

Competition and Markets Authority

Funeral Market: Insight Gathering

Introduction

Westerleigh Group (“**Group**”) is the leading developer and operator of crematoria and cemeteries in the UK caring for approximately 71,000 funerals a year. We are committed to providing exceptional care in beautiful settings, allowing families to remember, mourn and celebrate the lives of their loved ones in a way that is personal to them.

Further, as the Group includes an FCA authorized and regulated direct funeral planning firm, Distinct Funeral Plans Limited (DFPL), this enables us to have a greater insight into both the pre-need and at-need aspects of the sector.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to respond, outside of the online survey, to the recent invitation from the CMA to provide insights on the funerals sector. This request flows from the CMA market investigation in 2020, one of the outcomes which included a recommendation that the CMA should actively monitor market outcomes in the funerals sector. The Group welcomes the opportunity to provide the following insights, which focus primarily on the key themes to emerge since 2020 and follows the sunlight measures that have been implemented. These are:

- increased price and service option transparency for customers;
- the broader range of choices available to customers, being driven by a change in customer awareness and customer preferences; and
- a broader range of price points available to customers, including the choice of lower priced funerals.

Westerleigh Group Insights

The Market

Since the CMA 2020 market investigation the funeral sector has been through considerable change. Some of the key changes include:

- A significant increase in unattended cremations¹. An estimated 18% to 20% of all cremations are now unattended compared to less than 3% pre-2020².
- 59% of customers actively cutting the cost of the funeral by choosing what is included or excluded in the service³.
- An increase in the number of online ‘Funeral Directors’ offering direct cremations especially unattended.

¹ A cremation without any service

² SunLife Cost of Dying Report 2024 [Funeral Costs - Cost Of Dying Report 2024 | SunLife | SunLife](#)

³ SunLife Cost of Dying Report 2024 [Funeral Costs - Cost Of Dying Report 2024 | SunLife | SunLife](#)

- As explained below, direct cremations⁴ enable customers to choose a funeral at a lower cost than a standard funeral and significant competition (including from online providers) has resulted in a reduction in prices for direct cremations⁵.
- Customers looking for alternative funeral options such as, woodland burials, green burials, or other non-religious options.
- Customers looking more closely at the cost of a funeral in light of changing religious beliefs, the cost-of-living crisis, the wishes of the deceased and celebrating rather than mourning life in a different way.

Simpler Standard Services

Westerleigh has identified a noticeable increase in the demand for direct cremations with attendees, often referred to as attended direct cremations and simpler standard services⁶. Religious beliefs are changing and more awareness of direct cremations has led to an increase in families still wanting some elements of the standard service, such as time in chapel, but without the need for hearses and limousines, etc. which have traditionally added significantly to the total cost of a funeral. For example, the price of an attended direct cremation is typically in the range of £1,599 - £1,895⁷ and the price of a direct cremation is typically in the range of £850 – £1,775. This compares to the average price of a standard funeral of between £3,256 - £5,171⁸.

This is also borne out by the sales of funeral plans whereby 63% of all sales for the first half of 2024 are for 'simpler' funerals according to The National Association of Funeral Plan Providers (<https://nafpp.org>).

The Group anticipates a continued increase in the desire for direct cremations, both attended and unattended, and year on year expect the numbers to continue to rise.

How has the sector and the Group reacted to market changes

The sector has responded to changes in customer preferences and the CMA sunlight remedies by offering a greater range of funeral products at a wider range of price points, including lower cost funerals. As the funeral sector continues to change, the Group is committed to continue innovating to offer a broader choice to meet the ever-changing needs and requirements of customers. We are now able to offer a number of service options:

- **Early morning** – catering for more intimate / personal attended services with a chapel time up to 30 minutes.
- **Standard** (11.00 to 16.00) - with up to 60 minutes chapel time and unlimited attendees.
- **Twilight** (after 16.00) – with up to 60 minutes chapel time and unlimited attendees.
- **Weekend** - with up to 60 minutes chapel time and unlimited attendees.

⁴ A direct cremation usually refers to an unattended cremation without a funeral service; a variant is an "attended direct cremation" where mourners are present.

⁵ For example, [Direct Cremation from £995 | Celebration of Life \(col.co.uk\)](#), [Direct Cremation Services \(UK's Top Rated Provider\) | Aura](#), [Direct Cremation - Fenix Funeral Directors](#)

⁶ A standard service is where a customer has actively included or excluded a number services e.g. flowers, limousine, hearse, embalming

⁷ [Attended Direct Cremations | Aura](#), [Attended Direct Cremations | Aura](#), [Personal Funeral Arrangement in UK - Memoria Funerals](#)

⁸ [Funeral Costs - Cost Of Dying Report 2024 | SunLife | SunLife](#)

NB: Only 1 of the 40 crematoria within the Westerleigh estate is limited to 45 minutes chapel time.

Further, the Group has formed innovative partnerships with national industry trade bodies, allowing the member funeral directors access to preferential arrangements for direct and simpler cremations.

This has given funeral directors the ability to provide a wider range of options to their families; a greater choice of services, access to crematoria which may not have been considered previously due to location, and to work with their families to arrange a funeral that meets any financial considerations that they may be working with.

Summary

The Group were and continue to be fully supportive of the sunlight remedies introduced following the 2020 investigation.

We firmly believe that they have had a positive impact on customer choice and value for money. Customers are able to shop around and compare prices (there is evidence that they are doing so in greater numbers year on year⁹), driving competition and prices are now much more transparent. Changing customer requirements have also led to a broader range of funerals being available, including direct cremations which offer customers a lower price option.

The Group has and will continue to react with speed to the changing requirements of customers, offering greater flexibility and choice and meeting the needs of all customers regardless of type, timing or budget.

⁹ [Funeral Costs - Cost Of Dying Report 2024 | SunLife | SunLife](#) – 15% of customers cut costs by shopping around in 2023 vs 11% in 2023