



COUNCIL – 27TH FEBRUARY 2025

SUBJECT: CHARTER FOR FAMILIES BEREAVED THROUGH PUBLIC TRAGEDY

REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Council approval to adopt the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the conclusion of the second Hillsborough inquests in April 2016, the former Bishop of Liverpool, Bishop James Jones was commissioned by the UK Government to produce a report on the experiences of the Hillsborough families so that their 'perspective is not lost'. His report, entitled 'The Patronising Disposition of Unaccountable Power', records the Families' experiences over 28 years and presents 25 points of learning including a 'Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy'.
- 2.2 The Charter was written to ensure that the suffering endured by families bereaved following the 1989 Hillsborough disaster is not repeated should similar tragedies occur in the future. The Welsh Joint Emergency Services Group and Welsh Government are seeking a pan Wales delivery across Local Resilience Forums, emergency responders, Health Boards, Local Authorities, and the Voluntary Sector. The Charter asks signatories to:
- Place the public interests above the reputation of your own organisation
 - Approach all forms of public scrutiny with candour in an open, honest and transparent way
 - Avoid seeking to defend the indefensible
- 2.3 It is proposed that Caerphilly County Borough Council adopts the Charter to reinforce the commitment to support bereaved families and the community in the aftermath of a major incident. An event is being organised for the official unveiling of the signed documentation by organisations in Wales on the 19th of March 2025. The Charter is included at Appendix 1.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Council adopts the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The adoption of the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy will reinforce and enhance existing arrangements to further meet the needs and expectations of families should we face a public tragedy in the future.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Following the conclusion of the second Hillsborough inquests in April 2016, the former Bishop of Liverpool, Bishop James Jones was commissioned by the UK Government to produce a report on the experiences of the Hillsborough families so that their 'perspective is not lost'.
- 5.2 His report, entitled 'The Patronising Disposition of Unaccountable Power', was laid before Parliament. The Report records the Families' experiences over 28 years and presents 25 points of learning including a 'Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy'. The report demonstrated that the experiences of many of the Hillsborough families were reflected in the experiences of families bereaved in subsequent public tragedies.
- 5.3 The Charter was written to ensure that the suffering endured by families bereaved following the 1989 Hillsborough disaster is not repeated should similar tragedies occur in the future. The Charter is included at Appendix 1.
- 5.4 The Welsh Joint Emergency Services Group and Welsh Government have undertaken to adopt the recommendations from the Hillsborough Review captured through the Charter. They are seeking to develop a pan Wales delivery across Local Resilience Forums, emergency responders, Health Boards, Local Authorities, and the Voluntary Sector. The Charter asks signatories to:
- Place the public interests above the reputation of your own organisation
 - Approach all forms of public scrutiny with candour in an open, honest and transparent way
 - Avoid seeking to defend the indefensible
- 5.5 Adopting this Charter and honouring its principles will provide us with a framework to support bereaved families and the community in the aftermath of a major incident. It highlights our commitment to becoming more people-focused during public tragedy and to providing services that meet the needs of people before, during and after an incident.

5.6 In adopting this Charter Caerphilly County Borough Council would therefore commit to becoming an organisation which strives to:

- In the event of a public tragedy, activate its emergency plan and deploy its resources to rescue victims, to support the bereaved and to protect the vulnerable.
- Place the public interest above our own reputation.
- Approach forms of public scrutiny – including public inquiries and inquests – with candour, in an open, honest and transparent way, making full disclosure of relevant documents, material and facts. Our objective is to assist the search for the truth. We accept that we should learn from the findings of external scrutiny and from past mistakes.
- Avoid seeking to defend the indefensible or to dismiss or disparage those who may have suffered where we have fallen short.
- Ensure all members of staff treat members of the public and each other with mutual respect and with courtesy. Where we fall short, we should apologise straightforwardly and genuinely.
- Recognise that we are accountable and open to challenge. We will ensure that processes are in place to allow the public to hold us to account for the work we do and for the way in which we do it. We do not knowingly mislead the public or the media.

5.7 The Grenfell Tower Part 2 report states that

‘Effective humanitarian assistance is vital in ensuring that those who are most affected by an emergency are treated with dignity and respect and do not suffer additional trauma as a result of an inability to take control of their situation.’

Caerphilly County Borough Council has a raft of emergency plans in place to respond to emergencies and to support communities in the event of a major incident. These include Corporate Major Emergency Response, Evacuation, and Care Centres. The arrangements are further supported by regional multi-agency plans and structures established with partners (the emergency services, Gwent local authorities, Health Board, Natural Resources Wales, Ministry of Defence and utility companies, for example) through the Gwent Local Resilience Forum.

5.8 Following his Public Inquiry Report into the handling of the Marchioness Pleasure Boat Disaster, one of Lord Justice Clarke’s recommendations was that:

‘Local authorities’ social services departments should identify individuals who can be jointly trained with Family Liaison Officers to work with relatives following a disaster’.

In Gwent the 5 local authorities maintain a pool of suitably trained Crisis Support Workers to work alongside Gwent Police Family Liaison Officers who have been deployed to families (resident within the Gwent Police boundary area) bereaved as the result of a major incident. Working in partnership

ensures that alongside the necessary Police investigation, affected families are provided with the information, care and support they need during this time in a sensitive and compassionate manner. Crisis Support Workers can provide initial care and practical support to the family and provide signposting to individuals and organisations that can meet any longer-term needs.

5.9 On the 1st of October 2024 an event was held in Wales with attendees from across the public sector designed to share the lived experiences of those impacted by past tragedies. Families from Aberfan, Grenfell, Manchester, and Hillsborough shared their stories, emphasising the enduring impact of how individuals and families are treated both immediately following an incident and in the long term.

5.10 Attendees were honoured to be joined by Jeff Edwards (Aberfan) who was then aged 8 and was the last child rescued on the day. Margarat Aspinall (Hillsborough) who lost her son James aged 18, Margaret became chairwoman of the Hillsborough Family Support Group and now gives lectures on her experiences. Sue Roberts (Hillsborough) who lost her brother Graham. Paul Price (Manchester) received catastrophic injuries himself. He was with his partner Elaine McIver (a serving police officer), who sadly died whilst they were waiting for his 13-year-old daughter to come out from the concert. Ed Daffarn who escaped from the 16th floor of Grenfell Tower. The lived experiences of these families resonated deeply and were seen as vital in underscoring the importance of the Charter.

5.11 **CONCLUSION**

It is proposed that Caerphilly County Borough Council adopt the recommendations set out in this Charter, which will enable us to further meet the needs and expectations of families should we face a public tragedy in the future. An event is being organised for the official unveiling of the signed documentation by organisations in Wales on the 19th of March 2025.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 No assumptions have been made.

7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as adoption of the Charter is a commitment to reinforce and enhance existing arrangements to further meet the needs and expectations of families should we face a public tragedy in the future.

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with adopting the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 All Council employees are already subject to a number of obligations and expectations through their employment with the Council. The Council's Code of Conduct states that the public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all qualifying employees of relevant authorities. The role of such employees is to serve their employing authority in providing advice, implementing its policies, and delivering services to the local community. In performing their duties, they must act with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity.

9.2 The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the Civil Service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also apply to all those in other sectors delivering public services:

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

9.3 The adoption of the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy will reinforce and enhance existing expectations of staff.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The views of the listed consultees have been reflected within this report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 2000
Civil Contingencies Act 2004

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Appendix 1: Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy

Background Papers: 'The patronising disposition of unaccountable power' A report to ensure the pain and suffering of the Hillsborough families is not repeated, The Right Reverend James Jones KBE