Thank you for your letter dated 12 June 2018 following up on the progress made by the Department for Work and Pensions on the Social Fund Funeral Expenses Payment scheme.

As I have already mentioned, we remain committed to work closely with the funeral industry and wider bereavement stakeholders on issues concerning cost and transparency, particularly where this has a bearing on an individual’s choice and ability to make sensible, informed decisions regarding funeral choices and costs.

In the last 18 months we have engaged with the National Association of Funeral Directors, and the Society for Allied Independent Funeral Directors, faith groups and organisations representing bereaved people.

It is important that claimants make informed choices, and we need the industry to help by making its pricing structures easily available to people. One way of achieving this would be for the industry to publish their costs online.

It is for this reason that the department is pleased that the Competition and Markets Authority have launched a market study on funeral costs. We await the outcomes and recommendations which will inform future policy making decisions in due course.

The marketplace has changed over recent years and three of the largest funeral providers, Memoria, Co-Op and Dignity have introduced low cost funeral schemes. These funeral providers are also leading the way in providing transparency around charges by making their pricing clearly available on their internet pages.

Another example of market change is that of Brent Council who have taken on the role of a funeral director by offering a funeral package with cremations with a memorial service priced at £1,500 and burials (not including plot fees) starting at £1,200.
Whilst this demonstrates that some parts of the funeral industry are willing to address the issues concerning rising funeral costs, by ensuring that vulnerable people can access low cost schemes, further progress is required.

Regarding your concerns about the decline in applications for the Funeral Expenses Payment scheme, I am aware of the issue and my officials have started work to determine the cause and will put remedial steps in place if necessary.

I hope this reply is useful.

Kit Malthouse MP
Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance