



APSE briefing 19-19 April 2019

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. Crematoria Provision and Facilities – Government Response to the Review (April 2019)

To: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland Bereavement and Parks contacts

This briefing is provided to all APSE member authorities but will be of particular interest to those officers responsible for Bereavement Services and the management of crematoria and associated facilities

Key Issues:

The briefing paper outlines the Governments response to the findings of the review of crematoria provision and facilities, summarising the 150 responses received from multi faith and no faith groups

The package of measures the Government has devised as a result of the review will help make sure communities of all faiths have facilities that are fit for purpose and sensitive to their needs.

These measure will include national guidance on the siting and design of crematoria, and an offer of support to community groups interested in operating their own crematoria.

Faith Minister, Lord Bourne said:

“Cremations have become more and more common. This is why it is vital that there are high quality crematoria that respect cultural and religious traditions of all faiths and beliefs, and those of no faith.

This package of measures will make sure that local authorities and providers offer the appropriate facilities that reflect the communities they serve”.

The briefing note will identify those measures needing to be taken/considered by local authorities in particular

Background

In the July Budget of 2015, Government announced a review of the size and provision of crematoria facilities to make sure they are fit for purpose and sensitive to the needs of all users and faiths. The review was announced in response to concerns about the capacity of crematoria, in particular to accommodate Hindu, Sikh and Jain cremations, at which traditionally larger numbers of mourners wish to attend. In addition, there were concerns that crematoria do not always pay sufficient regard to the cultural sensitivities of different faiths.

Views were sought from faith and other community groups and providers on the following themes:

- Crematoria provision in England, including proximity to the nearest crematoria and demand for new facilities.
- Size and capacity of crematoria, including ability to accommodate large groups of mourners and availability of service times.
- Crematoria facilities, including:
 - *accommodation and amenities to meet particular cultural or religious traditions.*
 - *iconography to meet the needs of faith or other community groups.*
 - *car parking to accommodate large groups of mourners.*
- Staff training which pays sufficient regard to the cultural sensitivities of different faiths and other community groups.

Both users and providers were asked questions on these areas highlighted above to gain a full understanding of the key issues for all groups.

The responses to the questions will be of interest to the owners and operators of crematoria in England, in particular local burial authorities with statutory responsibilities to provide and maintain burial grounds or cemeteries including the provision and maintenance of crematoria; faith and other community groups in England.

Consultation issues and conclusions.

Difficulties in accessing crematoria due to a lack of availability and whether there is a need to develop more crematoria

Following responses received it was clear that it could be argued there could be a need for new facilities in certain areas of the country but overall provision was adequate. It was estimated since 1985 56 new crematoria had been built, 48 of which were privately funded. The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities felt that there were potentially around ten opportunities left in England, Scotland and Wales to introduce new crematoria that are viable to carry out sufficient numbers of cremations per year.

Issues regarding difficulties in developing new crematoria were also considered. In particular the restrictions imposed by the 1902 Cremations Act which prevents a crematorium being located within 200 yards of any dwelling house (except with the consent of the owner) and 50 yards from a public highway. Also the recommendation that sites with sufficient land of at least two to four hectares and in a quiet location to allow peace and tranquillity should also be provided. Comments regarding these restrictions noted that there was a lack of available or affordable land of a sufficient size to make a development economically viable, together with the restrictions of developing on Green Belt land, but also public opposition and local authorities seeking to protect existing council-owned facilities all made new developments difficult.

Despite these concerns most respondents felt that the planning systems remained fair allowing consideration of the relevant local and planning issues in determining whether a new crematorium should be built.

Government's conclusions on the above, were that difficulty in accessing crematoria were limited to a few geographical areas but overall crematorium provision was adequate nationally. They did not see a need to change the restrictions placed in the 1902 Cremations Act needed changing. There was no intention to allow development of crematoria on Green Belt land and that finally Government continues to believe that local authorities are best placed to consider the needs for new crematoria in their area and to consider the facts and circumstances of individual applications.

As a further issue Government has received information from community groups and individuals who have expressed an interest in developing not-for-profit crematoria to address a perceived lack of crematoria. They have referred such proposals to the My Community service provided by The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for further advice.

Size and capacity of crematoria and appropriate times and length of cremation services.

As the cultural diversity of the UK changes so do the needs of the different faith groups, this has particular relevance to the review into the provision of crematoria facilities.

The main issue addressed in this review was the ability to accommodate larger groups of mourners at funeral cemeteries particularly with reference to Hindu, Sikh and Jain funerals. This problem can also occur with the death of young people or a community figure when large numbers of mourners attend. From respondents comments it was clear that funerals attracting more than 100 mourners were often difficult to manage but attempts were being made to address this by providing side chapel or foyers/courtyards where CCTV and sound systems allow mourners who cannot access the chapel a view of the funeral.

Crematoria providers noted that in the majority of cases cremation services do not exceed 100 mourners one large urban council made the point that the majority of funeral services have less than 30 mourners in attendance. It was suggested by one respondent that perhaps varying the size of chapels with smaller rooms being made available as well as larger ones so different funerals can be accommodated.

Regarding the timings and length of services most respondents did that they had experienced difficulties in getting time slots, particularly at peak times and often had to travel further afield to get the slot they wanted, or wait for longer periods to have their family funeral accommodated. On those occasions where funerals took place at weekends or on Bank Holidays, respondents highlighted the higher cost of such funerals by as much as 50%.

The length of time being allotted also showed the need to reconsider the traditional 30 minutes allotted for a service. However it was notable that many providers of crematoria had now extended service times to accommodate those religious groups who had specific requirements or rituals as part of the service such a prayers and hand-washing. It was stated that 45 minute services now make up over 40% of services offered nationally.

A further problem appears to be information both from the viewpoint of funeral arrangers who do not always advise families about the length of service offered and also the slots made available by the providers of the crematoria.

Government's conclusion on the issues above states that there is a clear problem in accommodating larger groups and that The Department of Environment's 1978 guidance on the Siting and Planning of Crematoria recommendation that accommodation should be limited to a maximum of 80 mourners no longer meets the needs of England diverse communities. Industry guidance suggest chapels should be designed to accommodate 100 mourners and is therefore seen as more up-to-date.

However Government also recognises the added costs of providing larger chapels particularly within the constraints of existing sites. Therefore in future needs assessments will need to take into account local demand for larger funeral sizes where they are more common. Government is therefore proposing to consult on revised guidance which allows for larger chapels and foyers to accommodate greater numbers of mourners.

Although there was evidence of difficulties in accessing service times, Government received clear evidence of capacity outside peak times, particularly mornings or late afternoons. Private providers also appear to making adaptations to deliver Saturday services and lower cost funeral outside peak times.

In relation to better information both regarding funeral arrangers and service providers then they ask for greater transparency so that families of the bereaved can make more informed choices.

Crematoria Facilities – Accommodation and Amenities.

Concerns were raised about a lack of accommodation to allow space for ritual prayers, handwashing facilities meeting with family and friends and even the need to change into sacred robes. Respondents often cited that they had to undertake some of these activities outside of the chapel or in external venues such as community halls.

Another area of concern was the inability to view the charging of the coffin into the cremator. Providers of crematoria stated that they were addressing this by developing purpose built viewing points or installing CCTV so mourners could view the charging.

Some respondents mentioned the need for running water in which to scatter ashes and again some providers had identified nearby water sources and provided riverside platforms into which ashes can be scattered.

However on the whole such facilities tend to be provided in those areas where there is a local demand and that unless there is a need, then the cost of adapting old crematoria were seen as unjustifiable.

Government's conclusion stated that although the constraints of ageing facilities, lack of local demand and a lack of space had limited the ability to meet all the needs of the different faith groups it does not accept that such facilities are unjustified. Crematoria as with other public buildings should be able to be utilised by all members of the community and it reminds local authorities of their duties under the Equality Act 2010 to avoid discrimination, and more broadly they encourage all crematoria to work closely with their local communities in ensuring that their facilities meet specific needs.

Therefore regarding the Department of the Environment's guidance on the Siting and Planning of Crematoria they will consult on revised guidance which encourages the needs of different faith or community groups to be taken into account when planning crematoria.

Crematoria Facilities – Iconography

The topic of crematoria providing iconography to meet the needs of the different faith groups was discussed. Many respondents stated that suitable prayer books, music or indeed seating was provided to meet their particular faith needs, stating that crematoria remained overwhelmingly Christian in ethos which considering England has an established church in the Church of England, this is perhaps not to be unexpected.

However most crematoria providers stated that they have removable iconography and allow other faiths to provide their own iconography. Others have gone further by using modern technology through projector systems which project symbols or videos on chapel walls.

Government's conclusion is that crematoria should ensure that their facilities are suitable to meet the needs of all members of the community, including those of faiths and none. It will be consulting on guidance regarding interchangeable iconography.

It appears private providers are more advanced regarding iconography and therefore Government will be writing to all local authorities to confirm there are no restrictions on local government revenue spending which would prevent public funding being used for the provision of non-Christian religious items to help meet the needs of different faith groups. The Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 makes clear that a local authority in England may support or facilitate a religious event, or an event associated with a religious or philosophical belief.

Crematoria Facilities – Car Parking

Car parking was noted as a particular problem particularly where funerals are attracting large numbers of mourners. However in some cases mourners were hiring coaches to reduce parking demands. In order to address the problem providers were providing overflow car parks or leasing additional land dependent upon availability.

Government's conclusion was to note that existing guidance indicates that the size of the car park should be governed by the capacity of the chapel and continues to think this is the right approach. It will consider revised guidance on the impact of overspill car parks and the use of coaches.

Crematoria Facilities – Staff Training.

Due to the wide variation of faith belief it is clear that there needs to be sufficient training for all levels of staff involved in bereavements services to have an appreciation of the different aspects and rituals. Examples cited of poor practice involved placing coffins incorrectly, lacking care when transporting the coffin which can cause turbans to slip, causing distress to mourners when opening the coffin for a last viewing, or religious symbols being placed the wrong way round.

Many providers give comprehensive training on equality and diversity but it is felt emphasis should also be placed on the rituals and needs of the different faith groups. Therefore better channels of communication between cremation representative bodies, crematorium managers, funeral directors, clergy and celebrants and those groups representative of mourners is required.

Some providers are employing specialist faith advisers to help educate staff as well as holding open days to gain a better understanding of community needs.

Government's conclusions note that they acknowledge there are different interpretations of faith and belief practices, nonetheless crematoria providers should be able to demonstrate sufficient understanding of faith and other community group's requirements to be able to provide an appropriate service. They support the move to work more closely with communities to ensure not only facilities meet local need but also to be more transparent about the services they offer so families of the bereaved can make more informed choices.

A full copy of the Government Response to The Crematoria Provision and Facilities review can be found at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793588/Crematoria_Review_-_government_response.pdf

APSE Comment

England's ethnic and cultural diversity is constantly changing, as is the needs of its different groups. The issue of bereavement affect all these races and religions, but the way we all deal with our funerary needs and rites is very different. Therefore the Government's review is perhaps timely if we are to develop services which can take into account as many of these different bereavement requirements as possible.

Government in the review has made it clear that it very much supports local authorities regarding the provision of the infrastructure and its location, but equally it also expects local authorities to provide services which can be tailored to meet the many diverse needs, quoting several pieces of legislation to make this point.

There is clearly a great deal of effort being expended by local authorities into meeting need, with examples of best practice and innovation liberally quoted as part of the reviews findings. However, it should be noted that to meet many of these requirements will require funding, funding which many local authorities are consistently having reduced.

Therefore as part of their promises to review guidance on many of the issues contained within this review, Government needs to consider the implications of what they are proposing and the financial impact new guidance will have.

APSE, through its network queries and Cemeteries and Crematoria Advisory Group receives many requests for information about meeting different faith needs, and will therefore continue to disseminate amongst its members examples of best practice and innovation being delivered by its member local authorities in order to ensure England's Bereavement Services are providing the best quality of services to bereaved families regardless of religious beliefs.

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