



Local Authorities step up funeral provision

Liverpool City Council has become
the latest local authority to attempt to
introduce a **“low-cost”** funeral service.

The council wrote to funeral directors in the city recently looking for firms to get involved in offering a service for under £1,000 that includes collection, dressing, a coffin, a 30-minute funeral service or graveside ceremony attended by the family, transfer to crematorium, return of remains for collection by the family or a scattering of the ashes on a Garden of Remembrance.

The terms and plan were published recently without any apparent consultation and, having been alerted by members, NAFD President Alison Crake immediately wrote to Liverpool City Council questioning the council's motives, asking if it was “dressing up revenue generation as helping those in financial need” and requesting that it suspend any further action until a proper consultation could take place.

Ms Crake said the Association was concerned that the Council's proposals would “serve to drive up costs to bereaved families, and interfere with the local market – forcing local, often small and independent funeral directors, to effectively compete with the council on an uneven playing field.”

She added that, while the Council had quoted a price of £1,000, “there are numerous Merseyside funeral firms offering basic, simple and respectful funerals in the region of £700 plus disbursements.

“Comparing the list of services you would like included in the Residents Funeral Package with those offered by local firms, unless you are proposing to waive the £830 cremation fee, or £1,704 for the purchase of a grave and interment therein, plus the relevant fees for the doctors' certificates (the doing of which would be anti-competitive and an abuse of power), your

proposals will actually be more expensive than those already available on the high street?”

The Council has replied to the NAFD's letter and the Executive is considering the next steps.

Councils appear to be increasingly looking at funeral services as a way of plugging funding gaps. Last year a survey of NAFD members showed that nearly 50% of respondents said their local authority had not communicated any plans, with only 13% saying they were aware of plans in their area for councils to begin operating funeral services. The NAFD is interested to know whether that has changed.

The NAFD has already successfully fought North East Lincolnshire Council's proposals to run funerals, arguing that it was anti-competitive and, given that it had raised its burial charges by 250% in recent times, that it would not be able to offer a funeral that was as affordable or professionally carried out as those offered by local funeral directors.

Gateshead Council is among those local authorities beginning to offer its own funerals, operating Regent Funeral Services, which is due to open soon. The business is owned by the Council and run by funeral director Gareth Wall.

What's happening in your local area?

The NAFD is keen to get a UK-wide picture of whether this is a growing area for local authorities and needs your help in doing so, please get in touch with the NAFD by emailing info@nafd.org.uk if your local authority is introducing funeral services and any concerns you have about the proposals.