

All Chief Constables

Sent via email

10 September 2021

Dear colleagues,

Next Monday (13th September) I will be signing on behalf of the NPCC and all 43 forces in England and Wales, 'The Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy'. As you may remember, it was agreed at Chief Constables' Council to adopt the Charter, that arose from Bishop James Jones' report into the experience of families after the Hillsborough disaster.

This letter provides some additional explanation about the expectations in the Charter. As you will appreciate, it is important that the Charter and its implications are understood consistently across policing.

The Charter calls for the lessons of the Hillsborough disaster and its aftermath to be learned so the same missteps and mistakes are not repeated. While we recognise the importance of acting openly and transparently and of placing the public interest above reputational considerations, the signing of the Charter provides an important signal about our willingness to do so. It encourages us to look critically upon our actions and always to strive to act in accordance with the commitments the Charter sets out. Each of its commitments are, naturally, understood to apply within the context of the law as it happens to be at any time.

By signing the Charter, policing is committing to approach public inquiries, inquests, and other examples of formal scrutiny openly, honestly, and transparently, making full disclosure of the relevant documents, material, and facts. This does not override the procedural rules or directions applicable to such proceedings, or the data protection and freedom of information laws, rather it is a commitment to avoid defensiveness and present the full picture as openly as possible.

Where we recognise that we have fallen short in how we have responded to an incident, we should apologise straightforwardly and genuinely. There are often concerns about the legal consequences of making an apology so it is important to remember that an apology will not be deemed to amount to an admission of liability and nor is it the case that the Charter prevents any police force from presenting a legal case that is properly available to it. What the Charter seeks to encourage is the heartfelt human apology and explanation to those who have suffered harm.

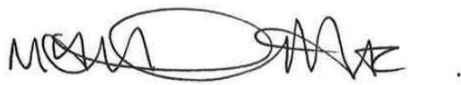
While we have made several changes already in policing to address the recommendations of Bishop James' review, the signing of this Charter demonstrates our ongoing commitment to act in accordance with its principles and within the context of our legal obligations.

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We will be publishing the Charter on Monday 13 September, alongside this letter, on the NPCC website. The College of Policing will also be signing and publishing the Charter on its own website. For those who wish to include the Charter on their own website, they may publish the one signed by the NPCC on behalf of all forces if they so wish. Additionally, the College of Policing and NPCC will be jointly publishing a full written response to Bishop James' review in the coming months which will provide a detailed summary of the various steps taken by policing to address the identified points of learning. We will be formally publicising the Charter once we have submitted our full response to Bishop James' review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Hewitt', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Martin Hewitt QPM
Chair
National Police Chiefs' Council