

Committee: **Special Council**

Date of meeting: **6th March, 2025**

Report Subject: **Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy**

Portfolio Holder: **Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member Corporate & Performance**

Report Submitted by: **National Advisory Service and Civil Contingencies Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Joint Executive Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	12.02.25						06.03.25	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the council's commitment to adopt 'The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy' (Hillsborough Charter) and commit to the principles within the Charter.
- 1.2 Embedding the principles of the Charter into the council's culture, policies and operational practices will provide a commitment to support the bereaved, protect the vulnerable and do so with a culture of honesty and transparency in planning for, responding to and recovering from a major incident.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Hillsborough Stadium disaster on 15 April 1989 cost 97 people their lives. 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 (Appendix 2) sharing the experiences of the Hillsborough families, and raising important recommendations which included the creation of the 'Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy' (Appendix 1).
- 2.2 With the announcement in the King's Speech on the 17th of July 2024 for the introduction of a duty of candour for public servants (Hillsborough Law), the significant steps being taken to embed the Charter for Families Bereaved by Public Tragedy principles into the operational framework and culture of public services across Wales underscores the commitment to ensuring that families affected by public tragedies receive the utmost respect, support, and care during and after such events.
- 2.3 The Charter establishes a framework for compassion, support, transparency, and accountability when responding to public tragedies, and serves as the foundation for how we must prioritise the needs and perspectives of bereaved families and others affected by public tragedy, ensuring their voices are heard and respected throughout investigations and public inquiries.

Each public service has been asked to commit to the Charter and its six principles:

1. 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.
2. Place the public interest above our own reputation.
3. 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.
4. Avoid seeking to defend the indefensible or to dismiss or disparage those who may have suffered where we have fallen short.
5. 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.
6. 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.

2.4 South Wales Police are championing the charter and coordinating a unified approach across Wales.

Phase One – Initial Engagement and Awareness

A workshop was held 14th May 2024, introducing the Charter to public services. The workshop focussed on the principles of the Charter and integration into current emergency response and recovery frameworks. The session highlighted concerns around legal and logistical challenges while securing consensus on the need for adoption. Outcomes of the workshop included positive initial commitments to the Charter and the identification of strategies to align services with its principles.

Phase Two – Sharing Lived Experiences

A subsequent event was hosted by South Wales Police 1st October 2024 providing an opportunity 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.

- Jeff Edwards – Aberfan Disaster 21st October 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 15th April 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 14th June 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 22nd May 2017 where 22 people lost their lives.
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All told very powerful personal stories of loss and suffering during these horrific incidents but always brought it back to how they were treated by public bodies which added to their individual trauma.

Phase Three – Public Signing of the Charter

Each organisation will formally sign the Charter in advance of an official signing. Phase 3 will culminate in a public event showcasing the collective commitment of the Welsh public services.

2.5 In demonstrating how the Council can meet this aspiration and in relation to the points outlined in the charter, there are several arrangements already in place related to supporting people involved in or affected by a major incident:

- The Council's Civil Contingencies Team holds the position of Chair for the Gwent Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Humanitarian Assistance Subgroup and as such are involved in ensuring the needs of anyone affected by an emergency are considered and supported appropriately, including survivors, witnesses, families and friends of anyone injured or deceased, staff responding to an emergency and those affected indirectly. The group are currently implementing the role of Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer (HALO) within the Gwent area. This officer will have a sole focus on humanitarian needs during an emergency, and ensure all partners focus on the humanitarian response from the outset.
- Within the Gwent Police area, the 5 local authorities and Gwent Police have signed up to a joint Crisis Support Worker Scheme. The Scheme maintains a pool of suitably trained Crisis Support Workers (CSWs) from within the Authority to work alongside Gwent Police Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) deployed to families within Gwent 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, also providing signposting to individuals and organisations that can help meet any longer-term needs.
- The principles of the Charter are embedded within the 2024 Corporate Emergency Management Plan.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 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. The principles are incorporated into reviews of policy, procedures, training and the culture of the organisation.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The recommendations within this report support the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and also the upcoming 'Hillsborough Law'. In addition, elements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 are applicable, such as confidence in the justice system, satisfaction with access to facilities and services, health, feeling safe, and feeling involved.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

There are no financial impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

To not adopt the charter principles could lead to a lesser service being delivered to the population of Blaenau Gwent, a less obvious focus on the humanitarian assistance at time of need, censure at any future incident inquiry, potential consequent reputational damage to the organisation and a loss of public trust.

5.3 ***Legal***

This will enhance aspects of the delivery of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and comply with the upcoming 'Hillsborough Law'.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no human resources impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***

There are no health and safety impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Adoption of the Charter ensures the current best practice will be taken into account during planning for and delivery of emergency response. The expected outcome for the public in signing the Charter is the commitment to support the bereaved, protect the vulnerable and do so with a culture of honesty and transparency in planning for, responding to and recovering from a major incident.

6.2 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Officer representatives have been involved in the pan-Wales engagement events.

6.3 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The principles of the Charter have been incorporated into the 2024 Corporate Emergency Management Plan. Adoption of the Charter aligns with the upcoming 'Hillsborough Law' which will formally introduce a duty of candour for public bodies. In addition, planning is underway for the introduction of the Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer role (HALO) within the Gwent area to ensure a focus on humanitarian needs during and following an emergency.

6.4 ***Preventative focus***

If the people are not the focus of the response from the start the repercussions may be felt further into the response. In not getting humanitarian assistance right at the early stages of an incident, the reputational damage for any organisation may be much more significant and it is hard to regain the trust of those affected if their needs aren't met from the outset. Adoption of the principles within the Charter will prioritise a transparent and supportive environment for the people involved in the incident.

6.5 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Implementation of arrangements to support and deliver on the principles of the Charter will be undertaken on a multi-agency basis through the Gwent Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Humanitarian Assistance Group. Arrangements are already in place on a multi-agency basis across Gwent through the LRF Crisis Support Workers Group to provide support to families bereaved through a major incident. There is an intention to introduce the Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer (HALO) role throughout Gwent to ensure a humanitarian focus from the outset of an emergency. This work is being undertaken by the LRF Humanitarian Assistance Group, and utilises learning from Lancashire, Essex and London.

6.6 ***Integration (across service areas)***

A number of service areas will have involvement in the focus on humanitarian response, ensuring appropriate records are kept and stored during and following an emergency. This needs to be embedded across the organisation through training, so that any employee who may be asked to support an emergency has an awareness of the impact of their response. The need to be open, transparent and accountable is across the Authority.

6.7 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

There are no detrimental impacts identified relating to the recommendations in this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 It is recommended that the Joint Executive Team oversee the implementation of the Charter principles within their directorates. Delivery will be supported and coordinated by the Civil Contingencies Team, with a progress update provided March 2026.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – copy of the Charter for signature



Charter for Bereaved
Families - Single Agen

- Appendix 2 - 'The patronising disposition of unaccountable power' The Right Reverend James Jones KBE

Jones, J. (2017). *The patronising disposition of unaccountable power: A report to ensure the pain and suffering of the Hillsborough families is not repeated*. London: Home Office.

Available

at:https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a821d79ed915d74e6235dce/6_3860_HO_Hillsborough_Report_2017_FINAL_WEB_updated.pdf [Accessed 31 Jan. 2025].