



Open Prepaid Funerals Limited.
Managing Directors Summary of the Open Prepaid Funerals Trust Solvency
Assessment Report of 5th April 2024

Dear Reader,

Each year we ask the auditors and actuaries of the Open Prepaid Funerals Trust Fund to produce the SAR to meet the regulatory requirements of our sector. The following provides a summary of its contents. The full SAR follows this summary.

Introduction

The Solvency Assessment Report (SAR) for the Open Prepaid Funerals Trust, prepared by Atkin Pensions, provides a comprehensive evaluation of the Trust's financial health as of 5 April 2024. This report is crucial for ensuring compliance with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) regulations and maintaining the trust and confidence of our stakeholders.

Background

The Open Prepaid Funerals Trust, established in 2003 and governed by a Trust Deed, allows individuals to prepay for funeral services. The Trust ensures that the prepaid sums, along with accrued income, are available to nominated funeral directors upon the Covered Life's death. The Trust's provisions have been updated through a Deed of Variation in 2022, enhancing its governance and operational framework.

Financial Performance and Solvency

As of 5th April 2024, the Trust's total assets stood at £23.11 million, reflecting a robust increase of £3.97 million over the past year. This growth is attributed to a net investment gain of £0.87 million and new plan money amounting to £5.81 million, offset by £2.28 million in payouts and £0.43 million in expenses. The Trust's liabilities are valued at £20.49 million, resulting in a solvency level of 113%, a significant improvement from the previous year's 106%.

Investment Strategy and Returns

The Trust's investment strategy is designed to balance risk and return, with a diversified portfolio comprising equities, bonds, alternatives, and cash. The expected future discounted investment return is set at 3.7%, reflecting current market conditions and the Trust's conservative approach to income allocation. This strategy ensures that the Trust can meet its obligations while maintaining a healthy margin between assets and liabilities.

Risk Management

The report highlights several key risks, including potential rises in cancellation rates, liquidity of assets, and fluctuations in asset values. The Trust's proactive risk management strategies, such as maintaining a margin of assets over cancellation values and ensuring liquidity, mitigate these risks effectively. Additionally, the Trust's ability to adjust income allocations provides flexibility in managing financial volatility.

Suite K The American Barns, Banbury Road, Lighthorne, Warwick CV35 0AE.

Registered in England & Wales Number 04747037. Open Prepaid Funerals Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority with firm reference number 962403 as a funeral plan provider.



Membership Data

The Trust manages a diverse portfolio of plans, with a total of 6,831 active plans as of April 2024. The average cancellation value per plan is £3,235, with an average value including income of £3,540. This data underscores the Trust's commitment to providing value to plan holders while maintaining financial stability.

Future Outlook

The Trust is well-positioned to continue its growth trajectory, with a strong solvency position and a prudent investment strategy. The expected future cashflows, based on current plans, indicate a stable financial outlook, with the weighted average term of liabilities being eight years. The Trust's ongoing commitment to monitoring and adjusting its strategies ensures that it remains resilient in the face of market fluctuations and regulatory changes.

Conclusion

The Open Prepaid Funerals Trust's Solvency Assessment Report of 5th April 2024 demonstrates a solid financial foundation and a commitment to prudent management. The Trust's robust solvency level, effective risk management, and strategic investment approach position it well for future growth and stability. As a managing director of an FCA-regulated prepaid funeral plan provider, I am confident in the Trust's ability to continue delivering exceptional value and security to our plan holders.

This report not only meets regulatory requirements but also reinforces our dedication to transparency, financial integrity, and the highest standards of service. We remain committed to safeguarding the interests of our plan holders and ensuring that their prepaid funeral plans are managed with the utmost care and professionalism.

Open Prepaid Funerals Limited has been proudly serving families and independent funeral directors all over the UK since our inception in 2003.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Taplin'.

John Taplin
Managing Director
Open Prepaid Funerals Limited



Open Prepaid Funerals Trust Fund

Solvency assessment Report
as at 5 April 2024

September 2024

Introduction

REPORT	Solvency assessment report (" SAR ")
PURPOSE	To provide information required by the Financial Conduct Authority (" FCA ") in accordance with the Funeral Plan Conduct of Business Sourcebook (" FPCOB ")
ADDRESSEE	Open Prepaid Funerals Limited (" the Company ")
ARRANGEMENT	Open Prepaid Funerals Trust Fund (" the Trust ")
DATE OF VALUATION	5 April 2024

This report is addressed to the Company and is not intended to assist any other user in making decisions. Neither I, nor Atkin Pensions, accept any liability to third parties in respect of this report.

This report and the underlying data and calculations comply with Technical Actuarial Standards TAS 100 (Principles of Actuarial work) and TAS 400 (Funeral plans), as far as they are material.

Background

The Trust was established by Open Prepaid Funerals Limited and the then Trustees and was governed by a Trust Deed dated 10 June 2004. A Deed of Variation was executed on 28 July 2022 and the Trust is now governed by the provisions set out in the Deed of Variation.

Under the provisions of the Trust, a pre-payment is received from Planholders for funeral services to be provided by a Nominated Funeral Director. This pre-payment is known as a Pre-paid Sum.

A Nominated Funeral Director, acting as an Introducer Appointed Representative for Open Prepaid Funerals Limited and who will be carrying out the funeral, introduces the enquirer to Open Prepaid. On death of the Planholder, the Pre-paid Sum and all accrued or allocated income and gains on it are paid to the Nominated Funeral Director.

Income on the Pre-paid Sums is calculated by agreement of the Trustees using data provided by the Actuary and in consultation with the investment managers and may be affected by investment conditions and market performance. Under the Trust provisions prior to the Deed of Variation, income would be calculated by reference to a formula provided by the Actuary.

The provisions of the Trust require that the Trustees apportion income and gains (and losses) between each Pre-paid Sum on a regular basis at their discretion. The Trustees act based on considered information provided by the Actuaries, the Auditors and the Fund Managers.

If the assets exceed liabilities by more than 110% in accordance with FCA rules, Open Prepaid Funerals Limited may notify the FCA that they are withdrawing the surplus over 110%, or may:

- Carry forward any surplus
- Use the surplus to
 - o Credit an additional amount to Planholder's Pre-paid Sums
 - o Pay additional amounts in respect of past funerals

If liabilities exceed assets or the Actuary advises that it is likely that this will be the case at a future actuarial valuation then Open Prepaid Funerals Limited may:

- o Inject capital
- o Suspend acceptance of new plans
- o Instigate the wind-down plan

Overview

A person is able to take out a contract whereby they pay in advance for funeral services. The payment is paid to the Trust and is termed a Pre-paid Sum. Fees, as detailed in the information provided to prospective plan holders, are paid to Open Prepaid Funerals Limited by the Trust.

When a Planholder dies, the Pre-paid Sum, with accumulated income, is paid to a Nominated Funeral Director. Income is intended to reflect investment returns over the period that the Pre-paid Sum is held by the Trust.

The expectation of the Planholder and the Nominated Funeral Directors is that the payment of the Pre-paid Sum on death will be sufficient for the Nominated Funeral Director to carry out services agreed with the Planholder in respect of the funeral.

If, as a result of inflation or rising costs, funeral costs exceed the Pre-paid Sum, the expectation is that funeral would still go ahead as planned. Whilst this may not be a direct risk within the Trust itself, it must be noted that there is a risk that Nominated Funeral Directors may not be willing or able to carry out funerals because of low amounts of money being paid from the Trust. The expectations of Planholders may not be met in these circumstances.

I understand, however, that Open Prepaid Funerals Limited does not guarantee that the third-party costs redemption value will fully secure the intended funeral without additional payment. However, the Company should satisfy itself that Planholders are aware of potential additional costs.

It would also be sensible for the Company to monitor periodically the Pre-paid Sums with investment returns added by comparing these against the current costs of the relevant funeral plans to ensure that the Pre-paid Sums remain sufficient for the Nominated Funeral Director to carry out the funeral.

A Planholder is entitled to cancel their Plan and receive a refund of payments made, though an administration fee may be deducted if they are cancelling after 30 days.

It is important that the Trustees are, as far as possible, always in a position to pay full refunds, should these be requested, either from the existing assets of the Trust or from a capital injection.

The provisions regarding the addition of income and gains (or losses) to Pre-paid Sums are set out in the document governing the Trust.

The Trustees have interpreted these provisions by applying a stable annual return over the term of each plan and have not adjusted proceeds to reflect day to day movements in investment markets. The return over the term of matured policies has not, therefore, precisely mirrored the return on the Trust over the period of investment. When investment markets are depressed, the proceeds could exceed the amount that the Planholder should receive based on a strict allocation of all income, gains and losses over the period of investment, and vice versa.

The smoothing of investment returns means that the Nominated Funeral Directors do not receive a lower amount when investment markets are depressed; a situation that might mean that it would become more likely that the Nominated Funeral Director would be unable to provide the agreed funeral services solely from the Pre-paid Sum.

Membership data

We have been provided with details of the membership as used by Luckmans Duckett Parker Limited, the Auditors for the Trust. This Solvency Assessment Report has been based on this data, which is summarised below for Plans still in force at April 2024.

Payment method	Plans	Cancellation value (£m)	Value using income to be added to Plans up to April 2024 (£m)	Average Cancellation value (£)	Average value with income (£)
Single payment	5,965	19.70	21.47	3,302	3,599
Instalment payments fully paid	569	1.83	2.11	3,213	3,707
Instalment payments not fully paid	297	0.57	0.60	1,932	2,019
Total	6,831	22.10	24.18	3,235	3,540

The cancellation values shown above are based on the amounts that would be paid to Planholders on cancellation if no income were given, and if no cancellation fee were charged. The accounts refer to this amount as the 'Liability for unfulfilled plans' (LFUP).

Where a Planholder was paying regular instalments over a fixed term, and that term extended past the valuation date, those payments were excluded from the accounts and have not been included in the table above. The remaining instalments for Plans at April 2024 totalled £0.63m (an average over 297 Plans of £2,135, with an average 14 months remaining).

The audited April 2024 accounts show the LFUP at the valuation date to be £22.096m

The values shown above with income to April 2024 are what would have been paid if all Plans were paid out at that point, with treatment consistent with deaths in the preceding month.

Whilst we have not carried out a full audit of the data, I am reasonably happy that the data is sufficiently accurate for the purpose of this SAR.

Assets

I have been provided with a copy of the audited accounts as at 5 April 2024.

The accounts show that the total assets at 5 April 2024 were £23.11m. This is a fair value. It excludes instalments due after the relevant date.

The Trust assets have increased over the year to 5 April 2024 by £3.97m. Investment gain/return (net of investment expenses) was £0.87m, new Plan money (net of Plan charges) was £5.81m, £2.28m was paid out for Plans and other expenses totalled £0.43m.

We have been advised that the split of the assets as at 5 April 2024 between asset sectors and between investment managers was as follows:

Sector	(£m)
Equities	11.89
Bonds	6.80
Alternatives	2.55
Cash	1.87
Total	23.11

Investment Manager	(£m)
Quilter Cheviot	22.33
Balance	0.78
Total	23.11

Valuation Methodology and Assumptions

This SAR is required to ‘determine, calculate and verify the assets and liabilities of the Trust by applying a best estimate basis.’ Best estimate assumptions reflect anticipated experience with no provision for risk of adverse deviation.

The Trust liabilities are based on payment of the Pre-Paid Sum with accumulated income, rather than being based on the cost of providing funeral services including inflation.

To value the liabilities we first estimate future cashflows using assumptions for probabilities of Plan holder deaths and cancellations, expenses, and likely income that will be added on Plan redemption. To get a single present value for the liabilities, we discount those cashflows from the date of the projected payment back to the valuation date allowing for expected future investment returns. We then compare that value with the audited market value of the Trust’s assets. To ensure consistency, the discount rate used reflects investment market conditions at the valuation date.

The calculations do not allow for new Plans taken out after April 2024, or payments into existing Plans made after that date.

	Assumption	Comment
Discount rate	3.7%	The expected future investment return, net of investment expenses and non-investment expense, for the assets held at the valuation date.
Base mortality	136% ELT17	The ELT17 table is the latest table based on general population experience. We have scaled the mortality table which gives earlier deaths than the standard table. This adjustment is based on the actual Trust past experience.
Future mortality improvements	CMI_2023 with 1.25% long-term trend	CMI_2023 is the latest future mortality projection model produced by the Continuous Mortality Investigation.
Cancellation rate per year	0.8% (1.2% in the first 3 years)	Based on recent Trust experience. Once a Plan has been in place for a while it is less likely to be cancelled.

More information on the assumptions is set out in the appendix.

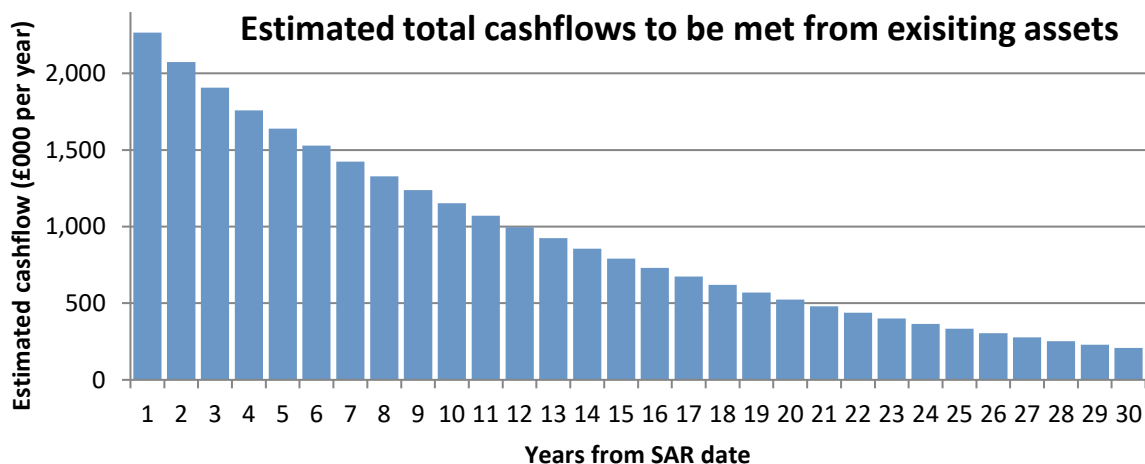
Income would be expected to be added to Plans being fulfilled. The level of income assumed to be added in the future should reflect the recent experience of the Trust’s investments, the expected returns that might be achieved in the future and continuation of a conservative approach to the allocation of income.

As the investment strategy being followed uses a significant amount of potentially volatile return-seeking assets, the income ought to be set at a level that seeks to ensure that a reasonable margin between the value of the assets and the value of the liabilities is retained.

The value used for future income in the April 2023 SAR was 2% per year. We have continued to use 2% for this SAR. It should be noted that this return is lower than the assumed return on the assets (essentially the discount rate of 3.7%). However, we believe that this is a reasonable assumption given the desirability of increasing the margin between assets and liabilities.

It must be recognised that income allocated to Pre-paid Sums at this level is lower than the expected rate of future inflation (assessed by reference to market expectations embodied in the pricing of fixed and index-linked gilts). This, in turn, implies that the Pre-paid Sums will not keep pace with inflation and the potential problems that that this may cause (and the need for Pre-paid Sums from existing plans and current funeral costs to be monitored) have been highlighted earlier in this report.

Using these assumptions, the expected cashflows payable from the Trust for the 30 years after the valuation date are shown below. The cashflows shown are for Plans as they stood at 5 April 2024 and ignore expense outgo.



Whilst, for clarity, we have only shown 30 years of cashflows in the graph (over 90% of the total cashflows), it would be expected that the actual cash flows would continue past 2080. The further into the future a cashflow is, the more time there is for investment returns to help meet it, and so require a smaller amount of the current assets. Allowing for this, the weighted average term of the liabilities is 8 years.

The cashflows will not be as smooth as this method implies; by chance you would expect some years to have more or less people dying, and this effect is made more significant still by issues such as extreme weather and epidemics.

Valuation Results

Solvency assessment of the Trust in respect of payments already received in respect of live Plans	
£m	April 2024
Total assets (market value)	23.11
Total liabilities	20.49
Solvency level	113%

The above solvency level allows for income to continue to be added to the Pre-Paid Sums at 2.0% per annum. Allowing instead for the income that will be given over the current year would give a solvency level of 128%.

It should be noted that the value placed on the Plan liabilities is lower than the value of Plans with income allocated to date. This is because the Plan liabilities represent the discounted value of future payments and the fact that these payments have been discounted at a higher rate than the assumed returns added to the Plans.

The solvency level reported at April 2023 was 106%.

We have analysed the reasons for the change in the solvency position.

Start	106%
Change in discount rate	7%
New business	1%
Other Plan experience/changes in assumptions	(1%)
End	113%

Over the year since the April 2023 SAR, the mortality and surrender experience was rather higher than assumed. However, the valuation is not particularly sensitive to those assumptions.

Sensitivities

The sensitivity of the results to changes in the most important assumptions are set out below.

Changes in assumption	Impact on solvency
0.1% reduction in the discount rate	-0.9%
0.1% increase in future income	-0.9%
10% increase in future mortality rates	-0.9%

Whilst the above table indicates the changes to solvency as a result of using different long-term assumptions, the solvency position would also be impacted by sudden changes in the value of the assets. It should be noted that a fall of more than 13% in the value of the assets (which is not beyond the realms of possibility) might reduce the solvency level to less than 100%. However, a fall in asset values would often be accompanied by at least some change in expected future returns, and so the fall in assets values would probably need to be rather larger than 13% to bring the solvency to 100%.

It should also be noted that, at the valuation date, the assets of the Trust were sufficient to cover just in excess of 105% of the total cancellation values of the Plans. As such, the Trust is vulnerable to the potential for the assets to fall to a level where all cancellation values could not be met. Whilst it may be felt that this is unlikely, a sudden loss of confidence in the Trust (as a result of events relating to the Trust or funeral plans more generally) might lead to significant surrenders. The Company should consider what arrangements they might put in place if there were a large number of surrenders.

Risks

The main risks that we would highlight are:

SUDDEN RISE IN CANCELLATION

This is unlikely to be a problem for the Trust, so long as the value of the assets remains above the total cancellation value of the Plans. Generally, an increase in cancellation will improve the solvency position, particularly in respect of more mature Plans. However, it is important to try and build up the margin of assets over cancellation value (and/or have mitigation plans in place) to protect against the potential for a fall in asset values and the possibility of mass surrenders.

LIQUIDITY OF ASSETS

There have typically been significantly more payments into the Trust in respect of new Plans, than there have been payments out of the Trust in respect of redemptions, cancellations and expenses. This could change, for example, from a sudden rise in cancellations or if there is a significant drop in the level of new Plans. It would then be more important that the assets can be disinvested quickly and without depressing their value. However, I would not expect that there would be a problem meeting the expected cashflow in the year from the April 2024 even if no new Plans were taken out.

FALL IN ASSET VALUES

Generally, the value of liabilities and value of the assets held are in respect of medium to long term cashflows. The asset allocation aims to achieve higher returns for Planholders than could be achieved by investing purely in bonds to match the expected payments from the Trust. However, this does mean that the value of the assets is more volatile relative to fixed liability cashflows.

The liability cashflows are, however, not fixed and can be adjusted by changing the level of income allocated to Plans. In an extreme situation, it would also be possible to reduce income 'accrued' in an earlier period, since income is not formally allocated before a Plan is redeemed. A fall in asset values would not generally be an immediate problem to the solvency, given the flexibility in the allocation of income.

SIGNIFICANT DROP IN NEW PLANS BEING WRITTEN

The high levels of new business recently have improved the solvency position (although the margin over cancellation values has reduced).

A large drop in the level of new business would mean the level of Trust expenses would become more significant, as more of the future expenses would have to be met from the existing Plans, and this would be expected to reduce the solvency position. Expenses would then need to be reduced, or some other action taken, as otherwise the solvency position would fall to 100% over time.

PRE-PAID SUMS INSUFFICIENT TO COVER FUNERAL COSTS

There is a danger that the Pre-paid Sums may, over time, be insufficient to cover the cost of the funeral arrangements that the Planholder expects. Although not a direct risk to the Trust, the potential implications for the Trust of an inability of funeral providers to provide funeral without extra cost to the Planholder should be considered by the Company.

OTHER RISKS

Whilst there are risks that may affect the Trust that we cannot comment upon, such as regulatory or legislative change, or if problems arise in the administrative processes, there are some specific risks we think should be mentioned.

- The Plan liabilities are in sterling. We understand that there is not a material currency risk from the investments.
- Climate change might affect the Trust. As there may be investment risk for the Trust in the transition to a lower carbon economy, the implications of climate change should be considered and potentially a policy put in place.
- Increased inflation not met with an increase in investment returns and income given, may increase the cost of funerals relative to the payments from the Trust. As noted above, this would not be a direct problem for the Trust itself. However, higher levels of inflation will increase the future expenses that will need to be paid.
- The SAR relies on the accuracy of the administration data. If there are additional liabilities that we were not aware of then the solvency funding would reduce. We perform checks, and there is an annual audit for the Trust, which should reduce this risk.

Next Steps

This SAR must be passed on to the FCA within 7 days.

The next SAR should be carried out with effect from a date no later than 12 months from the date of this SAR.



C M ATKIN
Fellow of the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries

27 September 2024

Appendix – Further comment on assumptions

MORTALITY

Past mortality experience for the Trust has been compared against the ELT17 table, and Continuous Mortality Investigation (“CMI”) tables on how mortality has been changing. We have used the latest tables available. If the Trust’s past experience is assumed to be consistent with mortality being a multiple of mortality from those tables, there is a 95% chance of that multiple being between 131% and 141%, with 136% being the most likely. The assumed mortality is higher than was used last year. It seems that the Trust’s mortality experience has increased over the last few years, and this may need to be considered further if this is a trend that continues. (More weight has effectively been given to recent experience because of the large growth in the Trust over recent years.)

The socio-economic background of new Planholders might also change with time. We do not expect there will be a significant difference for this Trust between Plans taken out before and after 29 July 2022, when FCA regulation of the funeral plan market commenced.

Future mortality improvements are assumed to be in line with CMI_2023 with a 1.25% long-term trend. The long-term improvement observed over the 20th century was around 1% per year. The rate of improvement increased for much of the last 50 years though there are indications that the improvement has slowed down, at least temporarily.

It is possible that new Planholders will have different mortality experience, particularly in the short-term, compared with other people who do not take out plans. We have made no allowance for such an effect.

EXPENSES

To allow for non-investment expenses, we have averaged non-investment expenses from the last five years in the Trust accounts. Allowing for inflation, that figure represents 1.6% of the asset value at the valuation date. We have allowed for expenses of 1.6% each year by reducing the discount rate by 1.6% for non-investment expenses. This is a change in method from the last SAR.

MARKET DERIVED DISCOUNT RATE

A sample of key financial market indicators is provided in the table below.

	Market indicator	5 April 2024
Government fixed interest bond yield	Bank of England – 8 year nominal spot rate	3.91%
Market inflation expectations (RPI)	Bank of England – 8 year spot rate	3.66%
Dividend yield	FTSE All-Share dividend yield	3.78%

We have used a term of 8 years above as this is the weighted average term of the discounted Plan liabilities.

Given that future income payments from bonds are generally fixed, and that the capital payment due at redemption is also usually known, expected future returns on bonds are generally based on current market yields. Allowing for expected outperformance of 0.25% from non-Government bonds being held, a return of 4.2% for bonds has been used.

Estimating future overall returns from return-seeking assets such as equities is a harder process. One possible method is set out below using 2024 market conditions.

Dividend yield	3.78% p.a.	FTSE All Share dividend yield
RPI inflation	3.66% p.a.	Bank of England 8 year spot rate
Allowance for dividend growth	0.50% p.a.	
Total	7.9% p.a.	

This has been used for investments in equities and alternatives.

The remaining assets held in cash have been given a nominal expected rate of return of 2.0% p.a.

The expected rate of returns for each asset class have then been applied to the asset allocation, to give a single investment return.

The resultant rate, after deduction of 1.0% to allow for investment charges (based on recent actual charges), is 5.3% p.a. The discount rate used in April 2023 was 4.9% p.a.

The actual discount rate used at 5 April 2024 is 3.7% after allowance has been made for non-investment related expenses as detailed above.