

Deceased Management Advisory Group

DMAG Update 3rd June 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference on 3rd June 2020, with representatives from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Scottish and Northern Ireland governments present for the open part of the meeting. APCC chaired the meeting.

1. Ministry of Justice update

The MOJ are still trying to identify the relevant contact from the MHCLG Taskforce so that they can be invited to a DMAG meeting to discuss the re-opening of places of worship.

The MOJ, as requested, had been in touch with the CMA who had stated that the date of 12th June was the final day for the submission of working papers and that of 19th June for registering the implications for the sector as a result of Covid19. It was also clearly stated that there would be plenty of opportunity to submit further evidence and for individual organisations to request a meeting with the CMA following the publication of their provisional report. It was recommended that enquiries be channelled through Nicola Brown.

The matter of the next scheduled meeting of the Burial and Cremation Advisory Group (BCAG), which would normally take place in late June or July, was raised and apologies were given for the delay in issuing the minutes of the previous meeting held in January, which were now receiving a final check prior to issue. It is suggested that a video meeting be held in either July or September and those present were asked if they thought this was a feasible proposition and if so to submit items for the agenda. The ICCM commented that it could work if there was a strong chairperson in place. APCC felt that it would be a good opportunity for the MOJ to update members on the status and proposed forward programme for all the major initiatives currently in progress or under consideration.

SAIF asked if there had been any progress on the subject on how paper copies of Form 4 should be handled if they were in the hands of a third party as opposed to being lodged with the cremation authority. The MOJ responded that they were currently taking advice from their lawyers on the matter.



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ICCM asked if there had been progress on such matters as the scattering of ashes and the FBCA said that a number of local authorities were considering allowing these events to take place again and that the revised guidance appeared to adopt the line that gatherings of groups of up to 6 people were allowable unless they breached specific exclusion requirements. The MOJ responded that this would seem to be a step too far in relation to the guidance easing certain aspects of the lockdown such as attendance at funerals. APCC stated there seem to be a need for greater clarity on such matters and asked the MOJ if it would help them if the subject was raised at the meeting with the Cabinet Office tomorrow. The MOJ agreed to pursue the matter further and asked that any approach to the Cabinet Office be delayed until next week which was agreed by all those present.

2. Scottish Government - Easing Lockdown

Their PPE measures in terms of the supply of PPE appeared to be going well and supplies were now generally available. Receipt of the Body Bag guidance was gratefully received. Advice in relation to funerals was being re-iterated, including advice on the use of face covers. The advice was being shown on their Twitter account and it emphasised that attendees at funerals should be kept to a minimum.

Guidance for funerals, cremation and burials will be refined over the next couple of weeks but this is very much a tidying up of language etc. and no significant changes are anticipated. A 'Frequently Asked Questions' briefing note is being prepared. It was pointed that there was no legal requirement for places of worship to be closed, the decision to hold funeral ceremonies was down to those responsible for individual sites but the majority of venues had decided to remain closed to date. It was advised that the 'Additional Deaths Oversight Group' which had representation from all parts of the sector were reducing the frequency of their meetings progressively from once a week to once a fortnight and then one every 4 weeks. Consideration is being given to forming smaller but more localised groups.

SAIF asked how the easing of the lockdown was likely to apply to the re-opening of places of worship. Revised advice should be available within 2 weeks and will include encouragement for digital services. While there is no legal requirement in relation to the maximum number of mourners who can attend a funeral, attendees should be within the definition of 'close family'



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although this is not precisely defined. SAIF made the point that needed to be at least 2 weeks' notice given of venues re-opening and their approach should be consistent with the restrictions currently being followed by crematoria and cemeteries. In response to SAIF's question on progress with 'Trace and Project', it was advised that no further information was available at present.

One of the two representatives attending for Scottish government announced this was likely to be her last appearance at DMAG meetings as her colleague who usually attended such events was returning to her usual duties next week. All those present thanked her for her very positive contributions and input together with the energy and enthusiasm with which they had been presented.

3. Northern Ireland Government – Easing Lockdown

Current status was described as similar to that for Scotland. However, there had been a review of the guidance, in which funeral directors and faith groups had been closely involved, over last two weeks. The shorter lead time in normal circumstances between death and the funeral, which was usually within a 2 to 5 day window, meant that the body is frequently taken home in the interim but this practice had been suspended for the duration of the pandemic and most funeral directors had accepted and abided by this requirement. However, as the situation eased there were growing signs of a minority of funeral directors offering to take the deceased home thereby effectively removing the business from their competitors by not adhering to the rules and this is becoming an increasing problem.

Churches were not legally bound to close but most had done so. There was currently no scattering of ashes taking place and while there was no statutory maximum on the number of mourners attending a funeral, the usual practice had been a maximum of 10. However, as restrictions eased and groups of up to 6 persons were allowed this number has increased to an average of 30 attendees. Also, a rise in what might be termed 'para-military' type funerals made it impossible, in practical terms, to enforce the regulations.

A question was asked in respect of the usual practices in relation to viewing the deceased in mainland U.K. SAIF responded by stating that normally the deceased were viewed in the funeral director's Chapel of Rest and provided social distancing requirements could be adhered to, which is not always



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possible for the smallest chapels, the practice could continue but if there was to be any contact with the body than masks should be worn. In terms of developing a 'Track and Trace' system, it was likely that any digital system would be linked to the Republic of Ireland rather than to the UK mainland and that there were no plans to develop an 'App' at this stage.

DMAG Meeting

At this point the Chairman could only get very intermittent contact with the meeting and asked the FFMA if they would kindly take over as he had no choice but to leave the meeting and now gives his apologies on behalf of BT and Kingston Communications.

It is understood that no additional information was received, or comments made in relation to the three agenda items, namely:

1. Items for future meetings with Cabinet Office/Scottish Government
2. Revision to regulations
3. AOB Round robin



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