

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 08 February 2024

Report of the Head of Health, Safety and Resilience

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;

Lancashire County Council Adoption of The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy (Hillsborough Charter)

Contact for further information:

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Brief Summary

Full Council on 12 October 2023 unanimously agreed, via a Notice of Motion, to develop the Lancashire County Council Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response framework to reflect the principles of the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy (known as the Hillsborough Charter).

This report describes the actions being undertaken by the Council and the plan to adopt the Hillsborough Charter through the Council's Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response Framework.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve the actions being taken to embed the Hillsborough Charter into the Council's Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response framework.

Background

Full Council on 12 October 2023 unanimously agreed, via a notice of motion, to develop the Lancashire County Council Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response framework to reflect the principles of the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy (known as the Hillsborough Charter).



The Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response framework is an operational document reviewed every three years. An addendum to Version 4 of the document has been added to deliver the Charter with immediate effect. It is proposed that the charter will be incorporated into our Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response framework when it is refreshed in 2025.

Adoption of the Charter

The delivery of the charter will be co-ordinated by the Health, Safety & Resilience Service's Resilience team on behalf of the county council to ensure that the Authority is compliant with each point contained in the charter as follows:

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.

All the council's Emergency Duty Officers are trained and familiar with the current Local Resilience Forum Human Aspects Plan and can provide a response to support any Humanitarian Assistance requirements.

The council has an Emergency Response Group, staffed by the county council's employee volunteers, who are trained to assist those requiring support during an emergency. The Emergency Response Group currently has 70+ volunteers who would predominantly support the affected population at Emergency Centres when established. This support can include a wide range of activities including administrative support, welfare support and basic trauma support. Volunteers meet regularly for training arranged by the Health, Safety and Resilience Team.

In November 2023, Lancashire County Council's Executive Management Team agreed to support the introduction and development of three specific roles to enhance our provision in this area; these posts are based primarily within the social care services and will be activated as required during an incident.

- Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer (HALO) – Operating at Strategic level to consider all humanitarian issues from a multi-agency perspective.
- Humanitarian Assistance Tactical Officer (HATO) – Operating at Tactical level to Humanitarian Assistance lead role at tactical level incidents.
- Key Workers - Social Workers who could support those affected through the coming days/weeks after a disaster with both psychosocial support and practical assistance.

2. Place the public interest above our own reputation.

Learning from incidents such as Grenfell has clearly reiterated that the focus of any response must consider those affected by the incident at the earliest opportunity and the focus must remain on the humanitarian assistance response for the duration of the incident and beyond.



It is therefore imperative that the public interest is placed at the centre of any response even to the initial detriment of our reputation. If the people are not the focus of the response from the start, then the repercussions may be felt further into the response.

In addition, by not getting this 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 start.

In Lancashire this focus will be further enhanced through the newly agreed Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officer, Humanitarian Assistance Tactical Officer, and Key Worker arrangements.

Humanitarian Assistance Lead Officers will attend Strategic multi-agency incident control (SCG) meetings with a sole focus on the humanitarian needs and to ensure all partner organisations are focusing on the humanitarian response as part of the wider incident management from the outset. Humanitarian Assistance Tactical Officers will support the same efforts at the tactical level.

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.

Also key point 7 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.

The Resilience Team are cognisant of the need for public scrutiny and when preparing any plans, training or exercises, ensure that full administrative records are kept. Emergency Duty Officers all have access to logbooks for recording details during incidents and are trained in the correct way to store information following an incident. This material is then available for debrief, investigation and inquiry purposes. A recent example has been the provision of information relating to the planning and response as part of the ongoing Covid inquiry responses to a number of specific modules.

4. We accept that we should learn from the findings of external scrutiny and from past mistakes.

It is clear from learning from incidents, such as Manchester Arena, Grenfell Tower, and Bishop James Jones' review of the treatment of the families following the Hillsborough Enquiry in 2016 (from which the Charter for families bereaved by public tragedy has been proposed) that dealing with those affected by an emergency is one of the hardest roles that we as an Authority undertake and in order to ensure that Lancashire is as prepared as possible we must learn from previous incidents and exercises and amend our plans accordingly.



In late 2022 the Lancashire Resilience Forum Humanitarian Assistance and Voluntary Organisations Subgroup (LRF HAVOS) supported Exercise Goshawk, a large three day live play counter terrorism exercise, by operating a Survivor Reception Centre and Family & Friends Reception Centre to test the Lancashire Resilience Forum Humanitarian Assistance Plan and the Lancashire Resilience Forum Emergency Centres plan. Multi Agency recommendations from the exercise have been recorded and shared for action and are being addressed as part of the formal plan review process.

In support of learning from events Lancashire Resilience Forum has (for several years) adopted the College of Policing debriefing process and HS&R Resilience Team have a number of officers who have been trained to facilitate a debrief and they form part of a cadre of Lancashire Resilience Forum members who can be called upon when a debrief is requested.

Going forward Health, Safety and Resilience Team will continue to, as appropriate, arrange internal debriefs for those who responded from the council during an incident and ensure representation at multi-agency debriefs.

5. Avoid seeking to defend the indefensible or to dismiss or disparage those who may have suffered where we have fallen short.

It is accepted that however hard responders try, where there is a humanitarian assistance response we may not always say or do the right thing; this is not down to lack of training or staff awareness but is the nature of a response where everybody will react slightly differently in a highly emotive environment. Through training with the Peace Foundation and learning from survivors of emergencies, the county council staff are aware of the need to adapt their responses as a situation unfolds; but also to be open with those being supported and to seek their guidance on our response so that we avoid, where possible, falling short of their expectations. If expectations can't be met then explanations are offered as to why and joint solutions are sought.

6. 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.

We will ensure that the need for humanitarian assistance support during an emergency is embedded across the organisation so that any employee who may be asked to support an emergency has an awareness of the impact of their response. The plan review, training and exercising will allow us to bring a focus on humanitarian assistance to the organisation.

During the last year Emergency Response Group volunteers and members of the Resilience Team have received training on basic trauma support and dealing with people affected by terrorism. Part of this training the group was delivered by the Peace Foundation who are funded by the Government Victims of Terrorism Unit to support anyone affected by a terrorist incident. As part of this training the Foundation arranged discussions with survivors who are being currently supported who shared their experiences to assist our volunteers in understanding the work they do. The sessions included



discussing the rationale for why we must ensure that the volunteers are as prepared as they can be to support people during an emergency and that any support is carried out with courtesy and respect.

Further information supporting delivery of the Charter

The council's Resilience Team holds the position of Chair for the Lancashire Resilience Forum Humanitarian Assistance & Voluntary Organisations Subgroup (HAVOS) and as such are involved in ensuring the needs of anyone affected by an emergency are considered and supported appropriately, this includes survivors, witnesses, families and friends of anyone injured or deceased, staff responding to an emergency and those affected indirectly.

The Humanitarian Assistance & Voluntary Organisations Subgroup have secured funding to assist in a full review of the Lancashire Resilience Forum Humanitarian Assistance Plans to ensure that all learning from exercises and previous incidents can be used to ensure that Lancashire is best placed to respond to incidents requiring a humanitarian response in the future. Part of the funding has been used to employ two consultants, Dr Lucy Easthope, an international Mass Fatalities subject matter expert and Anne Ayre, Hillsborough Survivor and Director for the charity Disaster Action, who specialise in support to survivors and families of those bereaved from major emergencies.

The consultants are working with us to provide advice and guidance on our current plans and ways that they can be improved. It is anticipated that the new plans will be completed by March 2024, when a training programme will then be delivered across all organisations with a role in humanitarian assistance to ensure that a joined-up approach is taken across the Lancashire Resilience Forum. Following the training, several exercises will be run in late 2024 and early 2025 to validate the work.

As we move forwards with our Humanitarian Assistance planning, training and exercising both as Lancashire County Council and as part of the Lancashire Resilience Forum, all of our work will continue to be underpinned by the ethos of a quote from Duncan McGarry, a former Police Family Liaison Officer:

'At the very worst time of their lives, the very least that we can do, is our very best'

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Finance

There are no financial implications for the county council.

Legal

This will enhance aspects of the delivery of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004



Risk management

Adoption of the Charter and building its key points into the county council's Emergency Planning, Resilience and Response Framework (policy) ensures the current best practice will be taken into account during planning and delivery of should aid the continued improvement of the service to the public.

As has been identified through Full Council, to not adopt the charter key points could lead to a lesser service being delivered to the population of Lancashire, a less obvious focus on the humanitarian assistance at time of need, censure at any future incident inquiry and potential consequent reputational damage to the organisation.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
None		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
N/A		

