APPCC asks Trading Standards to examine whether AFS misled veterinary practices and pet owners

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The Association of Private Pet Cemeteries & Crematoria (APPCC) has submitted a formal complaint asking Herefordshire Trading Standards to investigate potential consumer protection concerns surrounding pet cremation services supplied by Animal Funeral Services (AFS), both directly and through veterinary practices.

The complaint concerns the information and assurances supplied by AFS. It does not allege that veterinary practices knowingly misrepresented the service or were aware of the conditions shown. APPCC believes some practices may themselves have relied on incomplete or inaccurate information supplied by AFS and may therefore have been placed at risk alongside the families they served.

The images apparently taken at AFS appear to show large quantities of bagged animal remains, damaged containment with part of an animal visible, bags piled in a vehicle, external accumulation and extensive operational clutter. The images require verification and do not establish wrongdoing. They do, however, justify examining what information AFS provided to veterinary practices and pet owners, whether it was accurate and complete, and whether both groups may have relied upon it.

"Families did not pay for a beloved companion to be treated like rubbish. Veterinary teams did not knowingly put their name behind that kind of service either. If the published images accurately reflect what happened, Trading Standards must establish whether AFS misled practices, owners or both." - Kevin Spurgeon, Director of APPCC

When veterinary practices rely on supplier assurances

For many owners, the veterinary practice is the only organisation they deal with. The practice explains the options, accepts instructions and payment, retains the pet and releases them to the cremation provider. Owners may reasonably believe that the information supplied through the practice is accurate and supported by credible assurance.

APPCC says the investigation should distinguish between practices that may have been given inaccurate or incomplete information, practices that had limited means to verify the claims supplied to them, and any business that knowingly described a service in a way that did not match reality. The purpose is to protect veterinary teams and their clients, not to make practices convenient scapegoats for a supplier's possible failings.

> **"Veterinary teams are not cremation inspectors. They should be entitled to complete, accurate information and credible assurance from their suppliers. Where a practice recommends or arranges a service, it needs enough reliable information to describe that service accurately to the family."**
> **- Steve Mayles, Vice Chairman of APPCC**

What Trading Standards is being asked to establish

• What AFS told veterinary practices and pet owners about handling, containment, transport, storage, identification, individual cremation and ashes return.

• Whether veterinary practices received incomplete or inaccurate supplier information and unknowingly repeated it when advising bereaved owners.

• What written service specification AFS supplied to veterinary practices and whether it matched the service subsequently described to pet owners.

• Whether AFS gave practices meaningful access to the premises, records and processes needed to obtain credible assurance about the service.

• What guidance and safeguards are needed so veterinary businesses and pet owners are better protected in future.

Protecting veterinary practices from inaccurate or incomplete supplier

information

A veterinary practice can suffer serious reputational and financial harm when a supplier's service does not match the information on which the practice relied. If important operational details are incomplete, unclear or inaccessible, the practice may be left carrying the blame for conduct it did not know about and could not accurately explain to its clients.

APPCC is asking Trading Standards to consider whether AFS gave veterinary customers a complete and accurate description of its service, including the difference between the act of individual cremation and respectful care throughout collection, transport and storage. Whatever the eventual findings, APPCC believes the concerns raised should prompt every veterinary practice to review its arrangements and ensure that the service described to clients is supported by current, reliable evidence covering the complete journey from collection through to cremation and the return or final destination of the ashes.

> *"A regulatory approval may show that a site is* authorised to receive and process animal by-products. It does not, by itself, tell a veterinary practice whether pets receive the dignity, individual attention and funeral-style care being described to families. Vets need protection from that gap just as much as owners do."
> - **Kevin Spurgeon, Director of APPCC**

Eight checks veterinary practices can make now

• Confirm the exact name and address of the crematorium that physically receives and cremates pets, including any subcontractors.

• Obtain a written end-to-end service description covering collection, containment, transport, storage, identification, individual cremation, communal cremation and the return or final destination of the ashes.

• Review the provider's written service description, complaints procedures, regulatory status, membership or accreditation claims and available independent inspection evidence regularly. An on-site visit should form part of appointing a provider, with further visits following significant operational, ownership or management changes, serious complaints, regulatory action or other warning signs.

• Verify any claimed membership, accreditation or independent inspection directly with the organisation responsible rather than relying solely on a displayed logo. Practices can check whether a provider is listed as a current APPCC member; APPCC members are required to comply with its Consumer Code and independent inspection arrangements covering consumer protection and respectful handling.

• Ask the provider to demonstrate its identification and traceability system from collection through to ashes return.

• Review how damaged containment, delays, missing ashes, complaints and other incidents are recorded, reported and corrected.

• Ensure that the description given to owners accurately reflects the provider's written service specification, including any stages carried out by subcontractors or at another premises.

• Give owners clear information about the identity of the crematorium and the available aftercare routes, including the option of making arrangements directly, without suggesting that one route is necessarily preferable.

APPCC recommends regular supplier review, including at least an initial on-site visit. Further visits after material changes, serious complaints, regulatory action or other warning signs are sensible best practice. Credible independent inspection can provide valuable assurance but should not replace ongoing review. These are APPCC recommendations, not a statement that every check is currently a specific legal requirement in every case.

Price transparency alone is not enough to protect veterinary practices

Proposed CMA reforms should improve written prices and awareness of the routes available to owners. APPCC says that is welcome, but a clear price does not tell a practice how pets are handled, where they are stored, how identities are protected or whether the service matches the description used at the point of sale. Veterinary teams also need clear service information and credible assurance from their suppliers.

> *"A clear price does not tell a practice what happens to the pet. Veterinary teams need service transparency too.* Otherwise they can be left relying on assurances provided by someone else and carrying the reputational damage when those assurances prove inaccurate." - **Kevin Spurgeon, Director of APPCC**

APPCC terminology covers the whole service

Under APPCC terminology, individual cremation means one pet is cremated alone in an enclosed chamber and all visible remains are carefully collected before another cremation takes place. Communal cremation means pets are cremated side by side and ashes cannot be returned.

The APPCC Code also requires respectful handling and safeguarding during collection, transport and storage. This matters because an owner choosing an individual cremation service may reasonably understand that the respect promised applies to the whole journey, not only the moment inside the cremation chamber.

Owners should be able to ask questions - without investigating the service themselves

APPCC says the veterinary profession and bereaved owners should be on the same side. Families should be able to ask straightforward questions, while practices should have reliable supplier information and credible assurance so they can answer honestly and confidently.

• Which crematorium will physically receive my pet, and what information can the practice provide about it?

• How will my pet be handled, contained, transported and stored?

• How will my pet be identified and traced at every stage?

• What does individual cremation or communal cremation include, and what happens before the cremation?

• What checks or independent assurance does the practice rely upon when selecting and reviewing the crematorium?

> *"Bereaved owners should be able to ask straightforward questions without feeling that they must investigate the service themselves. Clear supplier information and credible assurance help veterinary teams answer confidently and protect families,* practices and the reputation of the profession."
> - **Alexandra Shaw, APPCC Spokesperson**

Every Promise Matters

The complaint forms part of APPCC's Every Promise Matters transparency campaign. APPCC is calling for clear written descriptions of the complete cremation service, consistent definitions of individual cremation and communal cremation, disclosure of the actual provider and premises, robust identification and traceability, regular supplier review and credible independent inspection of service standards.

Kevin Spurgeon added: "The fair question is whether AFS gave veterinary practices and pet owners a truthful and complete picture, whether practices had realistic ways to obtain credible assurance, and whether families received the service they were led to expect. Protecting pet owners and protecting good veterinary practices are the same job."

Important qualification

APPCC has submitted a complaint and asked Herefordshire Trading Standards to investigate. Submission of a complaint does not establish wrongdoing, confirm that a formal investigation has opened or determine the outcome. The photographs and claims should be tested against records, contracts, contemporaneous evidence and witness accounts. AFS and any veterinary practices concerned should have a fair opportunity to respond.

ENDS

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