

Deceased Management Advisory Group

Update 3rd December 2020

The members of DMAG held a video conference on the 3rd December, with representatives from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and Welsh Government (SC). Apologies were received from the FBCA. FFMA chaired the meeting.

DMAG Wider Consultation

1. Ministry of Justice update.

MOJ provided a comprehensive update as follows:

- Coroners : Coroners are actually under a statutory duty (regulation 4 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013) to be “available at all times to address matters relating to an investigation into a death which must be dealt with immediately and cannot wait until the next working day”: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/1629/contents/made>

Whilst this could be strictly interpreted to include only matters such as organ donation, in practice coroners will be on duty 24/7 either themselves or on a rota with their coroner team (of assistant coroners, and in an increasing number of coroner areas, area coroners).

- From GRO re death registration:

Delivery of registration services during the Christmas and New Year period (including staffing and opening hours) is the responsibility of each local authority in England and Wales and may vary. To ensure the death management process is not impacted by any local authority office closures over the holiday period GRO have issued a ‘Winter 2020 – Pandemic Good Practice Guide’ that outlines how each registration service should consider its service offering during those periods. This includes advice on:

- *Service managers should engage with the Local Authority around any proposed extended office closures during the Christmas/New Year period to ensure there is accommodation available for the continuation of death registration services. This will be crucial in ensuring there are no delays introduced into the death management system at a local level and support the work of the Local Resilience Forum in ensuring bodies can be moved quickly to support local mortuary capacity demands.*
- *Consideration should be given to the level of staffing during the Christmas/New Year periods when peak seasonal death volumes across the Bank Holiday Periods traditionally impact services. Consideration should also strongly be given to weekend opening between any Bank Holiday closures to ensure backlogs of death registrations do not accumulate.*

Where GRO become aware that register offices are being forced to close over the Christmas period due to wider local authority instruction we are advising affected services to ensure adequate staffing is in place during the period to undertake remote death registrations by telephone.



Deceased Management

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- The CMA report is due to be published before Christmas but we do not have a date yet. We are currently considering the options based upon the provisional report. As part of the options consideration, MOJ is likely to contact DMAG for further assistance and views. MOJ will also work with the devolved administrations since the issues are devolved.
- Re visits to funeral homes under the new tier system –
Funeral homes are permitted to remain open within all local restriction tiers. However, we would recommend that businesses make arrangements with customers over the phone where appropriate to limit the risk of transmission.
- Large crowds attending funerals -

It is a legal requirement for venue managers to take all necessary steps as required under a Covid19 risk assessment. They are also required to take necessary steps to limit the risk of transmission, for example, reminding attendees during the planning process and on arrival of the need to limit attendance within permitted numbers. Ultimately, the police have formal enforcement powers and can issue a fine to those not adhering to gathering limits or rules on wearing a face covering. If appropriate, the funeral director may want to work proactively with local law enforcement if they are concerned that there may be high turnout at a funeral.

2. Wales Government

SC reported the new Guidance had been approved and was awaiting translation after which it will be circulated. Greater emphasis is being placed on anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and wishes to attend a funeral to inform all involved parties.

Those attending funeral services should not sing in a choir unless adequate screens are in place between each singer.

In response to a question from SAIF, SC replied that there were no details available on crematorium opening hours over the forthcoming holiday but enquiries will be made.



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DMAG Closed Meeting

1. Notes from previous meeting.

These were agreed and will be placed on the DMAG website.

2. Items for future meetings with Cabinet Office/Devolved Governments.

No new items were brought forward but the matter of crematoria availability, raised at this morning's Cabinet Office meeting, was discussed. There seems to be a reluctance in some areas for families to hold funerals at the extremities of the day which causes some build up in capacity. FFMA commented that funerals late in the day when light was fading were not unusual. ICCM mentioned that some crematoria have installed suitable lighting to assist with late afternoon funerals.

3. CMA Report pending

Both NAFD and SAIF had received some draft reports to gauge their accuracy. Full report is expected later this month.

4. APPG on Funerals

A review of Tuesday's inaugural meeting of the re-formed APPG on Funerals and Bereavement was discussed. There were some teething problems to iron out but, in general, feedback was positive. It was agreed that greater participation from MPs from all parties was required. The new APPG website was reviewed. DMAG members look forward to a strategy meeting on the way forward for the Group which is being held at 12noon on Monday 14th December.

5. AOB Round Robin.

APCC to chair the next meeting – Monday 7th December 2020.

