

## **Funeral Directors and Crematoria Services**

### **Market Investigation**

#### **Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management Comments on Statement of Issues**

The ICCM welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Statement of Issues, and would urge the panel to read the ICCM's previous submission on the Consultation on the Funerals Market.

The ICCM also makes the following comments in relation to crematoria:

#### **Quality**

It is difficult to measure quality as there are so many factors affecting service provision at a crematorium. Some older crematoria, for example, may not look as impressive at first sight due to building styles no longer being fashionable, but they have excellent customer care and a range of service options and facilities. Conversely, some more recently built crematoria may look impressive, but not offer the same range of services. Further, what may be important for one family, such as an hour long chapel time, may not be important for a family that only want a short committal service.

Choice and flexibility are very important for a quality service. To help measure this, the ICCM has a quality scheme in place – the Charter for the Bereaved. This is a comprehensive assessment of the services offered at a crematorium or cemetery. Each year the participating authorities complete a self-assessment questionnaire, resulting in them achieving a Bronze, Silver or Gold grade, depending on their results. A proportion of Charter Members are audited each year to check their submitted questionnaire and to provide a quality check. The Charter is due for a revision this year, which will take into account current trends within the sector, such as length of service time, provision of audio-visual facilities, access to reduced cost funeral services etc.

Currently the Charter is the only quality assessment scheme available for crematoria and cemetery services. Membership of the Charter is voluntary, but ideally it would be mandatory, with authorities required to display their Charter grade at their premises, on their website and on any literature they produce, similar to how food premises display their food hygiene rating. This would give consumers an insight into the quality and the range of services offered at each crematorium and cemetery, and allow them to make more of an informed choice. A copy of the current Charter for the Bereaved and the annual self-assessment questionnaire is attached. The ICCM would welcome the CMA's recommendation to cremation authorities that they should adopt the Charter for the Bereaved.

#### **Shared budgets**

In many local authorities, crematoria and cemeteries are run as part of one department, with shared budgets across the service. This reflects the historic situation of local authorities providing burial and cremation facilities as a local service to their residents.

In simple terms, cemeteries do not make money, and are costly to maintain. Crematoria have the potential to make money. This is why the increasing interest by the private sector in building and running crematoria has not been matched in cemeteries; the only substantial private sector interest in cemeteries has been in natural burial sites, which don't require high intensity maintenance.

Separation of local authority crematoria budgets from cemetery budgets could be problematic, and would lead to a potential funding gap for cemetery maintenance. This would lead to either a massive increase in burial fees, causing more funeral poverty, or a reduction in the standard of maintenance



in cemeteries, or the local authority having to find alternative sources of income to offset the cemetery maintenance costs.

### **Cremation Costs**

The ICCM collect cremation fee data each year as part of the Royal London report into the cost of funerals. In 2018 63% of the 100 most expensive crematoria were private sector, compared with 37% public sector. The 35 most expensive crematoria in the UK were private sector. Conversely, 85% of the 100 least expensive crematoria were public sector, whilst only 15% were private sector.

The cost of a standard cremation ranged from £380.00 (Belfast – public sector) to £1070.00 (various ██████████ Crematoria – private sector).

Increasing competition through the provision of new crematoria has not driven costs down. As the number of cremations at an existing crematorium declines due to competition from newly built crematoria, the fees have to go up to maintain income levels to continue running and investing in the service. There is therefore no evidence to suppose that the introduction of a franchising model for new crematoria and/or providing for the tendering of contracts to manage local authority crematoria, as suggested in 143.b in the Statement of Issues, would lead to a reduction in costs and therefore help with funeral poverty.

### **Environmental Concerns**

Cremation relies heavily on finite fossil fuels, and emits pollutants. Some of the effects of cremation can be mitigated through better use of cremators, including holding over to ensure that the minimum amount of gas is used. This is possible where the number of cremations is relatively high, but with an increasing number of crematoria available, it may not be possible to use such environmentally beneficial techniques due to low cremation numbers at each site.

Factors such as resources required for a new build site, road construction, transport etc should also be considered when assessing whether more crematoria should be built and current planning conditions changed. Emerging technologies for more environmentally friendly forms of disposal may replace cremation in the longer term, leading to the potential for closed crematoria and distress for bereaved families who would no longer be able to access the sites.