

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL****CABINET MEMBER FOR FIRE AND RESCUE, AND RESILIENCE****DATE: 4 JUNE 2024****LEAD OFFICER: DAN QUIN, CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE, SAFER COMMUNITIES AND TRADING STANDARDS LEAD****SUBJECT: SCC ADOPTION OF THE CHARTER FOR FAMILIES BEREAVED THROUGH PUBLIC TRAGEDY****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Current processes following major incidents can compound and prolong the impact of a tragic event on bereaved families and/or survivors.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that:

The Cabinet Member approves the adoption of The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy for all Surrey County Council Services.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Signing up to the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy will provide additional assurance to our communities should an event happen within Surrey.

**DETAILS:****The need for a Charter:**

The need for the charter has arisen from Public Inquiries from recent major incidents, for example the Grenfell Tower tragedy and Manchester Arena Bombing, which are consistently suggesting that there is more that could be done to support families following large-scale tragedies or disasters, particularly where there is loss of life, or the distress caused to those affected is severe and likely to have a lifelong impact.

The framework that currently exists to investigate the tragic circumstances behind incidents such as the Hillsborough disaster and the Grenfell Tower fire, is complex and will often involve multiple agencies. Families can face an enormous challenge in understanding the roles of various agencies and to participate meaningfully in the numerous legal or investigative procedures. They must do this at the same time as coming to terms with what has happened to them. This is likely to be overwhelming and to add to the suffering of bereaved families and/or survivors.

A recurring theme from the feedback received from families during investigations, such as that into the Hillsborough disaster, is that without support and recognition from public sector bodies these processes can compound and prolong the impact of a tragic event.

Signing up to the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy will provide additional assurance to our communities should a similar event happen within Surrey and ensures leaders of public bodies deliver the particular changes needed within their organisation to make the behaviours described in the charter a reality in practice.

Adoption of the charter will align Surrey County Council with other county council authorities and government, who signed up to the Hillsborough Charter in December 2023.

When an organisation has signed up to the charter, it should declare this fact publicly.

#### **CONSULTATION:**

1. The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy has been shared with the Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue, and Resilience

#### **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

2. There are no risks or implications associated with the content of this report

#### **Financial and Value for Money Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with the content of this report

#### **Section 151 Officer Commentary**

The Council continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment. Local authorities across the country are experiencing significant budgetary pressures.

Surrey County Council has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the cost of service delivery, increasing demand, financial uncertainty and government policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to deliver financial efficiencies and reduce spending in order to achieve a balanced budget position each year.

In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2024/25 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority, in order to ensure the stable provision of services in the medium term.

There are no financial implications associated with adopting the Charter, and as such the Section 151 Officer supports the recommendation.

#### **Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer**

There are no significant legal implications.

### **Equalities and Diversity**

3. There are no equality implications associated with the content of this report.

### **Other Implications:**

4. The potential implications for the following Council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications arising from this report.
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No significant implications arising from this report.
Environmental sustainability	No significant implications arising from this report.
Public Health	No significant implications arising from this report.

### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

5. A signed copy of the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy will be made available on Surrey County Council's webpages.

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#### **Contact Officer:**

Tina Thorburn  
Business Manager  
07813 351428

#### **Consulted:**

Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue and Resilience, CLT, cabinet.

#### **Annexes:**

Annex 1 - Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy

#### **Sources/background papers:**

Kerslake Arena Review - Progress report on the work of the independent panel – 12th January 2018 <https://www.kerslakearenareview.co.uk/media/1020/kerslake-arena-review-progress-report.pdf>

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## **Annex 1**

### **Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy**

In adopting this charter we commit to ensuring that Surrey County Council learns the lessons of the Hillsborough disaster and its aftermath, so that the perspective of the bereaved families is not lost.

I commit to Surrey County Council becoming an organisation which strives to:

- 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.

Signed



Dan Quin  
Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Management and Resilience, Safer Communities and  
Trading Standards Lead