

HOW HAS COVID CHANGED FUNERAL DIRECTING?

In the survey, the NAFD also looked forward to the months and years to come, firstly asking members how they felt the pandemic may have affected funeral directing going forward. Here is just a sample of the many responses we received:

"Families may choose to have these kind of reduced services going forward."

"We have had to embrace new ways of doing every aspect of the job."

"There is certainly a short-term change - will it last? Who knows?"

"Greater digital influence on the whole experience."

"The electronic sending of forms has definitely been a great help."

"Lower take-up of limousines. Increase of direct cremations. Less 'add-ons.'"

"Our own health and well-being has been brought right into focus."

"More 'thinking outside the box' in terms of operation and services provided."

"We feel the norm will revert to pre COVID-19 time."

"An increase in competition over price in our area."

"More private family only funerals."

"It has improved hygiene practice."

If you add into this the changes to mortality rates and patterns that will occur over the coming years it's absolutely clear that COVID will have a significant impact but, put simply, we do not yet know what the full long term impact of the pandemic will be.

However, it's clear that the NAFD has an important role to play in helping members to understand and make sense of these changes - and to discover how it has affected consumer views about funerals and purchase intentions.

We also have an important role to play in making sure Government preserves some of the positive changes to the death registration process that have been welcomed by funeral firms, local authorities and bereaved families alike.

And supporting members in embracing other positive changes, such as the greater use of digital technology and communication tools.

Finally, in advance of the possibility of a second peak in the winter we will also review and update all of our guidance to take into account the experience of the last few months.

Regulation of the funeral sector has not gone away

As well as shaping member businesses, the changes brought about by COVID-19 should also have a significant bearing on the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) recommendations for regulating the sector. As members will know, the CMA recently restarted its investigation process after a hiatus of a few months during the pandemic.

With the CMA due to publish its recommendations this month, the NAFD acted quickly and commissioned Europe Economics to review some of





the key impacts of COVID on the funeral profession and sent this to the CMA in June - to enable it to be factored into its thinking.

More than half of all respondents to the feedback survey were supportive of this move, with the majority of the rest unsure of its benefit - and 14% were opposed.

"Now is a good time to point out to regulators how much potential value the profession has. It is not just about doing funerals week by week - but in times

of mass fatalities, the Government and society look to the profession to step up, keep working, take risks, have stock, etc."

"I am of the view that the CMA made up their mind long ago but that doesn't mean we should do nothing."

"It is vitally important that the NAFD seeks professional guidance on this from someone like Europe Economics. We must be in a position to respond to the CMA - this is particularly important given that the profession has been at the forefront of a pandemic."

“ I AM DELIGHTED THAT THE MAJORITY OF MEMBERS FELT THAT THE NAFD SUPPORTED THEM WELL DURING UNPRECEDENTED TIMES. MY VIEW HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO TURN TO YOUR TRADE ASSOCIATION FOR SUPPORT WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH AND, WHILE WE KNOW WE DID NOT GET EVERYTHING RIGHT, OUR SMALL TEAM - SUPPORTED BY SOME EXTREMELY DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS - WORKED AS HARD AS WE POSSIBLY COULD TO HELP NAFD MEMBERS, AND THE WIDER FUNERAL PROFESSION, THROUGH THIS. WE WILL USE ALL THIS FEEDBACK TO KEEP IMPROVING OUR SERVICE TO MEMBERS. ”

NAFD Chief Executive Officer, Jon Levett

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