

**MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
REPORT**

SUBJECT: CHARTER FOR FAMILIES BEREAVED THROUGH PUBLIC TRAGEDY (The Hillsborough Charter)

MEETING: County Council

DATE: 12.12.24

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To outline 'The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy' (Hillsborough Charter) and to seek Council's agreement to adopt and commit to the outlined principles in the response to a major incident.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Council adopts The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy (Hillsborough Charter) and champions the transparent and supportive environment for families bereaved by public tragedy as outlined in the Charter.
- 2.2 That the charter is embedded into the Monmouthshire County Council Emergency Management Plan and other appropriate major incident response plans to ensure the principles captured can be easily referenced, monitored and adhered to during a response.

3. REASONS:

- 3.1 The Hillsborough Stadium disaster on 15 April 1989 cost 97 people their lives. The Government has published its response to Bishop James Jones' report on the experience of the Hillsborough families in the aftermath of the disaster. There was a myriad of failings which should never be repeated. Bishop James-Jones, the Home Secretary's advisor on Hillsborough, provided a thoughtful and considered report that shared the experiences of the Hillsborough families, and raised important recommendations which included the creation of the 'Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy'. The charter is a series of commitments by public bodies to change, each related to transparency and acting in the public interest.
- 3.2 Public bodies are asked to commit to the Charter and its six commitments:
- 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.

3.3 The Strategic Director, Learning, Skills and Economy was invited to a pan-Wales event where all Category 1 organisations¹ were asked to sign up to the charter and pledge to meeting its commitments during a major incident. This initial event was organised by South Wales Police who are championing the charter and coordinating all Welsh response agencies to sign. A subsequent event was hosted by South Wales Police on October 1st providing an opportunity for response partners to hear first-hand the experience of victims from 4 major incidents; all relating their stories to barriers they faced as part of the response and the importance of the Charter in relation to their own stories. The speakers (and Major Incidents they were victims of) at the event were as follows:

- Jeff Edwards – Aberfan Disaster October 21st, 1966 – where 116 children and 28 adults lost their lives following the coal waste tip slipping down the mountainside engulfing Pantglas Junior School and surrounding properties.
- Margaret Aspinall – whose son James died in the Hillsborough Stadium Disaster in Sheffield on April 15th, 1989. In total 97 people lost their lives due to failure of crowd control – with an influx of supporters entering the stadium pens resulting in overcrowding and a fatal crowd crush.
- Ed Daffarn was a survivor of the Grenfell Tower Disaster which claimed the lives of 72 people on June 14th, 2017. He lived on the 16th floor of the tower block and was rescued by a fire fighter.
- Paul Price – who sustained life changing injuries and lost his partner Elaine McIver following the terrorist attack and bombing of the Manchester Arena on May 22nd 2017 – where 22 people lost their lives.- All told very powerful personal stories of loss and suffering during these horrific incidents – but always brought it back to how they

¹ Category 1 organisations: –

Police forces • British Transport Police • Fire authorities • Ambulance services • Maritime and Coastguard Agency • All principal local authorities (i.e. metropolitan districts, shire counties, shire districts, shire unitaries) • Port Health Authorities Health bodies • Primary Care Trusts • Acute Trusts • Foundation Trusts • Local Health Boards (in Wales) • Any Welsh NHS Trust which provides public health services • Health Protection Agency • Environment Agency • Scottish Environment Agency

were treated by public bodies which also added to their individual trauma.

- 3.4 There is an aspiration that all response partners will seek to sign up to the charter across Wales by Spring 2025, although it is recognised that each organisation must seek to agree this via their own governance arrangements. The aspiration is '*One Charter for Wales*' with all signing. In demonstrating how MCC can meet this aspiration and in relation to the points outlined in the charter, there is significant evidence in place that such principles are already being met. This evidence is outlined below.
- 3.5 Monmouthshire CC has a robust and because of several incidents over recent years, well-rehearsed 'Emergency Management / Response Plan'. Monmouthshire CC also sit on the Human Aspects Group within the Gwent Local Resilience Forum area and have signed up to the 'Human Aspects Response Framework' that is currently in its final stages of development. It summarises the methods by which organisations can provide a co-ordinated, prompt and appropriate humanitarian response to incidents within the Gwent Police boundary – supporting victims, the families of the bereaved and those vulnerable because of a major incident.
- 3.6 More specifically, within the Gwent Police area, the 5 local authorities and Gwent Police have signed up to a joint Crisis Support Workers Scheme. The Scheme maintains a pool of suitably trained Crisis Support Workers (CSWs) to work alongside Gwent Police Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) who have been deployed to families (resident within the Gwent Police boundary area) directly bereaved as the result of a major incident. Working in partnership will ensure 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. CSWs can provide initial care and practical support to the family and also provide signposting to individuals and organisations that can help meet any longer-term needs.
- 3.7 MCC has for many years adopted the key core values of openness, fairness, flexibility, teamwork and kindness with a priority being the protection of vulnerable people. These align directly with the ethos of the charter.
- 3.8 In support of the various Emergency Response plans in place, MCC also ensures that the council puts in place appropriate training and exercising – so staff know their roles and responsibilities and how to deal compassionately with those that have been involved in major incidents. One example of this is the 'Live' Care Centre exercise that has been scheduled at Caldicot Leisure Centre on November 6th this year - providing staff from Monmouthshire County Council, Gwent Police and Third Sector Organisations with an opportunity to work together in establishing and operating a Survivor Reception Centre, following procedures currently set out in the Monmouthshire Care Centre Handbook.
- 3.9 If all partner organisations who have a role in major incident response sign up to this charter there will be this clear set of principles that can be referred and adhered to with more positive outcomes for all those impacted by such disasters.
- 3.10 In addition to all of the above, and, as outlined by the Prime Minister, there is a move to put legislation in place that would compel public bodies to co-

operate with investigations into major disasters or potentially face criminal sanctions. This is currently being referred to as the 'Hillsborough Law' that will formally introduce a *Duty of Candor* on public bodies. This is because of a long-fought campaign by families of the Hillsborough Disaster to focus on the victims and individuals touched by such an event and 'protect' those that have been directly impacted. The law will seek to prevent public bodies 'closing ranks' and be made directly accountable for their actions and changes to some current cultures.

- 3.11 Prior to any such legislation being formally put in place the current aim and next steps is for all response partners to collectively sign a single Charter for Wales and accept this Charter as a moral obligation in line with organisational values as opposed to needing or waiting for such legislation to be adopted.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

None

5. CONSULTATION:

Will McLean, Strategic Director, Learning, Skills and Economy
Senior Leadership Team
Cabinet

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS:



Copy of the Charter
for Bereaved Families



Hillsborough_Report
Rev James Jones.pdf

7. AUTHOR:

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