

# Deceased Management Advisory Group

## UPDATE 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020, with representatives from the Welsh, Northern Irish, Scottish Governments and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) present for the open part of the meeting.

### 1. Welsh Government Update

It was reported that changes in the regulations, similar to those recently put in place in England had been made, whereby those who had tested positive for Covid 19 or were showing symptoms could legally insist on attending the funeral of a close relative in order to avoid infringement of Section 8 of the Human Rights Act. The attending representative had been given the responsibility for drafting appropriate guidance. APCC recounted how DMAG had written to the Cabinet Office Minister and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and that a response had been received from the Minister of State for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health. The prime outcome had been a strengthening of the latest version of the Guidance issued on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. The FBCA and the ICCM suggested that contact be made with Alice Stell from the Cabinet Office and from Public Health England in order to elicit further support for the task. It was noted that there was no change in the number of mourners allowed to attend the funeral, namely 20 inside the venue and 20 outside.

### 2. Responsibility for Enforcing Funeral Restrictions

The NAFD reported that one of their members had experienced some 500 people turning up at a funeral, despite having fully informed those arranging it of the current restrictions. As a result, the funeral director had been interviewed by the police under caution and warned that they might face prosecution. The NAFD had written to the Chief Constable concerned and the College of Policing to express their considerable disquiet over the matter but responses were still awaited. It was generally agreed that as the funeral directors had carried out their responsibilities in full, which seemed to be the case here, then the police's action was wholly inappropriate as the funeral directors are not responsible for enforcing public order. The Cremation Society pointed out that attendees had an individual responsibility to behave in an orderly manner within the law and the



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operators of the site were duty bound to try and maintain order and APCC stated that they were also ultimately responsible for the health and safety compliance of the site. All the organisations expressed their support for the NAFD in this matter. The MoJ undertook to take the matter up with the Cabinet Office and PHE.

### 3. Booking Portal – Dashboard Information Required

The FBCA felt that greater clarity was required from government on what information they required from the dashboard. The representative of the Scottish reported that we were developing a similar system in conjunction with their 'Resilience Colleagues'. Information was already being gathered on a weekly basis from a Mortician's dashboard. The MoJ is to consult with the appropriate agencies in England. It was agreed that the NAFD would alert the Cabinet Office and PHE so the matter can be progressed prior to the next meeting where hopefully it can be discussed further.

### 4. Competition and Markets Authority

APCC reported that an acknowledgement of receipt of the 'Tracking of Average Moving Trends' document had been received from the CMA. It was agreed that APCC would ask the CMA to give us their thoughts on the document well before the publication of their final report.

### 5. Northern Ireland Government Update

It was stated that the current restrictions were due to expire within the next 24 hours and although it was thought likely that they would remain in force, no details had been announced so far. In relation to attendance at funerals it was not presently clear if the current permitted maximum of 25 attendees would remain in place or whether there would be a reversion to basing the limit on the socially distanced capacity of the venue. The NAFD asked why Northern Ireland were not following PHE's guidance on viewing of the deceased as viewing is not permitted in the province. It was stated that nearly all funerals in Northern Ireland were carried out within 72 hours of the death and more usually between 24 and 48 hours, when the risk of infection was thought to be at its highest level which is why the use of body bags is mandatory.



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## 6. Ministry of Justice Update

SAIF asked if it was known how doctors were viewing the revised arrangements in relation to the medical certificate as it appeared that doctors were increasingly relying on funeral directors to contact the crematorium / medical referees in relation to incorrectly completed forms which were marked for referral back to the surgery, which would not seem to be a correct procedure. In addition the FBCA and ICCM had been requested to ask the MoJ if, because doctors signing Form 4 do not necessarily need to have seen the deceased after death, that the doctor completing the form could be required to state who verified the death / life extinct . The MoJ undertook to progress these matters.

The ICCM asked if further information was now available as to whether Memorial Masons could continue to erect memorials and/or remove them for added inscriptions etc. given that apart from funeral services cemeteries were meant to be closed. In general terms and provided such work was carried out in 'Covid' safe manner, the MoJ did not see why such activities could not continue. The ICCM, fully supported by their fellow DMAG members, stressed that given the run up to Christmas was usually Memorial Masons busiest time of year that this matter be resolved as soon as possible so if necessary, the regulations could be modified to allow Masons to enter and work in cemeteries while they still remained closed to the public. The MoJ agreed to pursue the matter urgently.

The Cremation Society confirmed that, to the best of their knowledge, memorial work was continuing in churchyards.

## 7. Scottish Government Update

It was reported that a decision was still awaited as to whether someone diagnosed with Covid 19 or showing the symptoms for it, could attend the funeral of a close family member. It should also be noted that in relation to the number of attendees allowed to attend a funeral, this was stated within the relevant Guidance as opposed to being embedded in legislation.



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## DMAG CLOSED MEETING

### 1. NOTES/MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The meeting held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November had been a strategy workshop for DMAG conducted by JBP associates and their notes of the session were approved by all those present.

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

It was agreed that the NAFD would inform the Cabinet Office and representatives from the devolved administrations that in future the Cremation Society would be represented by Colin Rickman, a member of the Council of the Cremation Society of Great Britain, at meetings with Cabinet Office and all DMAG related meetings.

### 3. NATIONAL BOOKING PORTAL

The ICCM expressed concern in relation to the possibility of double entry and related problems if dual systems existed as seemed likely to be the case in Scotland. It is important that there is continuity in relation to lead times and defining hotspots. Basing their view on practices used in other sectors, APCC suggested that a benchmark of 80% of capacity be used and this was agreed as a starting point.

Although it had been agreed in the Open Meeting that initially the Cabinet Office be asked to specify their requirements for the Dashboard, it was thought that it might expedite the process if DMAG set out the specific outcomes required and this was agreed. Members were asked to submit their thoughts as soon as possible. A letter had been received from the IT suppliers to the sector expressing concern over the Opus Xenta Booking Portal. The FBCA and the ICCM agreed to draft a response, and to produce a specification of what data is required for approval by the various Governments.



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## 4. AOB ROUND ROBIN

There being no further matters arising, the meeting closed at 17.28 hours.  
The next meeting will be chaired by the FBCA.



**FBCA**  
Federation of Burial  
& Cremation Authorities



**The Cremation Society**