

Briefing 17-16

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## **Facilitating Family Presentations at Local Authority Funeral Services**

This APSE briefing provides details on the methods local authority bereavement services are adopting to meet the changing and varied requirements of bereaved families to express their wishes at family funeral services.

### **Key issues**

Funeral services have been traditionally provided by local authorities for many years, but public tastes and demands are changing and will require suitable responses if they are to remain competitive.

There is a desire between local authorities to share information and benchmark performance against others be this operational or service choice and quality.

The aim of this short briefing note is to highlight how local authority bereavement services are rising to the challenges of new technology and improving service offer in a sensitive and practical manner.

### **Overview**

APSE was requested by a member authority to carry out a short survey on the different approaches local authorities are adopting to enable bereaved families to undertake more personalised approaches to funeral services than the traditional services which have been the norm for decades.

The advent of a more digital society has seen the growth of customers wanting to bring photographs, music and even on-line streaming to funeral services. These developments has caused the provision of the traditional funeral service to change. Added to the decline in church attendance, new services have also begun to appear, such as humanist services. Humanist funerals are designed to bring people together to express sadness at the loss but also to celebrate the life lived. They focus sincerely and affectionately on the person who has died, paying tribute to the connections they made and left behind and the way they lived their life. One of the ways this is expressed is by bereaved families creating presentations which they deliver at the funeral service.

The ability for local authorities to provide the necessary technological infrastructure has meant significant investment in improving their funeral service offer. This investment is

often built into wider facility improvements already planned for the crematoria or funeral chapel, such as mercury abatement equipment, improved seating areas, toilet provision, extra car parking, and the multi-media equipment necessary for photographs, films and music to be provided.

With this in mind there is a need to understand how these new service offers will be provided, managed and costed.

Therefore APSE put out a short survey to gather information on these considerations and received a healthy response.

## **Survey Questions**

### ***Do you provide a facility to play presentation (slides/photographs etc.) in your chapel?***

**73%** of responding authorities do provide facilities **27%** do not.

Of the comments received the following were most common:

Wesley Music System was most heavily used by those offering media opportunities

Families could bring their own facilities (PAT tested), and requested to test system before service to avoid disappointment if IT fails on the day.

Some offer on-line streaming of service and also opportunity of DVD of service for purchase

Of those who do not offer media facilities at this time, only one said they were not intending to introduce them in the near future.

### ***Do you make an additional charge for use of the presentation facility?***

**65%** do make a charge, **35%** do not.

The general approach to provision of material for the presentation was as follows:

Information is sent by the local authority, Funeral Directors or family to media providers to ensure suitability once the crematorium has raised a purchase order with the provider e.g. Wesley. Then the media provider provides a link that means the format can be uploaded to them with a specific log in for this purpose. This ensures that the families only send data relevant to a particular funeral.

### ***How do you ensure that submitted presentations are in a suitable format?***

The most common response to this question was that the Media supplier checks the presentations are in a format which can be played on the equipment installed in the relevant chapel. The media provider notifies the crematorium when the presentation is downloaded and the bereavement staff check the presentation works prior to the service.

***Do you provide instructions/guidance to customers or funeral directors to explain the requirements for submitting a presentation?***

69% said yes, 31% said no.

***By when do you require the presentation to be submitted to your team?***

Day before the service = 13%

48 hours before the service = 65%

Other – 22%

***Do you provide video feed facilities to allow mourners outside the chapel to view the funeral service?***

Yes 59%, whilst 41% said no.

Most of the respondents stated they had screens available in their crematorium/chapel waiting rooms. Those that provided web-cast facilities did this through their media supplier. Some stated that a user name and password was required to access the webcast.

***Do you provide live video feed to family and friends who are unable to attend the service e.g those who live overseas?***

Yes 49%, and No 51%

Whilst over half do not supply the service, it is as a result of issues such as unstable internet connections or they have not yet finalised an agreement to fund the necessary technology, although it is likely they will offer this service in the near future. Within a few years the provision of live video feed will be commonplace across funeral services.

**APSE Comment:**

Local Authority Bereavement Services are finding themselves, along with other council services, facing ongoing budget cuts and as such are having to consider new ways to plug these funding gaps whilst still retaining service quality.

Traditional service delivery whilst still having its place, also needs to be re-assessed as public tastes change and become more diverse.

It is clear from these survey results that digital technology has impacted on future funeral service provision and if local authorities are to retain business then they must be able to meet the demands of this technology and ultimately their current and more importantly, future customers.

Almost all of the respondents to the survey have, or are in the process of introducing media services as part of their funeral service offer. Only where there are clear operational difficulties such as poor internet reception, is the progress less apparent.

Although the majority of local authorities are choosing to charge for the provision of these new service offers, some at this moment in time, are building these services into existing costs, preferring not to gain income out of this improved service offer. Whatever the decision regards additional charges what is clear is that local authority bereavement services are becoming more adaptable to change and are developing services which not only can meet current needs but are sufficiently robust enough to meet customer needs well into the future.

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