

# Deceased Management Advisory Group

## UPDATE 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020, with representatives from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) present for the open part of the meeting.

### 1. MINISTRY OF JUSTICE UPDATE

MoJ agreed to follow up the enquiry raised by APCC at last Thursday's meeting as to whether any research had been undertaken or was planned to be carried out into the potential for using biodegradable plastics for the importation or exportation of bodies under the Transfer of Corpses Legislation of 1973, to which it had been previously noted that the UK is not a signatory. ICCM said that they had a somewhat faint memory that several years ago a 'shrink wrapped' product had been developed for babies and APCC said that they thought that this might be correct but they could not recall any precise details in relation to it. The FFMA stated that all the legal and guidance requirements their members adhered to were in relation to the use of zinc lined coffins.

### 2. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT UPDATE

As it was a public holiday in Scotland, their representative was not available to attend. NAFD are to ascertain if they will be able to join Thursday's meeting.

### 3. MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The representative from MHCLG stated the Guidance on Public Health Funerals, developed in June, had now been published and thanked those members of the group who had assisted with this process. ICCM commented that they had included the Guidance in recent training courses and had now circulated it to members. MHCLG welcomed these initiatives and made it clear that further comments and feedback would be gratefully received, particularly as in reality they had not really had an effective template to work to, because under the Public Health (Control of Disease)



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Act 1984, individual authorities had very much 'done their own thing' and ICCM agreed that this had certainly been the case. However, one somewhat negative outcome from the publication of the Guidance had been the attention it had attracted from the press, who had been inclined to present it as an entitlement/benefit, for which other specific welfare payments are available, rather than the solution of last resort it in fact is.

The NAFD enquired what measures MHCLG were taking in relation to LRFs and the second wave particularly in terms of 'Death Management' and applying 'lessons learned'. The representative undertook to investigate the current position and to report back to the group and the APCC Chair made it clear that they would be most welcome to attend future meetings of the group.

During this part of the meeting, it became clear that emails between members of the group and officials frequently went into 'Junk Mail' for both parties, which all parties needed to be aware of.

### DMAG CLOSED MEETING

#### 1. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The FFMA, who had chaired the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> September had experienced a total loss of all connections to the internet during the meeting and had to re-connect by phone. While draft notes of the meeting had been issued, their representative made it clear that a minor amendment put forward by APCC had yet to be included and that an email had been sent to DHSC whose attendee had given a detailed report, asking for a summary of the main points as it had not been possible to hear their full report. Therefore, final notes would be circulated as soon as possible for approval and publication on the DMAG website.



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### 2. ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS WITH CABINET OFFICE / SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

- a) Exclusion of Death Care Sector Staff from Priority Access to PPE – JL / RB

Concern had been expressed at the previous meeting by some DMAG members who had attended the meeting with the Cabinet Office the same day, in that 'Death Care' sector staff were apparently not to be regarded as 'essential' workers in respect of the supply of PPE within the arrangements being made for the second wave. FBCA expressed concern in respect of 'Death Care' sector staff being given full emergency / essential worker status but it was agreed that it was important to ensure that the sector was regarded as a priority in terms of the supply of PPE, especially as it was clear from the Cabinet Office meeting that there were no 'backstop' stocks at the present time and apparently difficulties were already being experienced again in obtaining particular items, such as face masks and body bags.

SAIF pointed out that it was equally important that 'Death Care' sector staff be treated as a priority in relation to the Test and Trace programme and this was readily accepted by all those present.

- b) Communication of Guidance from PHE – JD / JL

NAFD informed the meeting that an email had been received from the Cabinet Office saying that PHE were having to seek legal advice in relation to their revised guidance, yet to be published, in respect of 'Managing a Funeral' and therefore there would be a further a delay in providing responses to the questions submitted to them prior to last week's meeting. The email has now been forwarded to all DMAG members.

- c) Funeral Attendance Number Table – JL

NAFD hope to be able to circulate the table once all replies and responses have been received from PHE and the Cabinet Office.



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ICCM said that they were not absolutely clear what the true definition of a 'life event' was and therefore, until the revised guidance becomes available, they were advising their members that it was only for the funeral ceremony itself where up to 30 people could attend and all post events such as the scattering and burial of ashes were limited to a maximum of 6 attendees. Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that a funeral ceremony could include a service held at the graveside and therefore have up to 30 attendees although it was not clear cut as to whether any time restrictions might apply.

### 3. AGENDA RESPONSIBILITIES

The question had been asked, in the FBCA's absence at last Thursday's meeting, whether it was fair to expect the FBCA to continue producing the agenda for DMAG meetings; the alternative being for the responsibility to lie with the nominated chairperson for the next meeting. It was agreed to discuss the matter when the FBCA's representative returned from leave, who confirmed that they were happy to continue with the original arrangements for which grateful thanks were expressed.

### 4. AOB ROUND ROBIN

SAIF raised the topic of the future course and impact of the virus but it was felt that although stricter limits on existing restrictions were likely to be imposed in the short term, it was thought if another lockdown was announced, if at all possible, it would not come into effect much before the Autumn half-term holiday towards the end of October.

ICCM asked if there was still thought to be a need for government to provide financial support funeral directors over and above what is available to businesses in other sectors selected for additional financial assistance. While the multiple groups have already announced their intention not to seek such assistance, it is a very different picture for smaller independent organisations who have already faced an estimated reduction in revenue of around £500 per funeral and who are likely to face a very significant reduction in the volume of funerals after the pandemic ends. However, it was pointed out that many of these businesses have received, along with many others in other sectors, financial assistance based on the level of business rates they pay and therefore it is important that these amounts



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are accounted for when assessing the 'net' situation for the individual business.

FFMA reported that many coffin manufacturers were very quiet at present and were beginning to manufacture for stock which given the very wide scope of choice for the bereaved, is no easy task.

The Cremation Society had received an enquiry from a funeral director who been appointed by their local council to carry out Public Health funerals and as part of the equipment supplied had received visors and were asking if they gave the same protection as face masks. It was thought that while both helped protect the wearer, greater protection came from face masks provided that were of at least a group 2 specification when handling deceased bodies.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> September at 4 pm and will be chaired by the FBCA.



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