

## WELSH GOVERNMENT INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### Additional financial support towards funeral and other associated costs for the death of children under 18

#### SECTION 1. WHAT ACTION IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING AND WHY?

On 23 November 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association (on behalf of principal councils) and One Voice Wales (on behalf of community and town councils) was signed to end local burial and cremation fees for children in Wales.

The MoU set out a shared commitment to waive standard fees that burial authorities charge relating to:

- The *cremation* of a person under the age of 18 years (including stillborn and foetal remains);
- The *interment* of a person under the age of 18 years (including stillborn and foetal remains);
- The *exclusive right of burial*, where required;
- Any *other fees* directly relating to the burial or cremation of a person, or the cremated remains of a person, under the age of 18 years (for example, the fees charged for permission to erect a memorial).

The fees are waived by local government at source and, in recognition of the implications of not charging, the Welsh Government has provided financial support to local government by way of an annual grant. This money has been made available to LAs provided that they do not charge the relevant fees themselves and that they put in place arrangements to distribute an appropriate amount of the funding to other providers that also operate in line with the MoU.

Welsh Ministers committed to undertake a review of the current arrangements before the end of 2019-20 to consider how the MoU has worked in practice and whether the scope of what is covered should be expanded, for example to cover or contribute to the cost of a coffin and other wider funeral costs.

Following consideration of the review's findings and recommendations, the Minister for Housing and Local Government agreed there was value in retaining the current MoU and associated funding in relation to child burial and cremation fees.

The Minister also instructed officials to pursue provision of additional financial support towards funeral and other associated costs for children under 18 through a locally-delivered model in partnership with local government and others. This assessment considers the impacts of doing so.

#### Long term

Ending child burial and cremation fees has gone some way in reducing the financial burden on bereaved families that have suffered the loss of a child.

However, for many families the stress and worry about paying for other funeral costs is still an issue. Providing funding to cover additional costs such as a coffin, funeral vehicles, floral tributes and memorials will help further alleviate the financial burden for families at such a distressing time.

Expanding the scope of the support in relation to child burials and cremations will deliver a fair and consistent approach across Wales and will also provide more consistency across Wales and England<sup>1</sup> to ensure all families are supported equally, and that no family is disadvantaged because of where they live.

### **Prevention**

The policy aims to:

- Alleviate some of the financial burden faced by families, recognising that additional financial hardship could have longer term impact on the family; and
- Better support the health and well-being of the parent/legal guardian and wider family by reducing unnecessary stress and bureaucracy when they are at their most vulnerable.

### **Integration**

The policy should be considered an integral part of Welsh Government's commitment to support children and families, alongside the work that is already being done in Wales to improve health and equality outcomes for children and families, for example:

- Waiving of child burial and cremation fees
- National Framework for the delivery of bereavement care in Wales
- Healthy Child Wales Programme
- Flying Start
- Baby Bundle initiative
- First 1000 Days
- Cross-portfolio Early Years agenda
- Parenting – Give It Time
- Families First
- Healthy Start
- Designed 2 Smile
- Parental Information work being produced by Public Health Wales

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is fundamental to the approach taken in Wales. We have worked in partnership with local government and other key stakeholders to co-design the development and delivery of additional financial support towards the funeral and associated costs so that bereaved families can be supported in the most compassionate and practical way.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Funeral Fund England (CFF) provides funding towards certain funeral related costs - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-funeral-fund-for-england>

A working group was established comprising of representatives from the relevant services in local authorities.

### **Involvement**

A wide range of stakeholders were engaged as part of the review of existing arrangements for child burial and cremation fees (MoU and associated funding) and this informed the decision to provide additional financial support towards the funeral and associated costs. In addition, we proactively engaged with these stakeholders to inform the working group's development (approach and scope) of the additional support:

- Local Authorities, Town and Community Councils and other burial providers
- Local Health Boards
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Welsh Government Bereavement Support Working Group<sup>2</sup>
- Other devolved administrations
- The funeral sector's Death Management Advisory Group (DMAG)
- Internal Welsh Government officials

### **Impact**

In terms of the impact of the proposed expansion of the existing scope of the support for bereaved families of children, the arguments for and against have been considered, as follows:

For:

- Although there has been no direct contact with bereaved families, there is generally a belief from stakeholder groups which work with them that providing additional financial support towards the funeral and associated costs will have a positive impact for bereaved families;
- Providing funding to cover additional costs will help further alleviate the financial burden for families – parents never expect to lose a child and therefore, are unlikely to have planned for it; and
- Providing additional financial support towards funerals and associated costs will provide consistency in the support available across Wales and England and ensure no family is disadvantaged because of where they live.

***Welsh Government Bereavement Support Working Group – “Losing a child is the worst thing that can ever happen to a parent. Having to then face the financial burden of giving them a wonderful funeral adds unnecessary pain and worry at this heart-breaking time.”***

***Quote from a parent in response to the end of child burial and cremation fees – “When my daughter Daisy died, I needed to focus on grieving and supporting Daisy’s***

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<sup>2</sup> Membership includes internal policy leads, representation from charitable organisations involved in supporting families who have suffered the loss of a child, service user representatives, health boards representatives and members of the End of Life Care Board and clinicians

*siblings but found myself worrying about the financial burden of paying for her funeral. No parent should ever have to worry about money whilst grieving for a child.”*

Against:

- There was a mixed initial response from local authorities on the value of an expansion in scope – as funeral directors often waive some costs or greatly reduce them in relation to children. However, it is not clear what costs this covers; how consistently this is applied; and what age ranges it covers; and
- Some local authorities had concerns that a local authority-led delivery model would result in a significant amount of additional administrative burden on them.

As set out above, a wide range of stakeholders were engaged throughout the review of existing arrangements and the development of additional financial support for bereaved families that have lost a child.

### **Costs and Savings**

The average number of child deaths in Wales (over a three-year period) is 367, and this was used to model the cost of providing this additional support to families<sup>3</sup>. However, the final allocation for local authorities will be based on the average number of deaths registered (over a two-year period)<sup>4</sup>. This will ensure that local authorities get the right level of funding to distribute to families based on where the loss has been registered rather than where the loss occurred.

In addition, there will be some costs in relation to the ongoing delivery and administration of providing the support – but these will be minor because the approach to delivery has been built into an established system, within the existing role of the Registrar.

In total it is estimated that the additional support will cost around £200,000 and will be funded from the Housing and Local Government MEG.

### **Mechanism**

Legislation is not required to deliver this proposal.

Section 60 of the Government of Wales Act (GOWA 2006) gives the Welsh Ministers powers to do anything which they consider appropriate to achieve, among other things, the promotion of improvement of economic or social well-being of Wales. Providing bereaved families with financial support towards the costs of a funeral, will promote economic and social well-being.

Section (2) provides that this power may be exercised in relation to or for the benefit of the whole or any part of Wales or all or any persons resident or present in Wales.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on ONS figures 2016-2018 (calendar years) where the loss occurred.

<sup>4</sup> Based on information provided by Registrars of the average number of deaths registered over a two-year period (FY's 2018-19 and 2019-20) within the local authority

Payment will be offered on registration of the loss (eligibility for the payment is established at the point of registration). This approach has been built into an established system, within the existing role of the Registrar, who will act in this regard in their capacity as a LA employee and not a statutory Registrar.

## SECTION 7. CONCLUSION

### 7.1 How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

Collaboration is fundamental to the approach taken in Wales. We have worked in partnership with local government and other key stakeholders, to develop an approach so that bereaved families can be supported in the most compassionate and practical way.

A wide range of stakeholders were engaged as part of the review of existing arrangements for waiving child burial and cremation fees (MoU and associated funding) and this informed the decision to also provide additional financial support towards the funeral and associated costs. In addition, we actively engaged with these stakeholders to inform the approach and scope of the additional support:

- Local Authorities, Town and Community Councils and other burial providers
- Local Health Boards
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Welsh Government Bereavement Support Working Group<sup>5</sup>
- Other devolved administrations
- The funeral sector's Death Management Advisory Group
- Relevant Welsh Government officials

In addition, a working group was established to co-design the development and delivery of additional financial support towards the funeral and associated costs. The group was represented by local authority bereavement service leads; Registrars and WLGA.

Although children, parents, guardians and families were not directly consulted, the Welsh Government Bereavement Support Working Group were consulted. Membership includes representation from charitable organisations involved in supporting families who have suffered the loss of a child, service user representatives, health board representatives, members of the End of Life Care Board and clinicians who work directly with families to support them when they have experienced the loss of a child. For this reason, members were asked for their thoughts on what more can be done in Wales to support grieving families at such a difficult time.

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<sup>5</sup> Membership includes internal policy leads, representation from charitable organisations involved in supporting families who have suffered baby loss, service user representatives, health boards representatives and members of the End of Life Care Board and clinicians.

## 7.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

The approach to expanding the support to also provide a contribution towards funeral costs has been designed nationally, through the working group, to ensure a consistent approach to its delivery and that all families are treated equally. It will sit as part of a package of support including the waiving of burial and cremation fees and the provision of bereavement support services and should be considered an integral part of Welsh Government's commitment to support children and families, alongside the work that is already being undertaken in Wales to improve health and inequality outcomes for children and families.

The Children's Rights impact assessment has concluded that providing additional financial support to bereaved families that have lost a child will have a number of positive indirect impacts on children; and direct impacts, including where the parent or guardian is also a young person, or where there are other siblings. The policy will provide financial assistance in circumstances that may otherwise have caused financial hardship for parents, including those who are younger and perhaps less financially resilient. This will help support families to continue being parents for as long as possible as one of the last acts they can do is to provide a fitting funeral for their child. It will also help to alleviate some of the financial burden on families of all ages, including the most vulnerable families where additional financial hardship could have longer term impact on the wider family, including any other surviving children. We do not believe that the policy will negatively impact on the rights of children.

The policy will apply to all bereaved families that have lost a child below the age of 18 in Wales without discrimination. The Equalities Impact Assessment acknowledges that this policy is specifically to support families to pay towards the funeral or other associated costs of a child under the age of 18 – therefore, the same support will not be offered to the families of deceased young people or adults over the age of 18 who may also experience financial difficulties in the same situation.

The impact on the Welsh Language has been explored through a Welsh Language impact assessment. It is not expected that this policy will have a negative impact on the use of the Welsh Language or on Welsh Language communities.

Consideration of the impact of this policy on biodiversity concluded that there would be no negative impact on biodiversity.

A DPI screening assessment has been undertaken and it has been determined that the proposal does not meet the criteria for undertaking a DPIA specified by Article 35(1), 35(3) and 35(4) of the GDPR.

## 7.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

The policy supports the Welsh Governments well-being goals and objectives by:

- **A Prosperous Wales and A more Equal Wales** - Delivering a fair and consistent approach across Wales and providing more consistency across Wales and England will ensure all families are supported equally and that no family is disadvantaged because of where they live;

- **A Resilient Wales** - Alleviating some of the financial burden on bereaved families that have lost a child, including the most vulnerable families where additional financial hardship could have longer term impact on the family;
- **A Healthier Wales** - Better supporting the health and well-being of the parent/legal guardian and wider family by reducing unnecessary stress and bureaucracy when they are at their most vulnerable; and
- **A Wales of Cohesive Communities – Promoting knowledge and access to wider bereavement support services for parents and families.**

We don't believe the policy will have a negative impact on the well-being goals and objectives.

#### **7.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?**

In line with the agreed approach, as details of the funeral or evidence of spend will not be required it will be difficult to evidence/evaluate the direct impact of the scheme. However it is proposed that the approach is kept under review as it is implemented and that a wider review is undertaken after a period of time to collect qualitative information from Registrars and bereavement support services to understand what the impact has been. Welsh Government will also monitor the number of payments being made on an annual basis.