



NAFD AUTUMN MEETING 2018

FIT FOR THE FUTURE

THE NAFD VOTES FOR HISTORIC GOVERNANCE
CHANGE AT AUTUMN GENERAL MEETING



NAFD President Abi Pattenden



On a beautiful Autumnal morning at Coombe Abbey in Warwickshire, NAFD President Abi Pattenden welcomed members from as far afield as Penzance, Cornwall and Falkirk, Scotland, to the 2018 NAFD Autumn General Meeting.

First Vice-President David Barrington led the room in a moment of silence for those members of the Association who had died since the Annual General Meeting in May, after which the business of the day got underway.

The morning began with a few words from outgoing Interim Chief Executive Officer Graham Lymn, who reiterated his gratitude to the NAFD National Office team and the many volunteer members who had supported him during his tenure, before handing over to new Chief Executive Officer Jon Levett. "I would like to thank the members for their advice and counsel over the last few months, particularly those who serve the Association on the Executive, the various boards and committees and in other ways too," said Graham. "I would also like to thank the team at National Office – they have worked diligently to ensure my time has been relatively straightforward. Their dedication to the members is ongoing and will, I am certain, be continued under Jon's stewardship."

Addressing the room, Jon introduced himself, emphasising that, after only nine days in post, he was still at the listening and learning stage. However, he also stressed the opportunity that he felt lay ahead of the NAFD. "This profession is in a period of transformational change, not only in what bereaved families want from a funeral, but what governments expect of you too. I see this as a huge opportunity for the funeral profession and look forward to working with you to secure a robust future for the Association. This is your NAFD, and I would welcome your ideas as to what you would like to see in the future too."

Headlines from the Committee Reports

Many of the reports, provided to all members in the AGM pack, were taken as read. However, Philip Blatchly, Chair of the Committee for Professional Standards, did take the opportunity to highlight how the current level of inspections compliance (99.4% in the previous twelve months) may previously have seemed unachievable, and so this was something to be welcomed and celebrated as evidence of members' true commitment to high standards.

He thanked Policy and Legislation Manager Morgan Harris, and Complaints Analyst Derry Smith, for their diligence, compassion and commitment in managing the complaints process, ensuring families and funeral directors both felt listened to and the process was managed fairly and objectively. He also paid tribute to the former Chair of the NAFD's Independent Disciplinary Committee, Clive Newton, who had died recently.

Immediate Past President Alison Crake also addressed some key points in her report, highlighting the positive news that an increasing number of students were signing up to complete the NAFD qualifications programme, but also acknowledging the Board of Education's concern that only 19% of Diploma in Funeral Arranging & Administration students were going on to study for the Diploma in Funeral Directing. The Committee was undertaking a piece of analysis to understand why this was happening. She also encouraged anyone with an aspiration to be an NAFD examiner to please contact the committee.



Subsequent to the production of the Legislation Report, Past President Nigel Lymn Rose had met with both parliamentarians and civil servants on matters pertinent to the meeting. He updated members firstly on the positive opportunity represented in the meeting with John Hayes MP, an influential and well-connected backbencher on both sides of the House, who had expressed a commitment to reform of the Social Fund Funeral Payment. In briefing Mr Hayes, Nigel had gone back through the history of the Social Fund to analyse its performance and was struck, once again, by the irony that the Fund now paid out the same headline figure - £38 million - as it did when it was first launched, representing a massive reduction in real terms.

"If that isn't an indication of a system that is broken then I don't know what is," he said.

In John Hayes MP, Mr Lymn Rose believes the Association has found a politician who is committed to seeking reform, and the NAFD will be working hard to realise this going forward.

The day prior to the meeting, Mr Lymn Rose met with Lord O'Shaughnessy, the Department of Health and Social Care minister responsible for death certification reform and the introduction of Medical Examiners, and had also recently met civil servant in charge of the introduction of Medical Examiners, Jeremy Mean, on several occasions.

In meetings with both men, Mr Lymn Rose was struck that – in a welcome development from some meetings other governmental teams, both the Minister and Mr Mean truly listened and, in some cases, reported back evidence of genuine progress made as a result of previous NAFD interventions. DHSC were appreciative of the feedback already received from NAFD to date.

Mr Lymn Rose is persuaded that if roll-out happens in a two-step launch it could work well in terms of ensuring the system functions properly.

That said, he reported having flagged up concerns about issues such as the ever-increasing mortuary space (and cost) that will be required should Trusts decide that all deaths should be certified within the hospital environment. This could also expand the delay for families. He also asked for more clarity in respect of the future process for burials. Numerous issues were raised regarding deaths outside of hospital settings and although difficult to resolve all were noted and put on the DHSC radar.

He asked how the system will deal with the possible introduction of charges for burials – and how these will be collected. Again, it was felt in the meeting that these and other points were fully appreciated and will now properly be considered.

Mr Lymn Rose was pleased to announce to the Autumn General Meeting the news that there will be a National Medical Examiner, who will have very strict controls over each Medical Examiner to avoid any kind of uneven, idiosyncratic service. The National Medical Examiner will be appointed by December. There will also be regional Medical Examiners who will facilitate links between local operations and the National Medical Examiner.

In response to a question from Adam Ginder, it was confirmed that members will be provided with a full briefing ahead of implementation, in April 2019, and the NAFD will seek to try and arrange workshops and other opportunities with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure this new system is given the best possible opportunity to be successful.



Reporting on the work of the Membership Committee, President Abi confirmed that the Executive had agreed with its proposal to move to a partially appointed structure, which would commence in 2019, with two places up for election at the Annual General Meeting for a one-year term – a great new opportunity for members to get involved with the NAFD at a national level.

On behalf of Past President Paul Cuthell, Policy and Legislation Manager Morgan Harris updated on recent events in Scotland and how they should be of interest and concern to members right across the UK. Consultation on matters such as powers of inspection and how funeral directors communicated costs to clients might currently fall under the jurisdiction of the Scottish Government and Inspector of Funeral Directors – but they may well set a precedent for the rest of the United Kingdom.

At the recent NAFD Scotland Annual General Meeting, the Inspector of Funeral Directors, Natalie McKail, had talked members through her latest thinking ahead of issuing her recommendations to Ministers at the end of the year. It was clear that some of the biggest questions (for example on whether funeral directors should be licensed) remain unanswered. She had accepted an invitation to spend a day at NAFD National Office in November, which it was hoped would enable the Association to share its work with her and help shape her thinking.

Graeme Easton, from the Scottish Area Federation, expressed his concerns about the potential limits of proposed statutory powers to enter premises and interview members of staff. With support from Executive Committee member Gerry Boyle, who had spent significant time with Ms McKail, Morgan was able to reassure Mr Easton that these powers were at the extreme end of a range that had been proposed and that work was underway with the Inspector – who everyone had found to be reasonable, considered and positive about the profession – to develop a proportionate final set of proposals. Morgan agreed though that these more extreme proposed powers, which exceeded those of the Police – were, indeed, disproportionate.

Mr Easton further questioned whether funeral directors would be forced to keep records for fifty years plus, to which Mr Harris responded that, were this to be put in place, he would expect digital records to suffice rather than members having to resort to hiring storage facilities for their filing cabinets!

There was also a discussion about the merits of any proposals requiring those who undertook embalming to be qualified, rather than simply competent and experienced. All of these matters would be taken forward by the Scottish Executive, supported by Morgan Harris.

Report of the Honorary Treasurer

At this point, the meeting turned to the Association's finances. Honorary Treasurer Marcus Wilkinson began with a thank you to Interim Chief Executive Officer, Graham Lymn, whom he said: "stepped up to the plate and has done an excellent job supported by the staff at Solihull. The result is that we have stabilised our financial position and this is a good platform for (new CEO) Jon to launch himself from."

The projected outturn for 2018 had improved from May's projection. Budget saved on employment costs had contributed to this. However, IT costs had been higher than expected, particularly due to the investment in *funeral-directory.co.uk*. Funeral Arbitration costs were also higher than normal as agency staff were used for part of the year; however, this would drop back in 2019 following the appointment of a full-time member of staff.



**CHANGE IS NOT A THREAT,
IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY.
SURVIVAL IS NOT THE GOAL,
TRANSFORMATIVE SUCCESS IS.**

Seth Godin
(American Author and Entrepreneur)



Turning his attention to the matter of subscriptions for 2019, Marcus added: "Although it is important provide Jon, as the new Chief Executive Officer, with some flexibility, we do also need to ensure we are achieving value for money for members. We propose an inflationary increase of 2.5% but also expect to see changes in the bottom line, and the Association will have to work hard to achieve them. There are areas in which we can do more to get better value for members whilst still investing in those activities which support members in running their businesses."

The resolution proposing the 2019 subscription levels was carried, with no votes against and no abstentions.



Honorary Treasurer
Marcus Wilkinson
explains the Company
Limited by Guarantee



New CEO
Jon Levett
introduces
himself to the
meeting

The NAFD's future Governance

After a break for lunch, the attention turned to the future governance structure of the Association. Immediate Past President Alison Crake, who had led the Association's work in this area during 2018, presented an outline of the proposals that were described in the September edition of this magazine.

Outlining the need for change, Alison stressed that this didn't mean abandoning 113 years of history: "We have been the voice of the funeral profession for more than a century. We are a group of diverse businesses, who share a unity of purpose and a commitment to bereaved people, and who come together for the good of the profession. We are continuously evolving to match changing needs of bereaved families and the NAFD needs to evolve too, to ensure it is able to deliver what you need as members. However, like you the NAFD will never lose sight of its traditions. We make sure we are fit for the future - but we still don the same top hat and tails, and lead funerals in our communities as has been the case for generations. That balance is what we are seeking to strike today for the Association."

Ms Crake reiterated the key points about the Association's governance discussed at previous General Meetings and, recently, in this magazine. She reminded members that, although adequately functional on a day-to-day basis, the NAFD's governance arrangements were overdue a major restructure to ensure the Association was fighting fit for the future. As the Association's role became ever more critical in a rapidly changing economic, cultural and regulatory environment, its structure was becoming increasingly inflexible and, in some aspects, was now inadequate and actually could render its members vulnerable.

She also talked about opportunities as well as risks: "Other than the Rules of the Association, little is documented of the current governance. As a consequence, the role, accountability and expectations of the Executive and Committees is unclear and open to interpretation. There are also no clear metrics to measure performance and no regular review structure.

"In addition, there is a significant time commitment currently required of volunteer members who wish to serve the Association, which is proving unsustainable for some current committee members and Officers and a deterrent to otherwise capable and enthusiastic future Executive members and Officers.

"There is also an urgent need to ensure that the Association remains able to represent its diverse range of members equally and is also able to be adaptable and flexible enough to respond to future changes that may be required of it."

Reminding members that the resolution to become a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) had already been passed by the membership, Alison walked through the 'step-by-step' restructure necessary for the CLG to come into force on 1 January 2019.

REPRESENTING MEMBERS: A FUTURE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

During the meeting, Alison Crake ran through the proposed changes to the Executive Committee of the NAFD. As outlined in September's edition of this magazine, it is likely that these will be as follows:-

- Six members of the Executive elected by the membership, plus the Immediate Past President (who automatically retains a seat on the Executive for one year).
- Appointed representatives from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (with the understanding that England is represented through others elected to the Executive).
- Representatives of each of the NAFD's three largest members – on the understanding that the larger members could not put forward another candidate to the Executive Committee in addition to their appointed seat.
- If a member from an appointed category stood for election as an officer (eg Second Vice-President) their seat would not be backfilled on the Executive Committee (eg. with another representative from their firm or region) to avoid duplication.
- The member vote provides the opportunity for members to ensure they are happy with the balance of representation on the Executive Committee.
- Once elected or appointed to the future Executive Committee, each member would be expected to serve the interests of the whole Association and wider funeral profession.

A Management Committee would be formed, comprising the four Officers of the Association, the Chief Executive Officer and the Honorary Treasurer to identify, encourage and support future Officers of the Association and oversee the work of the Chief Executive Officer. It is proposed that the Chief Executive Officer will report to the chair of the Management Committee.

The proposed changes were not voted on at the meeting. They will be brought forward in May at the Annual General Meeting as these would be a Rule change – and so will be effective immediately.

Honorary Treasurer Marcus Wilkinson provided more detail on the differences between the current unincorporated structure and the CLG model, emphasising the current financial vulnerability of members and reiterating his commitment that, if the changes were not made, he was not prepared to continue his involvement with the Association because of the personal liabilities he and his business were expected to undertake. Several members in the room, including Immediate Past President Alison Crake, echoed this sentiment.

He concluded: "There is no change to your rights as a members, it is simply a limiting of your personal liability. Once you understand that, it makes the need to do this and proposed path very straight forward."



Immediate Past President Alison Crake presents the Governance proposals

IT'S A NO BRAINER. IT'S THE WAY FORWARD.

Graeme Easton, Scottish Area Federation

Resolutions and voting

After taking clarification questions from the floor, including providing reassurance that the change had no affect on the Local Association and Area Federation structures, President Abi Pattenden moved to bring the resolutions to a vote. Seconding her, Past President Nigel Lymn Rose said: "We've been talking about the future of the Association for all of the 50 years I've been involved with the NAFD. It gives me great pleasure to second these resolutions. I am delighted to see NAFD move forward, so that we will be fit for purpose for not only the rest of the 21st century, but well beyond it too."

The resolutions, which were voted on en bloc, were carried unanimously with no abstentions and no votes against. The work now gets underway to translate the Rules of the Association into Articles of Association and oversee the step sequence to make these changes a reality.

Any other business

Past President Sue Saville of the London Association of Funeral Directors highlighted her concerns that the membership may not be fully aware of funeral-directory.co.uk and questioned why there had not been national media coverage of the project.

In response, President Abi - and Deborah Smith of Wordsmith Communication - reassured Mrs Saville that this was intentional as the website had been in a soft launch stage, that there had been several communication opportunities with members - both in terms of features in *Funeral Director Monthly*, in the trade press and via email - as well as through social media posts - including posts that had reached almost 6,000 people online each, and had been shared by more than 40 members to their own audiences - but that member engagement was still developing.



Nigel Lymn Rose seconds the resolutions

Mrs Smith was also able to share the news, from Kevin Kelly of K-Squared which was running the projects, that the website had achieved a significantly higher percentage number of leads per visits than was the norm with comparison sites, and she felt this would help engage more members and potentially interest journalists - who needed to see why the site was bigger, better, more comprehensive or proven to deliver a better outcome for consumers than other such sites, in order to be interested in writing about it.

Key dates and warm thanks

Drawing the Autumn General Meeting to a close, President Abi offered the Association's sincere thanks to Funeral Products, represented in the room by UK Managing Director Michael Brooks, for its support of the event. She also warmly invited members both to National Conference 2019 in Guildford, on 9 - 12 May, and to the 2019 National Funeral Exhibition which would take place at Stoneleigh Abbey on 7-9 June.