

Funeral Payments: SOPA UPDATE, Nov 2015,

4th November 2015, COSLA offices: Discussion on funeral payments

In the context of future powers over welfare raised by the Scotland Bill, currently going through Westminster, approximately £2.6 billion of welfare expenditure will be devolved to Scotland out of a total Scottish expenditure of £17.5 billion. This equates to **14.6%** out of 84.4% which will remain reserved to Westminster. **One of the welfare powers to be devolved is funeral payments.**



SOPA has raised this issue in the past and it was a major point at the recent annual assembly with the rising costs of funerals a major campaigning issue. It was also noted by Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners Rights in his speech to the SOPA assembly.

Funeral price inflation

John Birrell, Chair of the Scottish Working Group on Funeral Poverty, drew attention to the lack of awareness or understanding of the funeral payments system and the rising costs of funerals in recent years. These were issues highlighted by SOPA in the past - in essence funeral price inflation. It was also noted that burial and cremation costs varied widely among local authorities, in effect a 'post code lottery' with Aberdeenshire and Perthshire being the most expensive places to die in Scotland.

Several policy ideas came out of both the presentation and the discussions that followed, including the idea of 'budget funerals'. These would start with a minimum cost and also a comparison cost of funeral directors (possibly on a website). It was also suggested that there should be inquiries into funeral directors' practices and local authorities, for a justification of the rising cost of funerals. This will be a continuing SOPA campaigning issue but it heartening to see that the campaign is already having an effect.