

# Summary of the All-Wales Executive Workshop

## Charter for Families Bereaved by Public Tragedy

### Feedback on Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

#### Session 1: Preparedness

##### Key Observations:

- **Awareness and Commitment:**
  - Many organisations were unaware of the Charter before the workshop but agreed they had already met some of its principles.
  - On a readiness scale of 1-10, most organisations rated themselves 6 or 7, except the Coal Authority, which rated itself an eight due to its smaller size (300 staff).
  - There was consensus on incorporating the Charter within the 'Strategic Intentions' of the LRF (Local Resilience Forum).
  - All organisations agreed to work towards signing the Charter.
- **Implementation and Challenges:**
  - Some organisations have full-time bereavement officers (Public Health) or trained officers (Transport for Wales, military, police).
  - Legal teams within organisations may cause delays or censure responses.
  - Some organisations commented on the requirement to escalate the potential future agreement in signing the Charter through their corporate governance.
  - Honest discussions about the realism of signing up to the Charter highlighted potential legal obstacles due to liability concerns.

#### Session 2: Response

##### Key Observations:

- **Experiences and Challenges:**
  - Participants shared historical and recent experiences with public tragedies (Aberfan) and more recent tragic events (e.g. Gleision Mining Disaster,). Some organisations primarily discussed COVID-19 challenges.
  - COVID-19 presented unique difficulties as victims were dispersed and included staff, affecting how organisations responded.
- **Charter Compliance and Difficulties:**
  - The Charter is seen as aiding development in dealing with bereavement, although its third principle (approach to public scrutiny) may be the most challenging to implement.
  - The necessity for honesty and open communication was emphasised, with the understanding that reputational risk and media scrutiny are significant concerns.

## Session 3: Recovery

### Key Observations:

- **Public Perception and Trust:**
  - The effectiveness of an organisation's response may not align with public perception.
  - Communication and transparency are crucial for maintaining trust and managing reputational risk.
  - A small number of dissatisfied individuals can significantly impact public perception.
- **Learning and Improvement:**
  - Organisations have statutory obligations to learn from major disasters.
  - Data storage and information retrieval issues for inquests or FOI requests were common, often due to staff movement.
  - Including the voluntary sector in responses and recognising the impact on staff through programs like VIVUP were discussed.
- **Support Systems:**
  - In a post-tragedy situation, the role of the LA as part of the Recovery phase and the LRF subgroups, such as Humanitarian Assistance, Evacuation, and Mass Fatalities subgroups, would be seen as a vital cog within the community in offering aid and support.
  - The importance of financial aid and support from national and local government and the third sector was highlighted.
  - TRIM processes and other support services were mentioned as valuable in helping staff deal with trauma.

### Key Facts

### Organisational Preparedness

#### Key Points:

- **Readiness and Eagerness:**
  - Organisations rated their eagerness at 9/10 and readiness at 6/7 for implementing the Charter's principles.
- **Obstacles:**
  - Legal concerns, communication challenges, internal consultations, conflicting priorities, and partner relationships were identified as potential obstacles.
- **Practices and Policies:**
  - Embedding the Charter requires a code of ethics, major incident plans, training plans, and effective communication strategies.
- **Training and Implementation:**
  - Training needs to include a humanitarian aspect and address internal competing demands.

- A phased implementation plan, engagement, and continuous training are necessary steps towards signing the Charter.

## Organisational Response

### Key Points:

- **Experiences:**
  - Experiences ranged from dealing with public tragedies to family deaths in fires to responding to suicides and other fatalities.
  - Learning and reflective practices, as well as forums to raise issues, are crucial.
- **Charter Impact:**
  - The Charter would influence policy and procedures, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.
- **Training and Exercises:**
  - Ongoing training and exercises at **all** levels, including MAGIC courses and All Wales Gold training, are essential.
  - Operational gaps need to be addressed for comprehensive disaster response.

## Organisational Recovery

### Key Points:

- **Partnerships:**
  - Encouraging partners to follow the Charter's principles is in the interest of all, promoting collaboration and adherence to JESIP principles.
- **Trust and Communication:**
  - Building trust with the bereaved and survivors requires openness, transparency, effective communication, and engagement with community leaders.
  - An effective communications plan and investing time in building relationships are crucial.
- **Challenges and Support:**
  - Principles 3 and 4 of the Charter might be the most challenging to implement, depending on the stage of recovery and organisational culture.
  - Recognising and addressing the impact of tragedy and trauma on staff and their families through trauma-informed culture and wellbeing strategies is essential.

## Recommendations

### 1. Enhance Training and Implementation Strategies:

- Develop comprehensive training programs that include humanitarian aspects tailored to address competing internal demands. This should involve a phased implementation plan to ensure a gradual and effective adoption of the Charter's principles.

- Regularly conduct training exercises at **all** levels, such as MAGIC courses and All Wales Gold training, to reinforce readiness and improve response capabilities.

## **2. Strengthen Legal and Ethical Frameworks:**

- Address potential legal obstacles by engaging with legal teams early in the process to identify and mitigate liability concerns. Honest discussions about the realism of signing up to the Charter should be encouraged to manage expectations and facilitate smoother adoption.
- Embed the Charter's principles into the organisation's values, major incident plans, and training plans to ensure alignment with strategic goals and statutory obligations.

## **3. Foster Open Communication and Transparency:**

- Develop an effective communications plan emphasising transparency and open communication to build trust with the public, the bereaved, and survivors. This should include engagement with community leaders and maintaining ongoing dialogues to manage reputational risks and public perception.
- Ensure that all staff understand the importance of honesty in communication, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues such as bereavement and public tragedies.

## **4. Integrate Support Systems and Partnerships:**

- Encourage collaboration with partners and the voluntary sector to enhance support systems for affected individuals and staff. Recognise the importance of financial aid and support from local and national government and other responders like St Johns and the Red Cross.
- Implement trauma-informed practices and wellbeing strategies to address the impact of tragedy and trauma on staff and their families.

## **5. Promote Continuous Learning and Improvement:**

- Establish mechanisms for learning and reflective practices, such as forums to raise issues and share experiences. Organisations should be obligated to learn from disasters and implement improvements based on these lessons.
- Improve data storage and information retrieval systems to preserve valuable insights and records despite staff movement, aiding in continuous organisational improvement and preparedness for future incidents.

The workshop highlighted the importance of preparedness, effective response, and thorough recovery processes in dealing with public tragedies. Organisations were willing to adopt the Charter but recognised various challenges, particularly legal concerns and the need for effective communication, testing and exercising programmes. Building trust and maintaining transparency were recurrent themes, alongside the necessity for continuous learning and improvement in disaster response and recovery practices.

## Next Steps

### Phase 2

As progress is made within each organisation, with the support of the LRF Executive Groups a provisional date has been agreed to host phase 2 of the adoption of the charter into all public services across Wales (11<sup>th</sup> September 2024). Phase 2 will be focused on the lived experience of families bereaved by public tragedy. We are scoping a suitable venue and arranging speakers for this event. Naturally, the day will be an emotive occasion, but it will serve as a stark reminder as to why this is such an important initiative to pursue and to ensure we place families and the communities at the heart of our response and recovery.

### Phase 3

The aspiration is to have the official signing event of the charter for all public services in Wales in November 2024. Further communication on these two phases will be provided to all senior representatives in due course.

### Agreed Actions

Action	Due	Owner
To collate the feedback and room content to form recommendations from the meeting.	24/4/24	AH
To update JESG on the day. Prepare a summary of facts from the day including attendance. Brief JESG.	28/6/24 JESQ	AH MT
Phase 1 – LRF’s to work together to form a plan of the key actions required to deliver the CFBF in a once for Wales approach. A simple pan Wales plan.	12/7/24	LRF Chairs
Phase 1 – Write to national partners & parties to ask what they recommend and can contribute (including the voluntary sector)	7/6/24	AH
Phase 1 – Form a key actions list	12/7/24	AH
Phase 2 – Plan the voice of the families event for a large location in Wales to include G,S and B commanders, planners and strategic leads	Deliver in Sept	AH
Phase 2 – Agree a common minimum standard for the adoption of the charter	13/9/24	LRF Chairs
Phase 3 – Planning the formal agreement and adoption event in November	Nov 24	LRF Co-ord

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