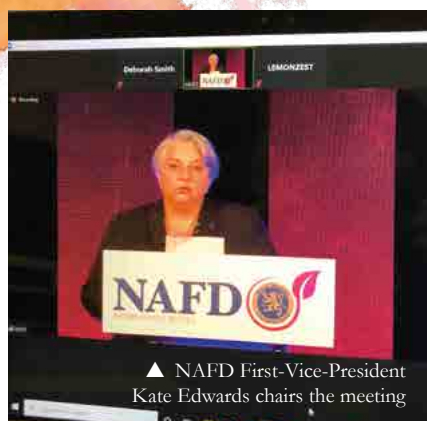


VIBRANT, VARIED - AND VIRTUAL!

THE 2020 AUTUMN GENERAL MEETING ADAPTS TO SOCIAL DISTANCING



▲ NAFD First-Vice-President
Kate Edwards chairs the meeting

Broadcast live from central Birmingham to one of the largest audiences to attend an NAFD General Meeting, the 2020 Autumn General Meeting was the first full event in the Association's 115-year history to be conducted remotely - rather than conducted in person.

For a sector where being there in person is such a fundamental principle, gathering together online might once have felt like a very poor substitute for an in-person event. But this is 2020 and, with no large gatherings permitted anywhere in the UK, the playbook for Association events had to be rapidly rewritten, by NAFD Events Manager Jane Lawrence, for a pandemic period - to ensure that the NAFD and its members could continue to discuss the important matters driving the funeral profession forward.

More than 120 member firms tuned into the broadcast live, with a further 50 already having watched the video posted on the members' website at the time of going to press. This compares to a typical in-person attendance at the Autumn General Meeting of around 100 member firms. We also know that many didn't watch the broadcast alone, and so it is a very positive indicator that blending virtual and in-person events in the future will help the NAFD to reach as many member firms as possible.

The NAFD was grateful to First Vice-President Kate Edwards, who stepped in at



▲ NAFD CEO Jon Levett
presented his report to members

short notice to chair the event after Tier 3 travel restrictions prevented President David Barrington from making the journey.

Welcome from President David Barrington

In his video address to the meeting, the President emphasised his pride in the profession in facing up to the extreme demands that 2020 has already thrown at the funeral sector.

He said: "Although this has been a terrible year for everyone, I am immensely proud of how the funeral sector and the NAFD held up under the extreme pressure we have been under up to this point and would like to say well done to all our members and colleagues who have supported us so far.

"We would not have been able to keep up this work without help from the medical staff, the clergy, celebrants, cemetery and crematoria staff and, of course, all the supplier members that have supported us in fulfilling our role.

"It's not just about COVID either - the CMA market investigation will shape funeral directing for a generation and beyond, and the NAFD and its members have continued to play a huge role in shaping final recommendations to Government, despite extreme time pressures brought about by the pandemic."

Association business

Turning to the Association business section of the meeting, Kate Edwards invited firstly the Chief Executive Officer Jon Levett, and then Independent Chair of the Management Committee Jonathan Rees, to address the meeting.

Jon Levett presented his report to the meeting, highlighting the Association's work on the CMA, COVID and continued governance changes since the short Annual General Meeting was held in June.

In particular, he highlighted the results of a survey, undertaken over the summer, to review the NAFD's response to the first wave of the virus. This involved undertaking a survey of members, a survey of relevant government departments, a telephone survey of some staff members and was supplemented by a number of individual conversations with members.

As a result, four key actions have been taken:-

1. the establishment of Representative Groups for those NAFD members who are involved in Local Resilience Forums/ Excess Death Management Groups in their local areas. This is to make sure these members know what issues National Office is discussing with central Government, for National Office to be informed of any issues arising at a local level that need escalating to central Government and for members to discuss practices being adopted in differing areas;
2. the NAFD is closely monitoring the PPE supply situation of its supplier members, to provide an early warning of any shortages arising;
3. a series of member engagement meetings are being set up, to discuss the issues you are grappling with at a regional level;
4. the Pandemic Planning Guide has been updated and republished.

Jon also highlighted that the NAFD continued to meet with the Cabinet Office

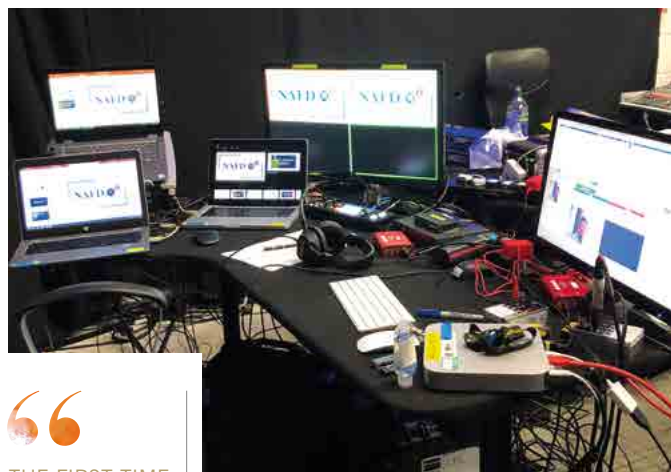
on a weekly basis, and thanked Past President Jeremy Field, who also represented NAFD at those weekly meetings, for his enormous help and support. The Deceased Management Advisory Group continued to meet twice a week and the NAFD's COVID Advisory Group met every Monday, guiding the NAFD's response.

Turning to the CMA, Jon highlighted that the NAFD had submitted its response to the CMA's Provisional Decision Report and expected the CMA's final report to be published in December. The NAFD attended a hearing in October, where we were given the opportunity to give supplementary evidence concerning a number of points we had raised in our response. Consequently, Jon revealed that he had been invited to a follow-up round table with the CMA to explore some of our points in more detail.

After also highlighting the exciting changes taking place in education, where the NAFD is developing a portfolio of education programmes to cover the range of roles in funeral businesses - as well as adapting the

2020 examination programmes to be COVID-secure and revealed the hard work underway to assess the possibilities regarding the 2021 events programme - Jon took a moment to thank every single member of the NAFD team for their extraordinary efforts during 2020: Membership Secretary Su Lewis, Education Development Manager Karen Vanstone, Education Administrator Karen Burton, Management Accountant Joan Philbin, Accountant Tracy Round, Policy and Legislation Manager Morgan Harris, Complaints Analyst Derry Smith, Senior Standards & Quality Manager Nigel Cooper and Standards & Quality Managers Natalie Thomas, Mark Cowan and Gary O'Hara, Head of Business Development Kirsti Clifford, Event Manager Jane Lawrence, National Office Administrator Rochelle Taylor and gardener Patrick McGovern - as well as Stacy Tuohy who looks after advertising for *Funeral Director Monthly* and IT/digital projects, and Deb Smith and Nick Britten of Wordsmith Communication.

Turning to his finance report, Jon explained some of the extraordinary expenditure that had been made



“THE FIRST TIME OF ANYTHING IS NEVER EASY AND THIS WAS INFORMATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL. IT WOULD ONLY BE BETTER IF WE COULD HAVE BEEN TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE TO SHARE THE EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS.”

during the period as part of the response to COVID and the CMA, the impact of not holding in-person events and the prudent financial management required to keep the NAFD's finances in good shape.

As chair, Kate Edwards reported that the vote, held in advance, to adopt the financial report had been passed - as had the proposal for a 0% increase in membership subscriptions for 2021.

Turning to the report of the Independent Chair of the



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▲ President David Barrington addressed the meeting and talked of his pride in the profession in facing up to the extreme demands of 2020



▲ NAFD Past President Alison Crake revealed the second version of the Pandemic Planning Response guide



▲ Jonathan Rees, Independent Chair of the Management Committee, updated members on work over recent months

Underpinning this work was a need to broaden the NAFD's network of relationships with those who take decisions affecting us. He continued: "That is why we recruited Newington Communications to support Jon and the team in how we position ourselves. It is also why we are determined to update the All Party Parliamentary Group in Westminster which, at the moment, is not reaching enough MPs across the political spectrum."

Jonathan's final theme, engagement, touched on how we can best engage with members so we are "all singing from the same hymn sheet and ideally the same tune."

He reported that, during the period, innovations had included:-

- the NAFD's first Annual Review;
- the commencement of a Local Association and Area Federation Review;
- taking *Funeral Director Monthly* online
- creating online meetings forums.

Invited speakers

Following the Association business aspects of the Autumn General Meeting were three guest speakers, whose video presentations can be found on the Members' website, if you would like to watch them.

Firstly, former Inspector of Funeral Directors in Scotland Natalie McKail addressed the meeting on the work she is doing with Senior Standards & Quality Manager Nigel Cooper to review NAFD inspections and to create a new framework that is flexible, risk-based and reflective of the changing needs of the profession going forward and the requirements of the new NAFD Funeral Director Code. Further details of the review were published in an interview with Natalie in October's edition of this magazine.

Natalie urged members to contribute their views to the review, by email to nataliehoy@aol.com, nigel@nafd.org.uk or markc@nafd.org.uk, and confirmed that the review would be completed by December.

Speaking to the event via a recorded presentation from his home in the Shetland Islands, Funeral Service Consumer Standards Review (FSCSR) independent chair and former Chief

Management Committee. Jonathan Rees addressed the meeting with an update on the work in recent months under three broad themes - governance, strategy and engagement.

Under governance, Jonathan described the work of the Management Committee to update, standardise and rationalise the NAFD board and committee structure. This had included subsuming some old committees - including Policy and Legislation and the Board of Examiners - so that we have fewer Committees, all reporting to the Management Committee, the updating of their terms of business, refreshing the Disciplinary Committee and introducing a Nominations Committee to encourage and support constant flow of fresh thinking into our Committees and Offices.

The second major priority had been to review the NAFD's strategy and make sure we are best placed for challenges to come. Said Jonathan: "This is not easy when events are coming at us

from all directions. However, David (Barrington), Jon (Levett) and I are all very keen that we position the Association on a front foot. At each Management Committee meeting we discuss progress against the Annual Plan and ensure it is a living document, considering the risks facing us and mitigation measures we can take - as well as anticipating future challenges."

He also revealed that the Management Committee was working on a five year strategy, which it would want to discuss with as many members as possible before it is finalised.

Also under strategy, Jonathan spoke about the work to develop the NAFD's approach to quality regulation and how the education offer was being developed to reach a higher proportion of those working in the profession, and to make best use of new technology including internet learning and introduce Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

“ I WOULD NOT HAVE ATTENDED WITH THE NEED TO TRAVEL AND FEEL THAT ALL FUTURE AGMS SHOULD BE STREAMED, EVEN IF THEY DO TAKE PLACE AT THE TRADITIONAL VENUES. ”

Ombudsman Lewis Shand Smith spoke next. He explained the short history of the FSCSR and how it had brought together representatives from the funeral and consumer sectors to develop an industry-wide Code of Practice that would “do justice to the passion for funeral directing which you and others have so eloquently expressed and will ensure that bereaved people are always properly and professionally cared for, no matter what kind of funeral they wish to arrange”.

It is also designed to get the funeral profession ready for regulation and ensuring the sector keeps moving forward in the right direction. He said: “It would be easy, particularly in light of the major challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, for the sector to lose sight of the goals it set itself just over a year ago. By adopting the Code, the NAFD will ensure these goals remain in sharp focus over the months ahead.”

During his presentation, Lewis explained how the Code was led by principles and behaviours, seeking to encourage the right behaviours and best possible standards in the profession. You can read more about it on page 16.

The NAFD had always committed to adopting the Code and, having consulted on a draft code earlier this year, the FSCSR met virtually in September to agree changes and sign off this initial version. The NAFD’s transition period, which began the day of the Autumn General Meeting, will enable valuable feedback about the Code to be gathered from members and help to shape its final form.

Lewis added: “No Code of Practice is perfect and it will be necessary to keep the Code under constant review to ensure it never falls out of step

with the expectations of bereaved people. I am particularly conscious that the Review’s Code has only ever been tested in working groups and never in the field. The NAFD’s early adoption of the Code will serve as an incredibly useful pilot, allowing us to put things right and avoid unintended consequences.”

Finally, Past President Alison Crake revealed the second version of her much-valued Pandemic Planning Response guide, which had been updated with the benefit of the experience gained over the last eight months and having realised just how valuable a resource it had proven to be for the profession not only across the UK but internationally too.

Introducing Alison, chair Kate Edwards noted that, in 2020, in addition to creating this valuable guide and updating it six months later to support funeral firms across the UK, Alison had also run her own family funeral business, represented her local area on its local resilience forum, reshaped the terms of reference for NAFD committees and, as Chair of the Board of Education, helped to develop both the new education framework and updated Manual of Funeral Directing.

During her presentation, Alison explained the additional resources developed for this new version included downloadable spreadsheets that supported funeral firms in capturing valuable data about their work, which would not only help them to monitor their staffing and supply levels during particularly busy periods, but also provide valuable insights to local resilience forums and excess death management groups.

Alison also explored a new section on Client Care and Communication - and

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”

sections on caring for the mental and physical well-being of employees (and leaders) in the profession during the winter months ahead.

The NAFD and its members owe Alison a great debt for giving of her time so willingly and extensively - particularly in the current time - and this was highlighted by members David Collingwood (Co-op Funeralcare) and Darryl Smith (Heart of England Co-operative) who jointly proposed a vote of thanks to Alison for her extraordinary commitment to the funeral profession and the Association.

Concluding the meeting

Throughout the meeting, questions submitted from the audience via the chat function were acknowledged by Deb Smith of Wordsmith Communication before being uploaded to a screen in front of the presenters - with the majority being answered during the event and then answered in writing and published on the members’ website.

At the close of the meeting, Jon Levett sought to answer as many of the outstanding questions as possible, before paying tribute to First Vice-President Kate Edwards for stepping in at the last minute and doing such a fantastic job chairing the meeting.

It was then left to Kate, as chair, to close the meeting by thanking all those members who were watching - and also the event sponsors who had helped to make sure the event could be held in such a difficult period:-

To view the Autumn General Meeting videos and answered questions, please log into the Members’ website and don’t forget to complete the feedback survey - whether you attended or not - as it will help us to shape future events.

Sponsorship of the 2020 Autumn General Meeting

A huge thank you to principal sponsor The Mazwell Group and to event sponsors Ecclesiastical Planning Services, Seker, Funeral Partners, Funeral Products, JC Atkinson and Auden Funeral Supplies.

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