

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

March 2017

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the costs of children's funerals.

As a Minister, I do not, by convention, sign any Early Day Motions (EDMs), as doing so is likely to breach the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility. However, I agree that this is an incredibly important issue, and the death of a child is always a tragedy for which families cannot plan.

I understand that a number of local authorities already choose to waive fees for children's funerals. I hope all local authorities would carefully consider their policy in this area. As democratically elected organisations, however, they are independent of central Government and are responsible for managing their budgets in line with local priorities.

There is a role that central government can play, which is why the Department for Work and Pensions operates the Social Fund Funeral Payment scheme that you mention. This continues to provide valuable help for people in receipt of a qualifying benefit. With an average award in 2015-16 of £1,410, the scheme is making a real contribution to the funeral costs of those who need it. Indeed, the average award has increased by 27 per cent since 2006.

The scheme meets the full necessary costs of a cremation or burial. Other costs, such as the coffin, and church and funeral directors' fees, are limited to a maximum scheme payment of £700. There is, however, no restriction on the type of funeral expenses that can be claimed under this category.

I am pleased that a Minister is restarting a round table group with the funeral industry and bereavement charities, because it is important that the Government has a better understanding of how the industry works, and what more can be done to help. I will be following the progress of these discussions carefully.

Once again, many thanks for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY

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