

# CPG for Funerals and Bereavement

7 November 2017  
Committee Room 6

## ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES

### In attendance:

Fulton MacGregor MSP (Co-Convener)	Rose Jackson
Miles Briggs MSP	Gerard Boyle
Gordon Swan	Paul Cuthell
James Blackburn	John Birrell
Ruth Mendel	David Beamer (Secretary)
Allan Stubbs	

### Item 1: Apologies

Jeremy Balfour MSP	John Williamson
Alex Rowley MSP	Nigel Lymn Rose
Stuart McMillan MSP	Ann McMurray
Willie Coffey MSP	Stewart Wilson
Johann Lamont MSP	Mark Hazelwood
Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP	Rebecca Paterson
Pauline McNeill MSP	James Morris
Erik Cramb	Devin Scobie
Mandie Lavin	

### Item 2: Approval of the minutes from the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

### Item 3: Election of Officers

The following officers were elected:

- Fulton MacGregor MSP (Co-Convener)
- Jeremy Balfour MSP (Co-Convener)
- David Beamer (Secretary)

### Item 4: Group Membership

A discussion was held about Group membership. Fulton MacGregor stated that he was keen to get more MSPs involved. Miles Briggs stated that there were many CPGs in existence and many

meetings clashed which limited attendance but there was in interest in the issues the Group examined.

There was then a discussion about non-MSP membership. Fulton MacGregor stated he was open to other organisations joining the Group including a representative from SAIF and more bereavement charities. Interested individuals should contact his office to request attendance at future meetings.

**Item 5: Update**

Fulton MacGregor requested that Natalie McKail, the Inspector of Funeral Directors, should be provided with questions in advance of her attendance at the next meeting of the Group.

**Item 6: The Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act and its implementation**

A discussion was held by the Group on the latest developments concerning the Act and its implementation. The powers of the Inspector of Funeral Directors were examined. There was then a discussion about the impact on bereaved families and a funeral director's business if a funeral director was forced to close without notice.

A number of funeral directors present stated that they had met with Natalie McKail and valued the opportunity to discuss in detail their work.

It was agreed that the attendance of Natalie McKail at the next Group meeting would be highly beneficial and could explore the powers of the Inspector and her focus. The Secretary was asked to liaise with the Inspector and seeks questions in advance from Group members that could be provided prior to the meeting. It was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Minister following Natalie McKail's attendance to address any issues not covered at the meeting.

**Item 7: Funeral Poverty / funeral affordability (including Local Authority charges)**

Ruth Mendel outlined the work of Citizens Advice Scotland including its annual report and the variation in pricing of local authority charges.

A discussion was then held on local authority charges and the reasons for recent increases. Allan Stubbs outlined his experiences as a Councillor and stated he would be happy to raise the CAS' analysis with North Lanarkshire council.

John Birrell outlined the work of the Scottish Working Group. He examined local authority charges and the reasons given by some local authorities for increasing prices. He also provided an update on progress with the ten point Funeral Costs Plan. Mr Birrell reviewed a recent benchmarking initiative to monitor local authority charges. Fulton MacGregor outlined the work of Alex Neil MSP and Alex Rowley MSP in this area and stated that he was keen for them to get involved in the Group's work.

Gerry Boyle raised a recent advert for a direct cremation funded by a social enterprise. Fulton MacGregor stated that there were strict rules for social enterprises and he would seek to find out more information.

**Item 8: Social Fund Funeral Payment devolution**

Rose Jackson outlined the work of Quaker Social Action and their campaign to increase the social fund funeral payment. John Birrell stated that the Funeral Poverty Alliance had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer with their demands.

The Working Group had also written to the Scottish Government on the need for the social fund to reflect the cost of funerals today and that the amount for “other funeral expenses” should rise with CPI every year. CPG members in attendance supported this position.

It was agreed to write a letter to the Scottish Government to request the attendance of the Minister for Social Security to a meeting of the Group and outline the support of the Group to increase the level of the “other funeral expenses” element and index link it with inflation.

**Item 9: Registrar Closures**

Paul Cuthell raised the impact on bereaved families of registrar closures and those that were now working on reduced hours. Mr Cuthell stated that we was aware of concerns raised by Funeral Directors across Scotland.

Gerry Boyle stated that delays due to registrar availability were increasing the time between death and a funeral. Other funeral directors present also acknowledged the additional days now being added as a result of registrar related delays.

Gerry Boyle also reported that there was concerns about the availability of grave digging teams.

Fulton MacGregor asked for a letter to be sent to COSLA to raise the Group’s concerns and request their attendance at a future meeting of the Group. Following attendance from COSLA, letters could then be sent to the relevant officers and cc’d to Council Group leaders to bring attention to the Group’s concerns / recommended actions.

**Item 10: Local Authorities insisting on Form 14**

It was agreed to raise this matter with COSLA.

**Item 11: Future Meeting Topics**

It was agreed that dates would be set for 2018 and a speaker sought for every meeting.

**Item 12:        Date of next meeting**

To be confirmed.

**Item 13:        AOB**

James Blackburn updated the Group on progress with regard to addressing concerns about the mortuary in Edinburgh.