

CEO

VIEWPOINT

It is with great delight that we welcome in the New Year having completed the corporate restructure that was unanimously approved by the membership at the Autumn General Meeting in October. NAFD is now a company limited by guarantee, and the Executive meeting on 24 January will be the first meeting of the Executive as a board of company directors, signed up to the Nolan Principles of Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.



A lot of work was needed behind the scenes to bring the new structure into place, and I am very grateful to Joan Philbin, our Management Accountant, and Gavin Gardiner, our auditor, for all the hard work they put into making this happen within what was a challenging deadline. Putting in place a new structure involves a lot of administrative changes – to bank accounts, VAT, HMRC, transfer of staff under TUPE regulations, transfer of leases, etc, as well as all the legal work which was ably handled by our solicitors, Harrison, Clark, Rickerbys.

With that work behind us, we can now start putting in place truly robust governance, which enables the Executive to effectively grapple with the strategic challenges facing the sector, and which ensures that I am held to account for the delivery of our strategic aims. Further

changes will be introduced in the months ahead, including changes to the structure of the Executive - which will be discussed and voted on at the Annual General Meeting.

I have been putting together an ambitious plan for 2019 to discuss with the Executive this month. This includes a number of items to deliver on the membership's appetite for NAFD to set and enforce strengthened standards of practice, as revealed in the recent survey we undertook of members. The plan includes, amongst other things, a review of the Code of Practice and Code of Professional Standards and a fresh look at our inspection regime.

We also need to think carefully how we manage the perception that there is a conflict between the complaints work we undertake to give clients

access to redress when things go wrong, and the important advocacy work we do on behalf of the sector. Some trade bodies and professional organisations have handled this well, and we need to look at models that we can apply to ensure a 'Chinese wall' is wrapped around, and seen to be wrapped around, our complaints work.

I am also keen that we begin to develop a 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD) resource for our members, in anticipation of the need for funeral directors and their staff to show they have maintained their fitness to practise in possible future regulatory regimes. The Board of Education has some interesting ideas as to the kind of courses we may make available. Watch this space for further details.

A flurry of activity followed the publication of the Competition & Markets Authority's (CMA) interim report at the end of November. We have welcomed the proposal for the CMA to undertake a full investigation of the funeral sector, not least because we think it needs further time to gain a full understanding of the work that funeral directors do.

Immediately following the publication of the report, I appeared on ITV News and Radio 4's Money Box, and members of the Executive fielded other media interest. Deborah Smith, Morgan Harris and I met with the CMA, and we held a special Executive meeting to discuss our formal response to the report, which has been emailed to all members. An article summarising its contents can be found on page 08.

It was disappointing that the quality improvements in the sector, for example in mortuary standards and in the personalised choices now

available to the bereaved, were not acknowledged in the report. However, whilst it is important that we challenge those areas where we think the CMA has simply got things wrong, we must not be overly defensive. There are real opportunities arising from the report, and some of its findings and proposed remedies do provide an impetus for change and driving up standards, which are to be welcomed.

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We have been pleased to welcome three new members of staff at National Office. Rochelle Taylor joined us as an Administrator in December. We have also recruited two new members to our Education team. Karen Vanstone will join us as Education Development Manager this month. She will be supported by Karen Burton who started with us in December as Education Administrator.

Jon

