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Chair of the Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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MoJ ref: ADR 70028

28th June 2019

CHILDREN'S FUNERAL FUND FOR ENGLAND (CFF)

I am writing to inform you that, on Monday 1 July, the Social Fund (Children's Funeral Fund for England) Regulations 2019 will be laid before the House. These Regulations will establish the Children's Funeral Fund for England (the CFF) and are to be delivered under Social Fund powers in section 138 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. It is the Government's intention that the CFF will come into effect on 23 July.

The CFF was announced by the Prime Minister at Easter last year. The announcement was in response to a cross-party campaign, initiated in November 2016 and led by Carolyn Harris MP, which called on the Government to establish a fund to spare bereaved parents the additional distress of having to meet the cost of their child's funeral. At Prime Minister's Questions in February 2019, the Prime Minister committed to delivering the CFF by the summer, a commitment which I reiterated on 1 May during an Adjournment Debate tabled by Carolyn Harris.

Annually, there are approximately 3,800 deaths of children from birth up to and including age 17, and just over 2,700 stillbirths after the 24th week of pregnancy. The CFF is part of a package of measures delivering the Government's commitment to provide bereaved families with the support they need. The scheme will complement other initiatives such as the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018, which received Royal Assent last September.

Once the Regulations come into force, bereaved families will no longer have to meet the fees charged for a cremation or burial of a child under the age of 18. Rather, they will now be able to access this provision for free at the point of need, with the costs being met by Government funding and providers applying to the CFF for reimbursement. As a further gesture of support, the CFF will also provide a capped contribution of up to £300 towards a coffin (or shroud or casket, where preferred), and will meet other specified expenses.

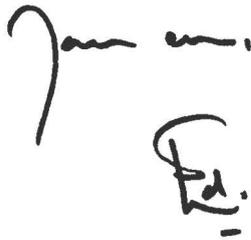
In recognition of the burden faced by bereaved families at this incredibly difficult time, the Government has aimed to make the CFF as generous as possible by, for example, taking a minimal approach with regard to eligibility. CFF provision will be universal, allowing all bereaved families whose child is buried or cremated in England to access this support, regardless of their means. Neither are the residency or nationality of the deceased child, or of the bereaved, relevant in determining eligibility.

The annual cost of the CFF is estimated at between £8.5m and £14m, including £1.5m running costs. It will run in parallel with the Social Fund Funeral Expenses Payment (FEP) scheme so that bereaved families in receipt of qualifying benefits can continue to apply to the FEP scheme for fees and expenses within its scope which are not covered by the CFF.

As I mentioned in the House on 1 May, the establishment of the CFF will bring England into line with Welsh and Scottish Governments who have established their own schemes, under devolved powers, to provide support for child burial and cremation. Provision for bereaved families will be available in all three jurisdictions under the arrangements applying in the jurisdiction in which the burial or cremation takes place.

My officials have worked closely with a range of interested parties, including industry representatives and charities, who have welcomed the Government's decision to offer practical support to bereaved families at such a distressing time. The scheme is complemented by the industry's own continued support for bereaved families through, for example, provision of wider child funeral packages either free of charge or at a reduced price.

Finally, I would like to record my thanks to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance, and his officials in the Department for Work and Pensions, for their support throughout the development of the CFF. Above all, I would also like to pay tribute to the tireless work of Carolyn Harris, who first brought this important issue to the attention of Government.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

EDWARD ARGAR MP