

Leading Bereavement Expert Says MPs' Report On The State of Funeral Provision Is Inaccurate As British Funeral Culture Is Changing Rapidly

Howard Hodgson highlights increasing use of Low Cost Direct Cremation to cut funeral costs.

In the wake of the recent release of the Parliamentary Work and Pensions Select Committee's damning report into the state of financially supportable funeral provision in England and Wales, a leading UK funeral expert believes the solutions to the problems already exist.

Howard Hodgson, a 5th generation funeral director with 50 years experience in the funeral industry, claims there is already a solution to the high cost of dying question without having to increase demands on the public purse or the need for Government intervention.

The Select Committee findings criticised the "opaque and outdated" state support arrangements for those unable to afford the cost of a funeral, as well as the rigid definitions around whom the Government deems to have been "close" to the deceased. Hodgson agrees, pointing out that the provisions have not been reviewed for 13 years. However, he goes on to criticise the report's out of date assessment of the market and says that there is no need for the intervention of the competition watchdog, the Competition and Markets Authority.

Hodgson says the report fails to recognise that the market has changed dramatically to meet increased demand for low cost direct cremation driven by financial consideration, diminished religious commitment and less desire to incur all the expense that a traditional funeral service involves. He cites the recent low cost direct cremation of David Bowie as an example that proves that this new direction is created as much by a change in funeral fashion as it is by financial necessity.

His company Memoria Ltd, which has a national network of crematoria covering England and Wales, has received so many enquiries about low cost direct cremation that it launched a number of low cost direct cremation options and reports that demand is brisk and increasing.

- A low cost direct unattended cremation service costs a total of £1,100.00
- A low cost direct unattended cremation is usually followed by an attended memorial service.
- A low cost direct attended cremation service costs in total either £1,600.00 or £2,000.00 depending on the hour time slot selected during the day.
- Full details of these services are available at www.memoria.org.uk
- All three options are considerably less than the £3,000.00 to £6,000.00 cost of a traditional funeral service, which varies by the service provision selected or the area of the country where the funeral is taking place.

Reacting to the Select Committee's report, Howard Hodgson, CEO of Memoria, said;

"At Memoria it has become evident to us that there is an increasing desire by a growing section of the general public for a low cost direct cremation service. We do not believe that this will totally replace the traditional funeral but we do have significant evidence that it is increasing its market share at an impressive rate, signifying a distinct cultural change in the way people are approaching funerals.

Therefore, we believe that there is not only a moral need to supply this legitimate demand, but that such provision can also reduce the cost of a funeral by around 70% and that this must be good news for both the less well off and the public purse.

Just to ignore this trend is not in the interest of either the funeral industry or the Government. Indeed, no costly Government intervention is necessary because the market has found a solution to the problem as it usually does in a free enterprise economy.

We are now seeing a groundbreaking change as the baby boomers start to end their days. This generation changed the fashion of life and now it is changing the fashion of death. This is good news for families who want to select low cost direct cremation and yet does not impact at all on those who don't."

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Howard Hodgson has more than 50 years experience in funeral care.
- Mr Hodgson comes from a long family line of funeral providers, first becoming an apprentice funeral director in 1968.
- An industry legend, Mr Hodgson was named 'Entrepreneur of the Year' in 1987 for his role in funeral care and the Stock Market Flotation of his company, and went on to oversee the subsequent merger with Kenyons in 1989 which resulted in then the largest funeral group in the UK. Howard sold his interests in 1991, having taken the company from one branch to 546.
- A successful author and broadcaster, Howard Hodgson has produced a number of books including two works of fiction based on his experience in the funeral business, an autobiography entitled *How To Become Dead Rich*, and a bestselling biography of Prince Charles.
- He founded Memoria (www.memoria.org.uk) in 2003.
- Memoria offers cremation services across a range of services including a specialised low-cost range www.memoria.org.uk/services-and-facilities/low-cost-cremations/