

## **The NAFD Welcomes the 2017 National Funeral Cost Index Report**

The National Association of Funeral Directors, whose members arrange 80% of the funerals taking place in the UK each year between them, has welcomed the 2017 National Funeral Cost Index report, by Royal London, and the evidence it provides of the hard work that funeral firms of all shapes and sizes are doing to support bereaved families. In particular, the NAFD welcomes confirmation that, after abstaining from price rises in 2016, funeral firms have pegged price rises at 2.1% this year – below the rate of inflation.

Chief Executive of the NAFD, Mandie Lavin, said: “Many funeral directors are introducing flexible payment options, pegging any price increases at the lowest possible level, introducing an ever-wider range of choices and publishing comprehensive price lists online in order to act in the public interest and ensure families can make informed decisions and feel confident that the funeral they choose is within their budget range.”

However, with both burial and cremation fees attracting above inflation price rises (the report shows burial fees up by 3.5% for residents and 5.3% for non-residents and cremation fees up by 5.4%), Ms Lavin called upon both local and national government to do their share too.

Ms Lavin added: “It is disappointing to see other organisations, many in the public sector, continuing to levy above inflation price rises, exacerbating the postcode lottery effect of burial and cremation fees and, at the same time, to also see funeral expenses payments from the Government Social Fund fall to their lowest level in decades.

“We know of many funeral directors who have found themselves trying to minimise their own costs to offset the impact of high price rises by other parties. Surely supporting hard-pressed families faced with the funeral of a loved one should not be solely the responsibility of the private sector? There should also be appropriate avenues for people to follow, when faced with funeral expense and affordability issues, and this is certainly something we remain committed to working with Government to achieve.”

The NAFD backed Royal London’s call for the Department for Work and Pensions to widen its review of the Social Fund Funeral Expenses Payment to include the falling numbers of people qualifying for a payment, the inadequate level of the payment and the length of time it takes to process claims.

However, in responding to Royal London’s call for the funeral profession to provide more direct cremation-style services, Ms Lavin countered that this is not always in the interests of grieving families.

She said: “All of our members are able to arrange a direct cremation – and this has been the case for many years. The reality is, a direct cremation means there is no opportunity for any family member to attend. In our experience, many families prefer to choose a more traditional funeral option when faced with this reality. A funeral is far more than a disposal; it is an important part of the grieving process and the significant increase in venue hire and catering spend over other discretionary items, such as flowers, indicates that, for many people, the importance of gathering together to mark the end of a life is what is really important.

“In the NAFD’s view, our members are working hard to do everything they can to act in the public interest; tailoring their services to meet the needs and budgets of the diverse range of families in the UK who lose a loved one each year. It’s time for both burial and cremation authorities and the Government to do the same.”

