

## Gosport Independent Panel

Family Liaison Meeting Wednesday 18 October 2017

### Note of meeting

Hornet Services Sailing Club, Haslar Road, Gosport, Hants

Present: Family members; members of the Gosport Independent Panel (Bishop James Jones, Deborah Sturdy, Christine Gifford, David Hencke, John Pounsford, Jim Smith) and Secretariat (Louise Dominian, Judy Joslin, Melanie Peffer, Code A)

Code A

#### Welcome and update from the Chair

1. The Bishop welcomed everyone to the meeting and said it was good to see a high number of family members in attendance, underlining the importance of the meetings. Since the first meeting in July 2014 increasing numbers of families had attended the meetings over the last three years.
2. The meeting was attended by the Family Sub-Group of the Panel with the addition of John Pounsford and Jim Smith. The Bishop invited Panel Members to briefly introduce themselves.
3. The Bishop explained that Jon Tunney, the press officer on the Hillsborough Independent Panel would be joining the meeting to give families an idea of how the press might respond in the lead up to and on the day the Panel's Report is published. Jon is not part of the Gosport Independent Panel or the Secretariat and would be attending the meeting and answering questions in an advisory capacity only.
4. The Bishop said that he had met with Philip Dunne MP, Minister of State in the Department of Health. The Bishop told the Minister that he had already spoken with families to inform them that the Panel would report in May or June next year and that they would be invited to a meeting where the Panel would present its Report to families before the Report is laid in Parliament.
5. The Bishop made it clear to the Minister that families would be the first to receive the Report. The Bishop recognised that, given the way families had been treated over the years, it was understandable that they might be suspicious about the Report being edited or altered by Government. This would not happen and underlined the Panel's commitment to sharing it with families first. The Minister and the Department of Health will need to plan their arrangements to lay the Report in Parliament and the Bishop wanted the Minister to be aware now of the tentative dates. The Bishop said the Minister was receptive, did not try to probe further and was respectful of the Panel's 'no piecemeal disclosure principle' - including to Government.
6. The Bishop said the Panel was in the final straight. It was at the end of accessing documents and was analysing around one million pages from approximately 100,000 documents. Good progress was being made and the Panel had already begun drafting

chapters for the Report. The Bishop reiterated that the Report would take a thematic, rather than an individual patient approach. The Panel had collated in the region of 800 questions from families and had grouped these into different themes. The vast majority of families' questions and concerns related to clinical care and Panel members were using their professional expertise to analyse and interpret the documents to write a Report that will add to public understanding.

7. The questions and concerns raised by families about the previous police investigations and the actions of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) were the subject of substantial examination under the scrutiny theme. The regulatory theme covered the concerns raised by families to various regulatory bodies, whose duties covered patient safety, and their response. The existence of and connections between local networks, including the media, and how they responded to the events at Gosport War Memorial Hospital was being considered under the networks theme.
8. The Report will point to certain documents and may include extracts or sample documents that tell the story of what happened at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. After families have seen the Report there will be an opportunity in the following weeks to have a personal meeting with Members of the Panel to discuss the findings of the Report and documents published within the on-line archive. The Bishop acknowledged that for some patients there will be no documents available but that overall the Panel has accessed sufficient documentation to tell the narrative about what happened at Gosport War Memorial Hospital using the thematic approach described.
9. The Bishop spoke about the press articles that had appeared during the summer, including in the Sunday Times and the Mail Online. He reassured families that the articles were not instigated by the Panel. Although the Panel had worked with the local media in the past to raise awareness of the Panel's existence and Terms of Reference, on this occasion the Panel had no involvement. The Bishop said he was sorry that some families had been upset by press intrusion. There was nothing new in the press reports and previous information had simply been repackaged to make a story. The Bishop indicated there could be more press activity in the run up to publication.
10. The Bishop reminded families that four Wednesdays in May and June next year had been provided to families as the tentative dates identified when the Panel will publish its Report. The Bishop explained that he could not be specific about the date at this stage because it will depend on Parliamentary business and uncertainties such as a general election being called. The Bishop explained that Wednesdays have been earmarked to coincide with 'Prime Minister's Questions' (PMQs) in the House of Commons, believing that the importance of the work families had pressed for was deserving of this prominence. At the moment, the Wednesday dates were the most likely timing for the Panel to invite families to Portsmouth Cathedral to share their Report with families first.
11. The Bishop recapped the four dates being held in 2018 with Portsmouth Cathedral as: Wednesday 16 May; Wednesday 6 June; Wednesday 13 June; and Wednesday 20 June. The Bishop said the Cathedral had been very cooperative and he reminded families that the Cathedral will be closed to the public that day to ensure families' privacy. The Bishop believed the Cathedral was a fitting place to remember families' loved ones and

for families to find out the truth. The media will be kept separate from families, in another building across the road from the Cathedral so that families will not be subject to media intrusion. The dignity of families and families' loved ones will be paramount.

12. The Bishop had noted that a number of people had raised concerns about travel to and parking at the Cathedral. The Bishop stressed that families' needs and requirements on the day were very important and that the Panel wanted arrangements put in place to make it as easy as possible for families to attend and receive the Panel's Report in Portsmouth Cathedral. The Bishop did not want anyone to feel unable to attend because the arrangements made it too difficult for them to do so.
13. The Family Team will give close attention to the arrangements for the day and has begun to look at possible transport options which might include arranged transport from the ferry and train station to the Cathedral. A questionnaire will be sent out with the note of this meeting to find out families' needs and requirements. The Bishop said he recognised that some family members with mobility issues may need door-to-door transport arranged.
14. Families will be asked to tentatively indicate in the questionnaire whether they are likely to attend the day of disclosure, and if so who they would like to accompany them. The Bishop suggested that as a guide, two or three people from each family, but the Panel would take a flexible approach as far as possible to meet families' needs. There are practical considerations in managing attendance on the day for security and privacy reasons and the estimated attendance could be 200-300 people depending on how many families wish to attend. The Bishop urged families to complete and return the questionnaire and include any special requirements that will make it easier for them to attend. Families could also speak directly to the Family Team.
15. The Bishop explained that, whilst he could not tell families at this stage exact timings for the day of disclosure, it was highly likely to be both a morning and afternoon meeting. This would mean an early start – perhaps even 9am, to enable the Secretary of State for Health to lay the Report before Parliament at 11:30, and for the Panel to present the Report to families first before it is laid in Parliament.
16. The Bishop was very aware that an earlier start may mean that some people who live a distance away will need an overnight stay, so the Family Team is also giving consideration to hotel accommodation. At the next Family Liaison Meeting on 21 February, the Bishop will be in a better position to give families more information on the practical arrangements.

#### **Update on Information Management**

17. Christine said that the process of accessing information and talking with stakeholders to pursue remaining information was almost complete, but work on this would continue at the margins as appropriate. The Panel is dealing with approximately 100,000 documents amounting to well over one million pages that have been digitised and are being analysed by the thematic teams.

18. Christine said she was in the process of going back to all stakeholders and asking the most senior people in these organisations to confirm they are absolutely certain that they have looked for and given the Panel everything of relevance. They are being asked to sign a certificate indicating that this is the case. Any organisation that does not sign a certificate will be named in the Report.
19. Christine explained that not all documents will be put in the public domain. Medical records and sensitive personal data will not be published. However, there may be extracts from medical records included to support points made in the Panel's Report. Christine estimated that the Panel will put perhaps 50-60,000 documents into the public domain on its disclosure website.
20. The disclosure website where the Panel's Report and the supporting documents will be published was in the process of being designed and built. The website will provide ease of access to the information, including being able to view the documents referenced in the Report. Christine said it was a huge job to get the website up and running, to add several hundred thousand pages of documentation to it and make sure all the links were working. Families' address details and signatures will be redacted and therefore not visible on any documents on the website.

#### **Engaging with the media**

21. The Bishop and David Hencke welcomed Jon Tunney to the meeting. David explained that there would likely be a lot of media interest in the Panel's Report as indicated by the recent press coverage. The journalists involved in the recent coverage had only made contact with those families that had previously spoken to the press or featured in media coverage going back several years.
22. David said families should not fear the press and that they will be interested in what the families have to say. David reminded everyone that families are independent from the Panel and that it will be up to families to decide for themselves if and how they want to interact with the media. On the day itself, the Panel will ensure that those who do not want to speak to the media are protected.
23. Jon Tunney introduced himself and explained that he had been the Press Officer for the Hillsborough Independent Panel and was now Head of News in the Department for Transport. Jon had also worked at Number 10, the Home Office and had previously been a journalist. Jon emphasised that he was attending the meeting as a friend and former colleague of the Bishop, and was not there to defend government or journalists.
24. Jon shared his experience and observations, both as a former journalist, and in his role with the Hillsborough Independent Panel (HIP) , including the following points:
  - The HIP day of disclosure was held at Liverpool Cathedral which offered a large and flexible amount of space.
  - There were no attempts by the press to intrude – they knew that they were on private property and liable to be removed if their behaviour contravened Jon's firm instructions.

- The three Hillsborough family support groups each gave individual press conferences after the Panel gave their press conference. Jon said having groups to speak on families' behalf had its benefits and can be a good way of voicing a collective opinion if individual families do not themselves want to speak to the media directly.
- Families were keen to speak to the media because the report had vindicated them. Families who wished privacy were able to leave and remain silent and not speak with the media.
- If families do speak to the media, it is likely they will be asked for personal details and information. Jon explained that the press will want to tell a story that others can identify with and including personal details provides a compelling way into a story.
- Jon reassured families that they should not feel pressurised into speaking to the press – it was entirely up to them. Jon suggested that if families were undecided at the time, they should ask for the journalist's card and say they will think about it.
- Jon encouraged families not to be afraid of the media or the process – families can use the media to their advantage and it is entirely up to families to decide how much information to give journalists.

25. The Bishop thanked Jon for his helpful insights and invited families to ask Jon questions before the general Q&A session:

- A family member commented that he thought the recent articles had been intrusive as they included previously published photographs. Jon confirmed the press will not contact families before they publish photographs they already have on file. Jon also noted that the press may source photographs from open social media. If the media take photos from Facebook they may be breaching copyright held by Facebook but not one held by the user.
- A family member spoke poignantly about their own experience of being catapulted into the media seventeen years ago including supportive comments about the need for families to stick together.
- A family member said that there had been a great deal of news coverage over the years and expressed the view that only some of it had been accurate reporting. Another family member asked whether the Panel had reviewed the historic media interviews with families. The Bishop confirmed that the media was within the scope of the Panel's work.
- Jon noted that people varied in what they considered as intrusive media, and suggested that if families had previously spoken with a journalist that they liked and trusted, they could decide to only speak with this journalist.

#### **Questions and answers**

26. The Bishop invited general questions and comments. In discussion, the following points and questions were raised:

- A family member asked whether the Panel's computer system was insulated from the internet and Christine gave assurance that all appropriate security measures were in place and that any redactions made could not be undone.
- A family member asked whether the website documentation published about a family's relative could be downloaded and provided on a memory stick to make it easier for other family members to access. Christine said that she was very keen that the information was easy to access and the best ways to achieve this will be considered.
- A family member asked how much in advance the Secretary of State for Health will have the Report before it is laid in Parliament. The Bishop confirmed families will see the Report first before anyone else. The Bishop may meet the Secretary of State for Health and/or the Prime Minister in advance to explain how the Panel has been working and ensure a statement will be given, however the Bishop will not give them a copy of the Report or reveal the Panel's findings to them.
- The Bishop confirmed that everyone who attends the day of disclosure will receive one print copy of the Report and the Executive Summary. Consideration will be given to whether additional copies can be provided on request and the Family Team is looking at how best to ensure those unable to attend the day can receive their copy of the Report quickly.
- The Bishop confirmed that if the Panel find contradictory information in the documentation then these contradictions will be put in the public domain or Report.
- The Bishop reiterated that when the Panel's work comes to an end so too will the Panel. It will be up to the appropriate state bodies responsible to decide next steps. The Bishop expressed his view that he thought it unlikely that MPs will leave the Report where it is.

#### **Any other business**

27. The Bishop invited family member, Peta Bermingham, to update the families on the establishment of a family support group. Peta explained that at the last meeting ten family members came forward to express an interest in the support group and a group email has been set up ( Code A ) Peta then met in September with Margaret Aspinall and Sue Roberts from the Hillsborough Family Support Group, who were very supportive, to learn from their experience.
28. Peta said that it was the tenacity of a few families that led to the Gosport Independent Panel being established and that once the Panel reported it would not be the end but the start of the next chapter. Peta suggested that a support group would be helpful when the Panel was no longer in existence. The group Margaret Aspinall chaired represented 77 of the 96 Hillsborough families. Peta said Margaret emphasised the importance of keeping together, there being strength in unity, that too many voices was not effective and that it was important to put aside personal differences.

29. Peta said it would need 6-8 people to take forward the support group and that she would welcome more families getting in touch if they were interested and encouraged families to pull together. There was a form available for those who wanted to leave their contact details after the meeting or wanted to speak to Peta.
30. There were further comments from other family members.
31. The Bishop thanked Peta and said he warmly supported the initiative to set up a family support group and thought it was a good idea, but that it had to be families' decision to do so and that the Panel and families must both protect their independence.

**Next meeting – Wednesday 21 February 2018 (Hornet Services Sailing Club, Gosport)**