



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Fire Authority, 15 February 2023

Report title: The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy

Lead Member: Councillor Simon Rouse, Chairman

Report sponsor: Jason Thelwell, Chief Fire Officer

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Action: Decision

Recommendations: It is recommended that 'The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy' be adopted and be attested by the signatures of the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer.

Executive summary: The purpose of this report is to ask that the Authority agree that it signs up to The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy (included as the **Appendix** to this report).

Following the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing and preceding the establishment by the Home Secretary on 22 October 2019 of the Manchester Arena statutory public inquiry, [The Kerslake Report](#) was published on the 27 March 2018¹. An interim 'progress report' providing an update on the work of the Review was published on [12 January 2018](#). This contained a recommendation from Lord Kerslake that public bodies adopt one of the 'points of learning' within '[The patronising disposition of unaccountable power](#)' report by the Right Reverend James Jones KBE² to sign up to a 'Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy'.

The Right Reverend Jones had been commissioned by Theresa May, as Home Secretary, following the conclusion of the Hillsborough inquests in 2016. The report identified 24 other 'points of learning' describing the changes that the Right Reverend Jones believed were necessary, following his experiences as chairman of the Hillsborough Independent Panel, including proper participation of bereaved families at inquests and the introduction of a duty of candour for police officers. Such a duty had already been introduced in the NHS by [Regulation 20 of the Health and](#)

¹ After Lord Kerslake who chaired this non-statutory review commissioned by the Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham in the exercise of his function as the Police & Crime Commissioner of Greater Manchester.

² Subtitled 'A report to ensure the pain and suffering of the Hillsborough families is not repeated', published by the House of Commons on 1 November 2017.

[Social Care Act 2008 \(Regulated Activities\) Regulations 2014](#) , following Sir Robert Francis' inquiry into Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust published by the House of Commons on [6 February 2013](#) .

The, then, Chairman of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) signed the NFCC up to the Charter on [9 May 2018](#) .

Financial implications: No direct impact.

Risk management: No direct impact. Many aspects of the six objectives of the Charter already align with the minimum standards of behaviour expected from employees of the Authority as set out in extant policies and procedures.

Legal implications: The Charter is a statement of intent that the Authority 'will strive' to comply with its six objectives. There have been attempts to introduce legislation to oblige public bodies and officials to make all of their dealings, with families and with official bodies, more transparent including a duty to assist the courts, official inquiries and investigations. This has previously been outlined in a Public Authority (Accountability) Bill, known colloquially as the "Hillsborough Law" after the Hillsborough Inquiry in April 2017, but this did not progress beyond a [second reading](#) in Parliament.

Privacy and security implications: No direct impact.

Duty to collaborate: The [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#) requires the Authority to consider opportunities for collaboration with the police and ambulance services. Adoption of the Charter would bring the Authority more aligned with its Thames Valley emergency responders. Both the [College of Policing](#) and the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) (on behalf of all 43 police forces in England and Wales) have signed up to the Charter. South Central Ambulance Service is a health service body which has a statutory 'duty of candour' under Regulation 20 (cited above).

Health and safety implications: No direct impact.

Environmental implications: No direct impact.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications: Adoption of the Charter is consistent with the Authority's obligations under the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) to have regard to the need to, i.a., advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Consultation and communication: At a meeting on 30 November 2022 of the National Fire Chiefs Council (on which Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is represented) the NFCC Chairman recommended that fire and rescue services promote the charter and to sign up to it if they have not already done so.

If the Charter is adopted a copy of the signed and completed document will be promoted on the Authority's website

Local officials of the FBU have been consulted and are supportive of the recommendations in this report, and have agreed to add their endorsement onto the Authority’s website.

Background papers: None other than those accessible within the body of the report.

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	The Charter	

In adopting this charter we commit to ensuring that **Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority** learns the lessons of the Hillsborough disaster and its aftermath, so that the perspective of the bereaved families is not lost.

We commit to **Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority** becoming an organisation which strives to:

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.

Signed

Signed

Etc

Etc

Chairman

Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive