

Submission to the Review of Laois County Development Plan 2021 2027

Introduction

The death of a child is something that parents are usually completely emotionally and financially unprepared for. Many bereaved parents have to rely on the generosity of friends and family or have to take out a bank loan to pay for their child's burial and funeral. In the darkest moment of a bereaved parent's life, they should not have to endure the financial burden of meeting funeral costs.

Research

Féileacáin carried out research on the costs of a baby's funeral and found that the cost of buying a plot and a headstone for a baby who has died amounts to a very minimum of about €2,000.

If bereaved parents decide to buy a plot in their local graveyard to bury their child, they will pay between €400 to €2,350 to buy the plot and between €1,500 – €4,500 to purchase a headstone and surround. Some parents have had to actually hold off getting a headstone and surround for their baby's grave until they can afford it. County councils can also charge a fee for planning permission for a headstone. Bereaved parents paid between €350 and €500 for planning permission.

In Ireland, since the scrapping of the Bereavement grant, with the exception of the Exceptional Needs Payment, there is a no scheme available to help bereaved parents with the financial burden of paying for their child's burial.

Statistics

Every year, some 2,100 families in Ireland experience the death of a child. Of this figure, 500 are babies up to age of 18 months. The death may have been a result of stillbirth, road traffic collision, serious illness, sudden unexpected death, an accident in or outside the home, or suicide (Source Anam Cara (2017) Annual Report <https://anamcara.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Anam-Cara-Annual-Report-2017-Final-1.pdf>).

International Comparisons

Norway

Bereaved parents in Norway may get up to NOK 23337 or €2,458.71 of the costs with the funeral covered from the State when the child is under 18 years old. There is no lower limit age of the child or foetus.

Wales and England Children's Funeral Fund

In Wales and England, bereaved parents no longer have to pay these exorbitant funeral costs for their children after Labour MP Carolyn Harris set up a campaign after she needed a loan to pay for her eight-year-old son's funeral. The Welsh government has recently established a Children's Funeral Fund, which will waive the costs of burials and cremations for the families of some 4,300 children who die each year in Wales.

The Welsh Government is making £1.5m available until 2020 to support local authorities and other providers of cemeteries and crematoriums. Figures show 379 children under 19-

years-old died in 2015 in Wales (Source: www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-42096445). This funding will also be available to all other providers of cemeteries and crematoria in Wales who agree not to charge on the same basis.

United Kingdom Coop Funeral Franchise

In the United Kingdom, the Coop Funeral Franchise throughout the country, provides funeral services free of charge up to families of children up to the age of 18 years.

The free services provided are:

- All Funeral Director services to cover all aspects of the funeral arrangement, including the completion of all documentation and liaison with all third parties and appropriate advice, support and guidance.
- Choice of coffin.
- Suitable vehicle the parents and their child.
- Personnel to conduct the funeral.
- Use of the funeral home for service where available.

(Source: <https://www.co-operativefuneralcare.co.uk/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-choices/childrens-funerals/>).

Asks

- Laois County Council needs to waive the fees for a single grave plot where a child under 18 years will be buried. There should be no lower age limit for the child or the fetus. Kildare County Council's Strategic Policy Committee have taken the lead on this. They have decided to waive the fee for the cost of a new single burial plot where a baby will be buried in all graveyards in Kildare up to the age of 18 months. The County Council would be keen to extend this waiver to children up to 18 years old.

More information

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