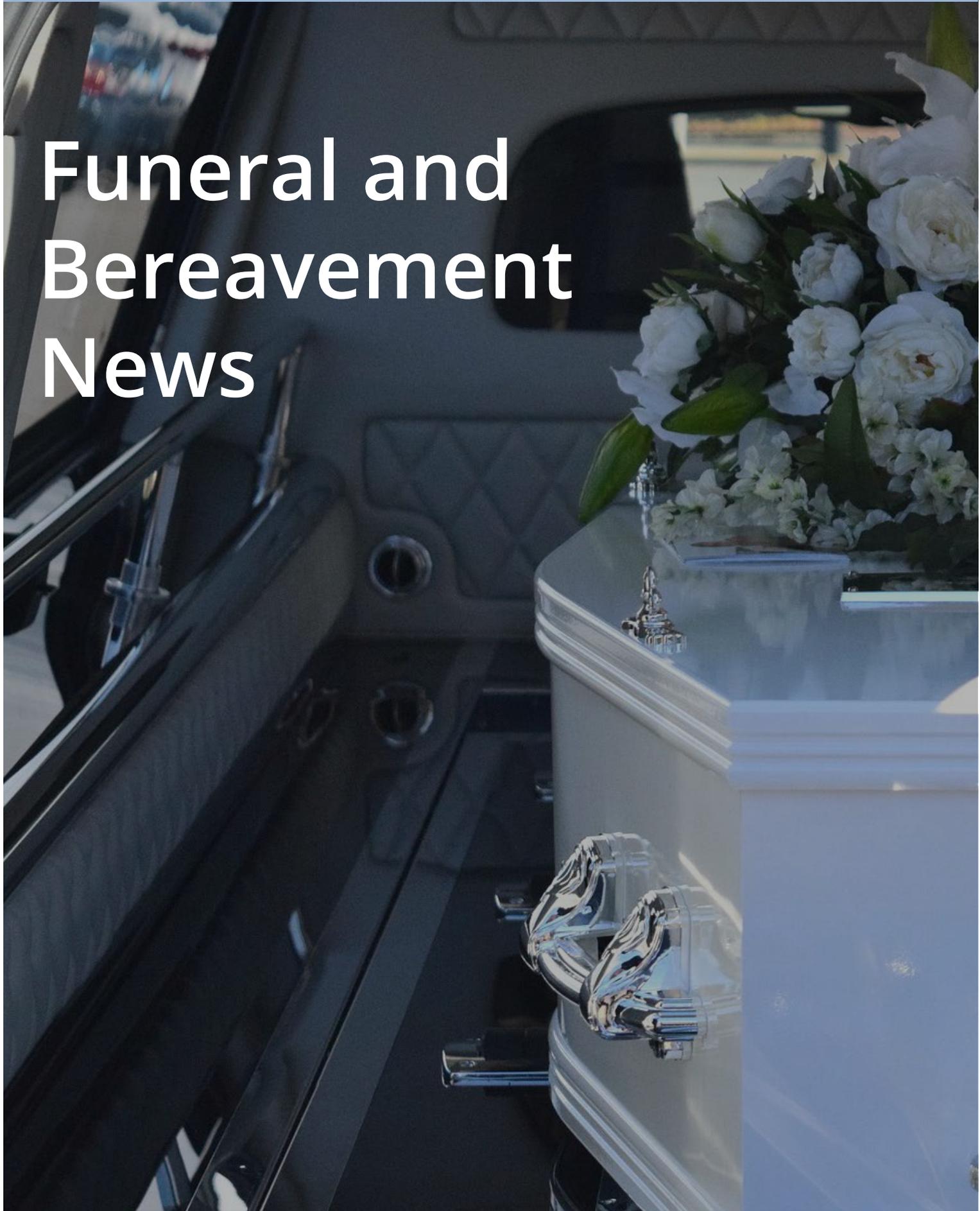


Funeral and Bereavement News



Foreword



Sir John Hayes MP

I am delighted to welcome you to the inaugural edition of Funeral and Bereavement News. This monthly Newsletter will provide updates on the work being done by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement, the Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG) and the wider sector, along with a deeper insight into some of the organisations that exist within it.

In my position as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement I have been in the fortunate position to hear directly from those operating within the funeral and death care sector. Their remarkable dedication and unwavering support to the grieving has highlighted the best of Britain.

Even with vastly increased workloads and a raft of additional regulations to abide by, funeral directors, florists, funeral furnishers, crematoria staff and others within the sector have ensured that those saying goodbye to a loved one can do so in as special and 'normal' a way as possible. They have adapted to new rules and surpassed what had been expected of them. From live streaming services to those that cannot attend to printing out scans of family members' handprints, their work has epitomised decency, empathy and kindness. This has all been undertaken against the backdrop of a potential risk to their own health, but with unfailing dignity they have continued to guarantee services are conducted and mourners have the chance to say a final goodbye.

The pandemic has brought with it challenges that everyone in society has had to overcome. Grieving families are unable to collectively mourn loved ones; travel restrictions have prevented many from physically saying goodbye and restrictions on mourner attendance at services have made the toughest times in people's lives even more difficult. Funeral directors and others in the sector have continued to work with families and accommodated their wishes wherever possible, at a time when demand for their services has reached unprecedented levels.

However, recent reports have shown that the sector needs our attention and support. I have been concerned with numerous accounts of unacceptable behaviour toward funeral sector workers and a lack of support when faced with such threats. Furthermore, disturbing instances of Fixed Penalty Notices being issued to funeral sector operatives when COVID-19 regulations have been broken, often through the breaching of permitted attendance levels, has served to only amplify concerns. I have been in direct correspondence with the Home Office and will continue to represent the sector on this issue until it is resolved.

I would urge all Parliamentarians to take an active interest in finding out more about the numerous issues facing the sector. I warmly invite you all to join the All-Party Parliamentary Group, which meets on the last Wednesday of each month. We will all at some point in our lives need to call upon the services of the sector. Ensuring that the sector is rightly celebrated for its work, not just over the last 12 months but for the work it has done and continues to do, will benefit us all.



Robert Goodwill MP
 APPG Vice Chair

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt in every community in the UK and by so many individual families and businesses. All of us in the All-Party Group for Funerals and Bereavement realise that there has now been much more media attention on this important sector which we all care about and which has often been overlooked previously.

I recognise how critical the funeral and death care sector has been throughout the crisis, as total UK deaths with COVID-19 is listed on the death certificate have now exceeded 135,000. So many businesses large and small have had to adapt to meet this unprecedented demand for funerals and other services. My own family business, a woodland burial garden of rest based on our farm in North Yorkshire, has also seen a significant increase in enquiries, with more interest than ever in the concept of green funerals and sustainable burial.

As a former Minister at the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and having represented a rural constituency for over fifteen years, protecting our natural

environment is incredibly important for me. Giving bereaved families the opportunity of a more sustainable woodland burial and planning a tree instead of erecting a headstone is an important choice for our sector to be able to offer.

Having served in Government in four different Departments as well as in the Whips Office, I am also well placed to advise on the cross-Governmental nature of so much of what we do. I am committed to helping the sector to have a louder and more joined-up voice at the heart of Government. Where the death care sector finds itself navigating a path through different Whitehall departments from the Home Office to the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, I hope the APPG will be able to be voice of reason, ensuring the businesses at the heart of the funeral and death care sector receive the support they deserve during this critical period in our nation's history. I am glad to be part of the APPG and will be encouraging other MPs across the House to also get more involved in our activities.



Peter Dowd MP

As the MP for Bootle in Merseyside for nearly six years I have been struck, like every Member of Parliament has, by the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected almost every business and resident in my constituency. In my own local authority of Sefton there have been over 800 deaths since the pandemic began and over 23,000 positive cases.

I know too, as a former Shadow Treasury Minister for four years, that the impact on our economy both nationally and regionally has also been immense. The tiered system of regional lockdowns was particularly difficult for the Merseyside City Region and the wider North West in the Autumn of 2020. It saw huge swathes of our businesses forced to close, just as they were getting back on their feet.

Like so many families across Britain, my own family has also had to cope with the pain of a bereavement recently. Across

the country, funeral directors and others within the sector have worked tirelessly to ensure families can say goodbye in as normal a way as possible.

It is well known that this sector has had to cope with an unprecedented increase in deaths over the past year. It is even more impressive that under these tragic circumstances, staff have been able to rise to this unexpected challenge and to continue to serve all of our residents with the dignity and consideration they deserve.

I am very pleased to have joined the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement and look forward to playing my part in ensuring the sector is better represented in Westminster going forward. I will be encouraging more of my colleagues to support the APPG by becoming members themselves.

Parliamentary Questions

Over the last month, a range of Parliamentary Questions have been submitted on behalf of the funerals and bereavement sector. These have been submitted by Sir John Hayes MP and Mark Pawsey MP. These have focussed on key issues that members of the Deceased Management Advisory Group and wider sector have raised during All-Party Parliamentary group meetings. A list of these can be seen below:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of categorising crematorium and cemetery staff as frontline healthcare staff for the purposes of the COVID-19 vaccine.

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if the Government will make an assessment of the potential merits of establishing a cross-Departmental lead group to assess the issues affecting the funeral and death care sector.

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase the number of apprenticeships offered in the funeral and death care sector.

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of reinstating the VAT exemption on personal protective equipment for funeral sector workers for the duration of the COVID-19 lockdown.

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support funeral directors and/or venue owners can rely on should mourners break COVID-19 regulations, particularly in relation to breaches to the 30-person limit.

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific guidance has been issued to police forces regarding the liability of funeral directors and/or venue owners when COVID-19 regulations have been breached by mourners at funeral services, and whether she plans to review the guidance to ensure that funeral directors and cemetery/crematorium staff are kept safe and not unreasonably held accountable for breaches of COVID-19 restrictions at funerals.

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice and support has been offered to funeral directors and death care sector workers regarding ensuring compliance with COVID-19 regulations at funerals.

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she will consider issuing a protocol to be agreed between all police forces and funeral and death care sector businesses to ensure a consistent approach on the correct procedure to comply with COVID-19 restrictions at funerals.



Bereavement Standard Debate, Wednesday 3 February 2021

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement, Sir John Hayes MP, spoke in an adjournment debate tabled by Grahame Morris MP on the implementation of a Bereavement Standard. This would ensure that a concise and consistent process is put in place to close accounts when a loved one dies. There were further calls for a clear ministerial lead on bereavement rather than answers from several different Government Departments. Sir John Hayes' contribution can be seen below:

"He will know that I am chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for funerals and bereavement. I wonder if he could add to his list of demands for the Minister the provision of vaccinations and personal protective equipment for frontline funeral staff, and a clearer line about the policing of funerals. There are some suggestions that funeral directors are being held liable for enforcing sensible rules on funerals. We need greater clarity on that, too, and I am very grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to make those points."

Ministerial Engagement

Letters from Sir John Hayes MP on key issues have been sent to relevant ministers. These have included two letters to Minister for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse MP, on the issue of mourner attendance at services with, in some cases, funeral directors and venue owners being held liable for this and receiving a Fixed Penalty Notice of up to £10,000. A letter has also been sent to the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, Gillian Keegan MP, inviting her to the next APPG meeting on March 24 to discuss an upcoming Skills and Inclusivity Inquiry looking at the funerals and death care sector.

Media Update

The APPG has had a successful period with media coverage for Sir John Hayes MP in parliament's internal publication *The House* magazine in December 2020. The article also appeared online, [on the PoliticsHome news site](#).

Subsequently Sir John has had success in publishing articles to support the wider funeral and death care sector in a range of his local and regional titles in Lincolnshire including: the *Lincolnshire Free Press* and [published online on Spalding Today](#) on 25th January, the *Rutland and Stamford Mercury* on 9th February and *Spalding Voice* on 11th February.

These opportunities have provided the APPG with an opportunity to promote the sector on a local and regional basis and provided an opportunity for DMAG members to write into these publications with their own responses. A local representative of National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) operating in Spalding and the Chief Executive of the Funeral Furnishing Manufacturer's Association both had letters published on 23rd February in the *Lincolnshire Free Press* which also [appeared online on Spalding Today](#).

This media success can be repeated for other members of the APPG and the JBP team which provides the APPG Secretariat is more than happy to draft articles for any MPs and peers in the APPG so these can be localised for their own areas and submitted to local titles. All articles are shared on the APPG's twitter page which members and supporters are [encouraged to follow](#).

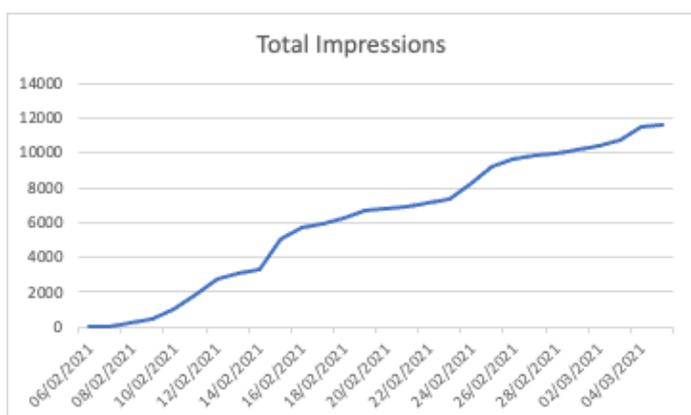
There has also been a lot of media attention for funeral businesses and how they have been managing through the pandemic with significant increases in the number of funerals to arrange and how to manage these under the relevant



restrictions. [Associated Press covered this in a story entitled 'Pandemic takes a toll on exhausted UK funeral directors'](#) and spoke with a number of businesses including Compassionate Funerals which serves a multicultural, multi-faith community in east London. The small firm normally arranges about five funerals each week, but the pandemic has seen this increase to as many as 20.

A local publication in Cumbria also [published a story](#) on 16th February which will be of interest to many in the sector, where a funeral director spoke out anonymously to warn against mourners breaking the COVID-19 restrictions at funerals and urging people wherever possible to stick to the published Government guidance.

Social Media Update



A new [Twitter account](#) set up to promote the work done by the APPG has been created and has enjoyed a very effective first month. To date, there have been over 10,000 impressions on tweets and over 2,500 profile visits. Content has so far included Chair of the APPG, Sir John Hayes, intervening in the Bereavement Standards debate tabled by Grahame Morris MP, written Parliamentary Questions and answers that have been asked on the sector and links to articles.

Content will continue to be posted on a regular basis and as the APPG continues to grow, it is expected that this will translate into higher follower numbers, impressions and engagements.

Member SpOtlight

Julie Dunk

CEO, The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management



The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management has a long history, having originally been formed in 1913 as the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents. The name of the organisation has been changed five times over the years, with each new name reflecting changing times and an increasingly important role. Membership of the Institute is currently in two categories: professional membership for those employed in cemeteries and crematoria in the UK, and corporate membership for authorities and companies providing cemeteries and

crematoria. The ICCM is governed by an elected Board of Directors, who set the strategic direction for the organisation. A full-time officer team of six deliver day to day support to members, as well as providing training, education, and best practice guidance.

The overall aim of the Institute is to raise standards for bereaved people through the provision of accredited training and education, and the development and promotion of best practice in cemeteries, crematoria and ancillary services. This is achieved through the Institute's BTEC accredited Crematorium Technician's Training Scheme; the City & Guilds NPTC accredited Cemetery Operatives Training Course, and the Pearson BTEC accredited ICCM Diploma in Cemetery and

Crematorium Management. The Institute also owns and promotes the Charter for the Bereaved, which sets high standards of customer care and environmental protection for the bereavement sector. Those authorities and companies that adopt the Charter for the Bereaved demonstrate their commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. The Institute showed their own commitment to these important aspects last year by gaining ISO 9001:2015 accreditation.

The coronavirus pandemic has been the most challenging situation that the Institute and its members have faced since the Second World War. Although we have prepared for pandemic situations before, for example bird flu and swine flu, and successfully dealt with increased winter death rates on a regular basis, the scale and longevity of the current pandemic is unprecedented. Members have worked hard throughout to ensure that funerals can happen in a timely fashion, and in as 'normal' a way as possible. Restrictions on the number of attendees, and the need for social distancing have brought added pressures for both bereaved people and those helping them, and our members have found it hard to transition from being a caring, people-centred service to a more functional one with limited contact. Many are also tired after working for the whole of the pandemic period with extended hours and limited breaks, as well as coping with health and home situations, and caring for their own families. But, despite these difficulties, our members will continue to be creative in helping bereaved people to have meaningful funerals and are hoping that normal service can be resumed as soon as possible. Plans are already being drawn up for both individual and communal memorial events to commemorate the lives of those lost during the pandemic. Such events will help families, friends, and all of us as a nation to heal after such a devastating period.

Member Update

Jon Levett
CEO, National Association of Funeral Directors

The legal restrictions that have been placed on the number of people attending a funeral during COVID-19 remains a key topic of debate - and one of the major challenges of the pandemic for funeral directors.

Currently, 30 people can attend a funeral in England, 20 in Scotland, 25 in Northern Ireland and, in Wales, it is the venue's COVID-secure capacity that determines the maximum number.

For the most part, families have complied with the restrictions - even if it must have been heart-breaking to decide which loved ones could attend. This must have been particularly challenging for communities for whom large funerals are considered the ultimate social expression of love and respect. Although I don't condone it, it hasn't surprised me that some members of these communities have continued to turn up to funerals in large numbers.

This has been a problem in all four countries of the UK but, in England, these incidents have spurred a tougher approach to the policing of breaches of coronavirus restrictions.

We've been very concerned about what this means for funeral directors. Funeral directors do not invite attendees - families do - and funeral directors have no powers to enforce coronavirus restrictions. This has not always been understood by the police, and we were shocked when a funeral director received a fixed penalty notice of £10,000, after around 150 mourners attended a funeral in Hertfordshire.

We immediately sought clarification from Hertfordshire Police, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Home Office. Sir John Hayes, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Funerals and Bereavement, asked a Parliamentary Question on this matter. It became clear that some police forces clearly thought that, where funeral directors thought excess mourners may attend, the funeral should have been cancelled, without any consideration about the implication for the deceased person and client family.



Fortunately, the Home Office has taken a more sensible view and Kit Malthouse, Minister of State for Crime and Policing, responded to our letter saying:

"It is normally the family or a close friend of the deceased who issues invitations. Where this is the case and a funeral director has notified the Police that a breach has occurred or is expected, then they will normally have discharged their responsibilities under the law."

This supports the position outlined in NAFD guidance and supported by DMAG. Hopefully, this will bring some sanity to the policing of funerals.

News in Brief

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced measures to increase incentive grants for apprenticeships from £1,500 to £3,000, as well as an additional £126million investment in traineeships. This will help with the Government's levelling up agenda and it is estimated that the new funding will assist 40,000 young people in England. This will help to build on many of the schemes currently offered by the funeral and death care sector already, including the level 3 funeral director standard and the level 2 funeral team member standard.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has opened a consultation on new rules for pre-paid funeral plans. The consultation closes on 13 April and aims to 'improve standards' within the sector. Businesses that offer pre-paid funeral plans will need to register with the FCA and apply for authorisation if they wish to continue to offer plans from September 2021.



Join the APPG today
www.appgfunerals.co.uk



The All-Party Parliamentary Group for
Funerals and Bereavement