

**UK COVID-19 Inquiry:  
Module 2 - Rule 9 Request to Cruse Bereavement  
Support**



**Reference: M2/R9R/CBS/TJS**

This response gives a high-level overview of the activities of Cruse Bereavement Support during the pandemic and our liaison with the UK Government. We are obviously happy to provide more details on request.

**1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body. Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.**

Cruse Bereavement Support is a registered charity (208078). We were established 63 years ago.

Our mission is “we support people through one of the most painful times in life – with bereavement support, information and campaigning”.

We work across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and work closely with our sister charity, Cruse Scotland.

Our support is through content on our web site, speaking to people on our helpline, web chat, group work or ongoing 1:1 support from one of our volunteers.

**2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.**

We help any bereaved people in England, Wales or Northern Ireland. Our clients can be of any age, children, young people or adults. We support people whose loved ones die from any cause including illness (including Covid), accident, suicide etc. We also support people from immediately after death to many years afterwards.

**3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive.**

At the start of the pandemic we converted all our 1:1 support from in person work to support over the phone or on zoom. Similarly, all our training to volunteers was delivered on zoom.

Despite the pressures of operating through the pandemic, we provided support to more people than ever before:

Cruse activity	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
People supported face:face 1:1	24,793	n/a *	1,917
Ongoing 1:1 telephone support	2,452	24,535	23,669
Assessments/Brief support	6,538	7,528	8,018
People supported in groups	7,252	1,914	2,983
Children and young people supported	5,877	2,992	1,718
Helpline calls	15,469	30,861	34,857
Helpline emails	940	3,904	6,749
Cruse chat	n/a	24,709	29,000
<b>Total support by a Cruse volunteer/staff member</b>	<b>63,321</b>	<b>96,433</b>	<b>108,911</b>
People given information	59,329	51,646	52,365
People visiting the website ( <a href="http://www.cruse.org.uk">www.cruse.org.uk</a> )	708,300	971,970	1,329,900
Page views	3,200,000	3,656,500	4,282,000
Visitors to Hope Again ( <a href="http://www.hopeagain.org.uk">www.hopeagain.org.uk</a> )	52,300	74,343	61,000
Total social media reach	9,696,267	13,267,831	14,087,509

**4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please include links to those documents where possible.**

**5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.**

**6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland**

**Executive, when the Government(s) and/or Executive were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or the Northern Ireland Executive, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or Northern Ireland Executive addressing such concerns.**

We have grouped the answers to Q4,5 and 6 together.

Throughout the pandemic Cruse raised issues about the impact of Covid on bereavement with the UK Government. There were two main routes, the Working Group on Funerals and Death Management with the Cabinet Office and a wide range of discussions with officials at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

The discussions with the Cabinet Office were not fruitful and there was a lack of engagement with the needs to bereaved people.

Our discussions with the DHSC were largely in partnership with the National Bereavement Alliance (NBA) and other charities in the sector and the documents in the attached appendix were jointly written. From April 2020 we were in regular (weekly) discussions with the DHSS about impact of the pandemic on bereaved people and how DHSC and others could provide more support. Key documents from this time are:

- 15 April 2020 Proposal for PHE 'Outline proposal for PHE v2 (Appendix A)
- 22 April 2020 Sector letter to Michael Gove (Appendix B)
- 6 May 2020 Sector briefing to **NR** following sector meeting with her 5 May 2020 'Bereavement VCS for DHSC FINAL' (Appendix C)
- 13 May 2020 Submission to **NR** Covering document 'COVID-19 Bereavement Response – NGO Packaged Bids' and 'Bereavement VCS grants programme FINAL' (Appendix D)
- 19 May 2020 'Bereavement VCS grants programme proposal 19 May 2020' (Appendix E)
- 22 May 2020 Letter to Matt Hancock 22 May 2020 (Appendix F)
- 18 June 2020 Reply to that letter from **NR** (Appendix G)
- 24 Sept 2020 NBA and CBN submission to CSR 2020 (Appendix H)

The liaison and correspondence with DHSC continued onto 2021:

- 26 Jan 2021 Letter to Matt Hancock (Appendix I)
- 26 Jan 2021 publication of [report](#) on the response of the bereavement sector
- 5 October 2021 NBA and CBN submission to CSR 2021 (Appendix J)

Central to all these discussions was the need for extra funding for bereavement charities. We knew that demand to charities would increase due to the increase in deaths. We also

knew that for many people whose loved ones died from Covid there would be additional need for support as:

- They didn't have the opportunity to be with their loved ones if they died in hospital
- They couldn't have the funeral they wanted
- They weren't able to get the support they needed from family and friends due to lock down

We were pleased that the DHSC did provide some limited funding to bereavement charities in 2020, which included £252,635 in June 2020 for the extension of the Cruse helpline.

However, the majority of the proposals that we put forward in partnership with the National Bereavement Alliance were not funded or supported.

Over this time the DHSC seconded officials to work on bereavement support, this was the first time there had been named officials in the DHSC with responsibility in this areas. We are very pleased that this team has continued with permanent and committed staff. Again, for the first time a responsibility for bereavement was given to a named Minister for the first time.

Cruse was also in close liaison with the Welsh Government during 2020 and we received funding from of the Welsh Government of £72,000 in April 2020.

**7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19.**

Our views on lessons learnt are in three sections structures, public policy and funding.

### **Structures**

At the start of the pandemic, it was difficult to gain traction with the UK Government on issues impacting on bereaved people. The discussions with the Cabinet Office were not productive. However once a team were in place at DHSC this was far more productive. In turn having a named Minister was very positive. More recently a cross government working group has been established chaired by DHSC.

Bereavement affects us all – but is often ignored by policy makers, we hope that having both a permanent team at the DHSC, a named Minister and a cross government working group will mean that it is quicker and easier to engage with government in case of similar events in the future.

### **Public policy**

We recognise the potential “trade off” between protecting public health through the Covid measures including lockdown and supporting bereaved people, including allowing hospital



visits. If a similar situation arises, again the impact on mental wellbeing, including of bereaved people, needs to be considered. Our colleagues at the charity Sue Ryder proposed “Bereavement Bubbles” as a way of mitigating the isolation that bereaved people faced, solutions like this could have gone a long way to helping bereaved people at such a difficult time, but there was no evidence that this was seriously considered by the government.

Similarly at times, the limits of numbers at funerals felt disproportionate compared with other restrictions.

### **Funding**

Whilst we are pleased that Cruse and other charities in the sector received funding to continue our vital work supporting bereaved people, our observations are:

- At an incredibly busy time the charity sector had to spend a disproportionate time lobbying for funding and writing the case for support
- The funding was not allocated in a transparent manner following clear principles. It felt like those charities who shouted loudest had the most success in receiving funding. There has been no published list of bereavement charities who did receive funding
- Funding should have been prioritised to those organisations who had a track record in the sector to build on and who had the infrastructure to act quickly.
- The funding should have been prioritised to charities that could demonstrate it would benefit long-term sustainability of the charity. At least one charity recipient of Covid funding is no longer active.
- All funding stopped by March 2021. However, we know that bereavement has no timescale. Throughout the pandemic, we said the impact on bereaved people should be measured in months and years, not days and week. The annual demand to the Cruse helpline increased by around 36% through 2021 showing the long-term impact of the pandemic. However, there was no long-term covid funding for the bereavement sector.

## **Personal Data**

**Steven Wibberley**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Cruse Bereavement Support**