

**CPG for Funerals and Bereavement**  
**29<sup>th</sup> October 2013**  
**Annual Meeting Minutes**

**In Attendance:**

Stuart McMillan MSP  
Nanette Milne MSP  
Fiona McLeod MSP  
James Blackburn  
Alan Slater  
Dom Maguire  
Nigel Lymn Rose  
Gerard Boyle  
John Birrell

Alan Fraser  
Brian Gegan  
Graeme Brown  
Ann McMurray  
Cathy Dunlop  
Paul Cuthell  
David Beamer (Secretary)

**Item 1: Apologies**

Bob Doris MSP  
Malcolm Chisholm MSP  
Mark Hazelwood

**Item 2: Approval of Minutes from the last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

**Item 3: Approval of Minutes from the last Annual Meeting**

The minutes of the last annual meeting were approved.

**Item 4: Election of Officers**

The following officers were re-elected:

Nanette Milne MSP (co-convener)  
Stuart McMillan MSP (co-convener)  
David Beamer (Secretary)

The Secretary confirmed that he would work with the co-convener to submit the Annual Return.

**Item 5: Death Certification including presentation from Mrs Cathy Dunlop (Registrar's representative on the National Advisory Group)**

A presentation was delivered by Cathy Dunlop, Senior Registrar at East Ayrshire Council and President, Association of Registrars of Scotland (AROS). Ms Dunlop is also the AROS representative on the National Advisory Group and on the Formal Programming Board.

Ms Dunlop outlined the purpose of the Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011 and the process of registering a death. She then discussed the Review Process and the expedited procedure that covered religious/cultural reasons, compassionate reasons, and administrative/practical reasons.

A discussion was held on the MCCD and focus was placed on the wording used in the "Disposal Hazard" section. This included the use of the word "body" instead of "deceased".

John Birrell expressed his concerns about any delays in holding a funeral due to the impact this can have on the grieving process as well as the impact of those in work. Nigel Lymn Rose thanked Ms Dunlop for her presentation and expressed his support for her work and other Registrars in making the new system work.

**Item 6: Infant Cremation Commission**

John Birrell provided a short update on the Commission and progress to date. 40 submissions had been received. Ann McMurray stated that the parents' group will have sight of the Commission's report before publication.

**Item 7: Pre-stillbirth foetuses (John Birrell)**

John Birrell, on behalf of the Scottish Grief and Bereavement Hub, circulated a briefing note on pre-stillbirth foetuses and discussed its content. The note is attached to these minutes.

**Item 8: Scottish group on Funeral Poverty (John Birrell)**

John Birrell provided an update on the work of the Scottish Group on Funeral Poverty and circulated a briefing note. The note is attached to these minutes.

Nigel Lymn Rose welcomed the briefing and the Funeral Poverty Group's call for greater consistency in terminology. He also outlined how the proportionate cost of disbursements had increased significantly more than funeral director charges. Dominic Maquire highlighted the importance of not confusing the term "cost of dying" used in the AXA Sun Life surveys with the "cost of a funeral".

**Item 9: Social Fund funeral payments / centralisation of administration**

The Secretary provided a brief outline on Social Fund developments including the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) decision to centralise funeral payment processing into one office in Balham, south west London. Balham will handle all applications from England, Scotland and Wales by the end of October 2013.

It was agreed to discuss this item at the next meeting to identify if the centralisation of administration had impacted on the service provided to the bereaved and the funeral sector in Scotland.

**Item 10: Date of future meetings**

Tuesday 16 December 2013 6pm TG20.21

Wednesday 5 March 2014 6pm Q1.04

Wednesday 11 June 2014 6pm TG20.21

**Item 11: AOB**

John Birrell referred to the minutes of the last Annual Meeting regarding the application of Final Fling to join the Group. The Secretary agreed to review and update the Group at the next meeting.

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**BRIEFING NOTE PROVIDED BY JOHN BIRRELL: Disposal of Pregnancy Loss**

The Scottish Government issued guidance from the Chief Medical Officer on the "Disposal of Pregnancy Loss up to and including 23 weeks and 6 days gestation" in July 2012. [http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/cmo/CMO\(2012\)07.pdf](http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/cmo/CMO(2012)07.pdf)

The new guidance makes clear that the disposal of any pregnancy losses by way of incineration or clinical waste (which was technically possible under the earlier 1992 guidance) is no longer acceptable. Instead, a new minimum standard is introduced of collective disposal in a crematorium. In circumstances where such disposal is not available, disposal by collective burial is acceptable. In either situation, "collective" is defined as a number of pregnancy losses, in individual sealed containers, collected together into a larger sealed container. Women may opt out if they wish to make their own arrangements. Fundamental to the Guidance is the requirement that all involved are treated with dignity and respect.

At the time of issuing, the Chief Medical Officer signalled that compliance with the new guidance would be audited by Scottish Government after a period of twelve months.

That audit has now been carried out, and the Hub has can report:

- Ten of the fourteen territorial Health Boards in Scotland report that they are now meeting the minimum standards set out in the Guidance.
- Of the remaining four, two expect to be meeting the standards by the first quarter of 2014 and Scottish Government officials are currently following up with all four in order to ascertain progress, any on-going issues and any assistance that they might find useful.
- Boards identified key benefits of consistency and standardisation leading to improved record keeping for audit trail purposes. They also highlighted improved transparency, through improved communication and information for patients, which accorded with the underpinning principle of respect and dignity for all concerned, within the Guidance.
- Key challenges reported included implementation costs; storage and transportation issues; the change-over to new documentation and staff training.
- As far as can be ascertained from the responses received, seven crematoria are already providing the new collective cremation service to Health Boards, and more may follow. Health Boards are free to make arrangements with crematoria outside their geographic area, or can use burial as an alternative arrangement. Several are utilising both of these options.
- There are two private hospitals in Scotland offering services relevant to the Guidance. Both replied to confirm they were also meeting the new minimum standards.

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**BRIEFING NOTE PROVIDED BY JOHN BIRRELL: Funeral Poverty in Scotland**

A second meeting of the Hub working group on Funeral Poverty was held on 22 October, hosted by Citizens Advice Scotland. As well as CAS, there was representation from Money Advice Scotland, Church of Scotland, NHS Bereavement Coordinators, Hospice Bereavement Coordinators, Good Life Good Death Good Grief, Hospice Chaplains and the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors. The group was again joined by Anne Corden, Researcher with the Social Policy Unit at York University.

With the average funeral costing around £3,500, not including the discretionary items which people add on (like flowers, catering and memorials) the main concern of the group remains how people on a low income or with limited resources can arrange a funeral when so often such arrangements require to be made at short notice. With funeral directors, understandably, increasingly looking for a deposit to cover all or at least some of the non-discretionary items, where can people find financial support? The group recognised that for some payday loans may be appropriate, but also discussed the possibility of credit unions becoming more widely involved in funding this type of purchase.

The group also discussed the need to increase the cap on the Funeral Payment available, to those who qualify, through the Department of Work and Pensions and to improve the turn around time for applications. However it was felt that realistically this would not change, and finding ways of reducing funeral costs, and of supporting and empowering families to make more realistic choices about the funeral was a more likely way forward.

The meeting stressed:

- the need for more clarity and transparency around funeral charges
- the need for consistency of terminology – both in the way terms like *basic*, *simple*, *low budget* or *standard* are used to describe a funeral, suggesting that this might be cheapest available, when often this is not the case, and in the way these terms may be used by different funeral directors to include different levels of service or added extras
- the differences in the cost of burial or cremation across the country, and how these costs have increased in recent years (by over 50% in the past 5 years)
- the fact that burial/cremation charges form only around a third or less of the total cost of a funeral in Scotland
- the need to encourage a discussion of funeral culture - what do we need to include and what can be left out, or arranged privately - for example buying your own flowers from the florist or the supermarket.

We heard of the excellent work done by a project in London which trains "mentors" to support families on low incomes to make choices around funerals, and which has negotiated special rates with local funeral directors. There was discussion about other contractual arrangements which have been made and how similar contracts and services might be made available in Scotland.