanatory text.



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It was confirmed that a representative from MHCLG would be able to attend Monday's meeting.

Letters from DMAG to the Mayor of London and to the West Midlands LRF regarding PMART have been sent.

Information on the additional spend funerals directors have faced in purchasing PPE is being gathered.

5. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS WITH CABINET OFFICE / SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

A guidance note on coffins and contents is being prepared and will be circulated to DMAG for approval before being released.

DMAG will provide quantified and qualified information to the Cabinet Office wherever possible, and will continue to press for responses to questions DMAG has posed.

DMAG believe that overall, the sector is coping well and that there needs to be more emphasis on the positive aspects of the situation.

The following matters are to be raised with MHCLG when they attend the meeting on Monday:

- That the lead time for funerals is to be defined as being as from the date of collection of the deceased to the date of the funeral.
- The supply of PPE by LRFs to the funeral sector.
- How funeral directors can access temporary mortuary capacity
- The current position on the BMA and GRO differing advice on the MCCD?
- PMART activities and current status.

6. DMAG - FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS



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DMAG agreed that from week commencing 27th April, video meetings would be held on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday each week, but that additional meetings would be held if an urgent need arose.

7. AOB – ROUND ROBIN

The issue of radioactive implants was discussed. It was agreed that the situation would be monitored.



FBCA
Federation of Burial
& Cremation Authorities



ICCM
Institute of Cemetery and
Crematorium Management

