

Meeting of:	COUNCIL
Date of Meeting:	5 FEBRUARY 2025
Report Title:	ADOPTION OF THE CHARTER FOR FAMILIES BEREAVED BY PUBLIC TRAGEDY
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Responsible Officer:	LOWRIE MORGAN-HUGHES EMERGENCY PLANNING MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon policy framework or procedure rules
Executive Summary:	This report seeks Bridgend County Borough Council's support for the Charter for Families Bereaved by Public Tragedy which outlines 6 principles to ensure public servants act in the public interest in their treatment of individuals, families and communities affected by such events.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To outline the principles of the Charter for Families Bereaved by Public Tragedy and seek approval for Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to demonstrate its commitment to upholding the principles by signing up to the charter.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy was proposed by Bishop James Jones in his report on the experiences of families affected by the Hillsborough disaster, published in November 2017. It formalises a commitment to transparency, acting in the public interest, and treatment of the bereaved with care and compassion. In the report, Bishop James highlights 3 points of learning in particular:
 - a charter for families bereaved through public tragedy
 - 'proper participation' of bereaved families at inquests
 - a duty of candour which should require police officers – serving or retired – to cooperate fully with investigations undertaken by the Independent Police Complaints Commission or its successor body.

2.2 In collaboration with Local Resilience Forums, South Wales Police arranged a series of workshops throughout 2024 which included presentations from Bishop John James. These culminated, in October 2024, with an event which highlighted the lasting impact on those affected by bereavement through public tragedy through first hand accounts of these experiences, shared in person by individuals who lost loved ones in public tragedies, including Aberfan, Manchester Arena Attack, Hillsborough and Grenfell Tower. These workshops have reinforced the importance of the charter and its adoption by public bodies across Wales.

2.3 The charter outlines 6 principles: -

- I. In the event of a public tragedy, support the activation of emergency plans and deployment of resources to rescue victims, to support the bereaved and to protect the vulnerable.
- II. Place the public interest above our own reputations.
- III. 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.
- IV. Avoid seeking to defend the indefensible or to dismiss or disparage those who may have suffered where we have fallen short.
- V. 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.
- VI. 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 Local Government Act 2000 / BCBC Code of Conduct

2.4 The majority of these principles are already legal requirements for Local Authorities and BCBC has recognised these requirements through their incorporation in its constitution and codes of conduct. Adoption of the Charter will reinforce the council's commitment to uphold the principles covered in the Charter, as outlined above, and ensure that families affected by the loss of loved ones through major incidents are treated with compassion and their views are not overlooked during response and recovery.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 South Wales Police and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council are seeking support for the charter from partner organisations with the aim of all partner agencies having signed the Charter by March 2025.

3.2 In adopting the Charter, the council will be making a public commitment to treating families bereaved by public tragedy with care and compassion and to acting with transparency and in public interest, in responding to and supporting communities to recover from such events.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent implications from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial impacts from this report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that Council:

- Adopt the Charter for Families Bereaved by Public Tragedy.
- Authorise the Leader and the Chief Executive to jointly sign the Charter on behalf of Bridgend County Borough Council.

Background documents

None