

COLLABORATION, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND WELLBEING

The key themes at the NAFD Autumn General Meeting

At the start of October, the 2019 NAFD Autumn General Meeting dawned bright and sunny at the Jurys Inn Hinckley Island, Leicestershire.

After welcome refreshments and good conversation in the exhibitor area, funeral directors and supplier firms from across the UK were welcomed by NAFD President, David Barrington, who shared with them the key themes and events of the first half of his year in office.

He also invited them to join him in Liverpool for the 2020 NAFD Annual Conference, which will take place on 1 - 3 May - outlining a weekend of lively debate, excellent speakers and fantastic entertainment. David noted that it would be the first time the NAFD has hosted Conference in Liverpool since 1906, and wondered what had happened to make it such a long time until it decided to come back!



AGM hears about extensive NAFD work programme

During the meeting, members heard about the significant work undertaken over the last six months by the NAFD team and member volunteers across a wide range of issues, including the latest steps in the implementation of the Burial and Cremation Act in Scotland, the extensive revision of the Manual of Funeral Directing and the NAFD's ongoing work to respond to the Competition & Market Authority's market investigation.

NAFD Chief Executive Officer, Jon Levett, outlined the work of the Association over the previous six months and the next steps in the ongoing governance reform programme. Focusing on the extensive workload resulting from the ongoing CMA investigation, Jon provided an

example of the activity - which had involved the redaction of 2,500 inspection reports and 250 complaints in a matter of days to meet a statutory deadline.

Past President Sue Saville agreed that the CMA's questions had, indeed, been overly complex and had resulted in hours of work to respond to them. This, she said, was not terribly fair and so it was good to hear that a simpler version would soon be published for consultation.

Jon also presented the finance report for 2019 and budget for 2020, showing a healthy financial position for the Association based upon maintenance of the 'steady as she goes' principle of managing the Association's finances. This was enabling the NAFD to project a modest surplus of £9,115 for the financial year to December 2019.



The exceptional expenditure relating to both the Funeral Standards Consumer Service Review (FSCSR) and CMA market investigation were also highlighted by Jon - two unbudgeted, but extremely important, NAFD projects. While extremely difficult to predict the exact requirements - as the nature of the professional advice needed would depend upon the outcome of the investigation - he projected that these would not exceed £50,000 and costs incurred to date were nowhere near that level at present. These costs would be funded from the NAFD's special reserves.

The National Funeral Exhibition 2019 was reported to have been a huge success financially for the NAFD - albeit extremely resource intensive - which means the management recharge was unrealistic and would need to be adjusted for 2021 to be more realistic about the staff time

and overheads involved. As the event was growing, it was predicted that additional resources and employment costs would be required.

The outcome of all these factors meant that the NAFD was recommending a 2.5% increase in membership subscription rates for 2020. This was passed unanimously, with one abstention.

Adam Ginder of the London Association of Funeral Directors queried the amount of time that the Area Federation and Local Association precepts had taken to be paid in 2019 and asked what would happen going forward. Jon explained in response that this was partly due to accounting software changes, but also because the team was undertaking more due diligence than previously. Precepts would not automatically be paid. They had to be based on a well-

founded plan, and some applications would be referred to the Management Committee for a decision. Jon undertook to set out a clear timetable and criteria for what would, or would not, attract a payment.

Delegates were also encouraged to engage with the NAFD's *funeral-directory.co.uk* project, adding information about their branches and putting their prices online, ahead of what was increasingly expected to become a requirement following the CMA investigation.

Responding to a question from Past President and Honorary Member Nigel Lymn Rose about the increased budget for Conference 2020, Jon informed members that, as hotel rooms in Liverpool tended to be sold out very early for weekends - and members often booked late for Conference - it was necessary to contract for 150 rooms at the Conference hotel to ensure members would have access to accommodation when they booked. This also allowed for packages to be sold including both the Conference and accommodation.

He also explained that the calculation upon which the Conference budget was built was based on a similar number of delegates to last year, which was lower than normal - but, if more NAFD members attended, the cost to the Association would be significantly lower than budget.



Addressing the members for the first time was Jonathan Rees, the new Independent Chair of the NAFD Management Committee. He spoke about how impressed he had been with the NAFD, the achievements of its staff and the passion and commitment of its members. He shared his thoughts on the ongoing work to modernise governance of the NAFD, to meet the needs of bereaved people and urged members to inject ideas and influence debate - to help shape the future.

During the presentation of reports, Philip Blatchly, chair of the Committee for Professional Standards, commended the members for helping reduce the number of abandoned inspections - but highlighted a continuing problem with compliance on very minor matters. He highlighted that, while members were demonstrating very high levels of service in many key areas, they were then failing inspections on aspects such as having their Membership Inspection certificate visible on the wall, complaints leaflets available and other required display items such as price lists. These, he said, were the easiest things to comply with! He also cautioned members: "The CMA is watching us," and urged them to address these issues.

Philip made special mention of Morgan Harris, Derry Smith and the Standards and Quality Managers for their tireless work in the area of upholding standards.

Following Past President Jeremy Field's presentation of the Legislation report, Nigel Lymn Rose added a point about the Children's Funeral Fund saying that, for once, it had been quickly instigated after announcement.

However, he noted, there were continuing problems with third parties, eg cemeteries which had, at times, been unhelpful to both funeral directors and families. He hoped this was just part of the learning curve. The NAFD undertook to recirculate the guidance notes about the Fund to support members.

In response to the presentation of the Membership Committee report by Second Vice-President John Adams, Adam Ginder mentioned that the London Association of Funeral Directors was looking to reintroduce the Eastern District Local Association and that any support or advice would be welcomed as to how to make this a success.

The sheer weight of incoming legislation was the focus of the report from NAFD Scotland by James Morris, NAFD Scotland President. He thanked Morgan Harris and Jon Levett for their support over the preceding months.

Past President Alison Crake revealed that, not only was the revised Manual of Funeral Directing ready for launch in January 2020 as part of the member benefits for next year, but a second publication on planning for pandemics and mass fatalities was also nearing completion - enabling members to self assess their readiness and contingency plans in the event an incident involving a large number of deaths occurred.

There were two resolutions during the meeting, one being a Rule change reflecting the change from the Funeral Arbitration Scheme to NAFD Resolve and one being confirmation that members wished the accounts to be audited. Both passed.

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Key NAFD dates for your diary

Celebration of Success

7 December 2019

Jurys Inn Hinckley Island, Leicestershire

NAFD Conference 2020

1-3 May 2020

Crown Plaza, Liverpool

NAFD Conference 2021

14-16 May

Cardiff - venue to be revealed

National Funeral Exhibition 2021

11-13 June 2021

Stoneleigh Park

Powerful and poignant guest speakers

Following the conclusion of the Autumn General Meeting, the Association was privileged to hear from a number of external speakers. Firstly, Joanne Kearsley - the Senior Coroner for Manchester North - spoke movingly about the collaboration between organisations in the response to the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017.

She urged funeral directors to get to know people in their local resilience forum as relationships were key to being able to work together under pressure.

After lunch, the Independent Chair of the Funeral Service Consumer Standards Review, Lewis Shand Smith, gave an update on the work of the review - as well as his background as a champion of the consumer through his work as Chief Ombudsman.

His work, going forward, would be to find ways to engage unaligned funeral directors and persuade them of the merits of signing up to a Code of Practice and inspections. He said: "It's their prerogative not to join but, to be able to say to consumers 'I'm signed up to these standards - you can trust me', would be good marketing I'd have thought?"

He also felt strongly that having a consumer resolution scheme was important as part of the Code that was being developed - and that it was something all funeral firms should provide. "I spent 15-16 years as

Ombudsman and I know it's essential that consumers have somewhere to go if something goes wrong. I'll fight for that if necessary."

The draft Code of Practice was expected to be published for consultation in December, following engagement with the FSCSR Stakeholder Group, which now comprised more than 50 industry, consumer and other stakeholder representatives.

Lewis then invited Sarah Jones from Full Circle Funerals, a member of the FSCSR steering group and a funeral firm not in membership of any trade body, to share the findings of her recent research report into the experiences that a range of bereaved people had in organising funerals. She spoke about the different ways - and the different points in a funeral - in which people found meaning, and how they found ways (or struggled to find ways) to make decision making work when a lot of people were influential in the funeral-decision making.

Another key theme emerging from all the presentations was a focus on wellness which, given that it was World Mental Health Day, was particularly important. As well as formal programmes of support for professionals working in difficult jobs, the need to check in on colleagues and keep an eye out for each other was emphasised and the question was posed - do we really know the impact of working with death on a daily basis?



Debate: what does NAFD membership mean to you?

Finally, there was a debate about the importance of NAFD membership to different types of members and how the Association could develop to engage and meet the changing and diverse needs of member organisations as well as bereaved consumers.

Chaired by Nick Britten from Wordsmith Communication, there were discussions about what was important to different types of members, how the Local Associations and Area Federations could be developed - and whether the NAFD's core purpose should still be primarily focused on supporting funeral directors - or whether a broader remit was now required. A continuing theme throughout the debate was the shared responsibility of the NAFD and its members for its ongoing success -

and how a balance could be struck between what the NAFD should do for members, with what members should do in return to support their Association.

The NAFD is extremely grateful to MuchLoved, Coastal Media,

Dodge, Funeral Products, SEIB and, particularly, to headline sponsors Arranger and Funeral Guide, for their sponsorship of the Autumn General Meeting. Without their support, major NAFD events like this simply would not be possible.



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