



Ecclesiastical

PLANNING SERVICES

Topic: Tonight – ITV television programme (11/10/18)

Rip-off Britain – BBC1 television programme (12/10/18)

Inside out – BBC North East television programme (15/10/18)

Issue: Television broadcasts exposing poor sales practices and lack of transparency during the selling of funeral plans to members of the public.

Prepared: 12 October 2018

Media statement

Chris Clark, Managing Director of Ecclesiastical Planning Services said:

“At Ecclesiastical Planning Services, our priority is ensuring that potential customers, who are often elderly and sometimes vulnerable, are treated fairly. We do not use sales teams to sell our plans directly to customers.

“Nearly all of our plans are sold in partnership with funeral directors that carry out funerals and are experts in this field, and a small number are arranged by advisers who are professionally qualified, some of whom are also members of the Later Life Academy*.

“Ecclesiastical Planning Services also operates as the supporting funeral plan provider for Royal London Funeral Plans**. Royal London is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) with business practices and standards that are commensurate with those expected of an FCA regulated business.

“The steps that we take to ensure that people are provided with a professional, personal service from specialists who understand how to arrange and carry out funerals mean that customers’ needs and wishes are met by the plan they choose.

“Ecclesiastical Planning Services operates a fair and transparent approach to the fee that is charged for setting up and administering the funeral plan. The plan management fee, which is added to the price of the funeral pre-payment, is made clear to the customer at the outset. We do not deduct any other charges from the funeral pre-payment amount which is held securely and invested in a guaranteed insurance fund for the sole purpose of conducting the funeral.

“The unprofessional and unscrupulous sales practices highlighted in recent television programmes exploit vulnerable people and damage the reputation of our profession. We support the concept of statutory regulation for the funeral plan market to ensure that funeral plan providers and distributors are supervised more effectively, and unscrupulous operators are prevented from entering the market.

“As a member of the Funeral Planning Authority (FPA), Ecclesiastical Planning Services is actively participating in discussions with stakeholder groups to encourage high standards and the fair treatment of customers”.

*The Later Life Academy provides education and guidance to professional advisers specialising in later life planning.

**Royal London Funeral Plans are marketed and arranged by Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Limited and its subsidiaries.

Questions and answers:

How does Ecclesiastical Planning Services sell funeral plans to customers?

We do not employ sales teams to sell our plans directly to customers.

Nearly all of our plans are sold through funeral directors that arrange funeral pre-payment plans for their customers, and a small number are arranged by advisers who are professionally qualified and may also hold a membership of the Later Life Academy. The Later Life Academy provides education and guidance to professional advisers specialising in later life planning.

If we receive enquiries direct from consumers we endeavour to facilitate an introduction to a funeral director for a discussion about a funeral plan. This ensures that people are provided with a high quality, personal service from a professional funeral arranger or specialist adviser, and means that the customers’ needs and wishes are met by the plan they choose.

Robust due diligence requirements must be satisfied before any professional adviser can introduce a product from Ecclesiastical Planning Services to one of their customers.

Ecclesiastical Planning Services also caps the level of introducer fee that is paid to professional advisers, which we believe ensures that all parties benefit from fair value.

Does Ecclesiastical Planning Services visit people’s homes to sell funeral plans?

Ecclesiastical Planning Services does not sell funeral plans directly; they are sold by funeral directors or professional advisers.

A funeral director or professional adviser will only go to a customer’s home to discuss our pre-payment arrangements if requested to do so by the potential customer.

Our priority is ensuring that potential customers, who are often elderly and sometimes vulnerable, are treated fairly and that they choose a plan that best meets their needs. We pride ourselves on our reputation for “doing the right thing” for our customers.

Potential customers should never feel pressured into making a decision that might not be in their best interests or that they cannot afford, and we support any actions that result in funeral plan providers being supervised more effectively.

How do customers of Ecclesiastical Planning Services know what is included in their funeral plan?

All of our customers receive a document setting out the specification of their funeral plan making it clear what is included. It is also made clear whether any additional payments could be required at the time of the funeral to cover additional expenses that are not covered by the plan. These may, for example, include third party expenses that are outside of the control of the funeral director.

How does Ecclesiastical Planning services cover its costs for administering the funeral plan?

We charge a plan management fee which is added to the price of the funeral pre-payment. The management fee is made clear to the customer at the outset. No other charges are deducted from the funeral pre-payment amount. This is held and invested securely in a guaranteed whole of life insurance policy and can only be used to pay for the funeral.

Would Ecclesiastical Planning Services support regulation for the funeral profession?

We are deeply concerned that agents selling funeral plans operate without supervisory oversight from any regulatory body which means that inadequate controls are in place to protect the consumer against rogue sales people and inappropriate sales tactics.

We pride ourselves on our reputation for “doing the right thing” for our customers and we fully support the concept of statutory regulation for funeral plan market.

Ends