

**Gosport Independent Panel**  
**Family Liaison Meeting 15 July 2015**  
**Note of meeting**

Hornet Services Sailing Club, Haslar Road, Gosport, Hants

Present: Family members; members of the Gosport Independent Panel (Bishop James Jones, Christine Gifford, Duncan Jarrett, Dr Colin Currie, Professor Jim Smith, Dr Bill Kirkup, Deborah Sturdy and Kate Blackwell) and Secretariat (Louise Dominian, Judy Joslin, Melanie Peffer, [Code A] Tracy Ofeosi and [Code A]): Hillsborough Family Support Group (Margaret Aspinall, Christine Burgh).

**Introductions**

1. The Bishop welcomed everybody to the meeting. He explained that an alternative venue had not been found, however changes had been made to the seating arrangements and it was hoped that this would help with the sound. A family was joining the meeting on the telephone. These arrangements would be tested further over the summer.
2. As this was the first meeting for a number of families and one of the Panel Members, the Bishop asked Panel Members and the Secretariat to introduce themselves.
3. The Bishop explained that that he had been looking to appoint someone with legal expertise to the Panel for some time but it had been important to get the right person and this had proved to be a challenge. Kate Blackwell QC had now been appointed by the Minister. The Bishop invited Kate to introduce herself.
4. Kate explained that she was a criminal barrister with extensive experience of both Crown Court and Court of Appeal cases, including prosecuting in professional disciplinary cases. She was appointed as a Crown Recorder in 2009 and as Queen's Counsel (QC) in 2012. She was a member of the Prosecution Team in the Harold Shipman case and was later instructed in the Shipman Inquiry.
5. The Bishop explained that the last item on the agenda was Margaret Aspinall, Chair of the Hillsborough Family Support Group who would be speaking to both families and the Panel about her own quest for accountability. The Panel and Secretariat would then withdraw and families would have time on their own to speak with Margaret and colleague.
6. Bishop James said he had been encouraged by the response rate to the disclosure of documentation letters sent to families seeking their authorisation. So far, 95% of

families in contact with the Panel have given their permission.

7. The Bishop explained that following the May General Election, Norman Lamb MP was no longer a Minister. The responsible Minister for the Gosport Independent Panel was now Ben Gummer MP, the new Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Care Quality in the Department of Health. The Bishop had asked for and been given a very prompt meeting with him.
8. The Bishop had taken the opportunity to explain the context and background to the Panel's work and had emphasised the importance of the Panel's independence. The Bishop had explained that he would continue to chair the Panel as he had done for Hillsborough, including ensuring the Families' First principle was followed. He had made it clear to the Minister that families would see a copy of the report before Ministers and then it would be for the Secretary of State for Health to lay it before Parliament.
9. Bishop James said that he had explained the differences between a judicial inquiry and an Independent Panel to the Minister. A Panel had to engage with families, and that regular Family Liaison meetings were an example of such engagement. The Panel's Terms of Reference had been shaped, but not defined, by the families themselves. Being independent meant that the Panel was free to go wherever the evidence took them.
10. The Minister's portfolio included responsibility for patient safety and patient experience and he was very supportive of the Panel's work. The Bishop had explained to the Minister that the findings of the Panel would be of national significance. He had also made the Minister aware that the Panel did not yet know the volume of documents that will be involved and therefore more resources may be required, although the Panel was conscious of budget restraint and would work as quickly as it could with integrity.
11. The Bishop said that significant progress was being made with access to organisations' material and Christine Gifford would give more information on this shortly. The Bishop noted that the information management systems encountered in other organisations so far ranged from the competent to the chaotic. To date, there had been no unexpected resistance to disclosure. The Panel was at the first stages of analysis and was becoming aware of the complexity of the task.

### **Information Management**

12. Christine Gifford emphasised the complexity of the task and reported that over a 100 organisations had been identified as potential stakeholders who may or may not have information. Approximately fifty percent of organisations have said that they hold information. Material had been received from twenty of these. Organisations had been prioritised in order of importance.

13. Christine explained that although the Panel did not know how many cases there would be eventually, it does now have the name of the ninety two cases included in the Hampshire police investigation and details of another fourteen so there were currently one hundred and six cases. Some of the information the Panel has access to is very old and the Panel was in the process of putting together a roadmap on how families could be traced/contacted where needed. There would be a media campaign inviting anyone with concerns to contact the Panel after which the Panel will assess the results before starting the process of tracing families. The Panel recognised the importance of handling any proactive tracing very sensitively. Families could be informed, but any decision to be involved and to come to meetings was for them.
14. In terms of the volume of information, any organisation with greater than 10,000 document pages is considered to be a high volume stakeholder. It is estimated that approximately thirty organisations will be high volume stakeholders and that these organisations will hold forty to fifty percent of the material to be retrieved. The volume could be in excess of one million electronic and paper-pages although some of these will be duplicates. All paper documents would be scanned and digitised. The system being used for managing the documentation was now in place. It was a similar system to that used by the Hillsborough Panel but with some significant additions.
15. Christine explained that there were amendments currently being considered to the Freedom of Information Act which some commentators had indicated would make it easier for officials to withhold information from the public. Christine considered that this would not affect the Panel's important Access work, but if this situation changed she would bring it to the attention of the Panel and families.

#### **Ensuring affected families and others are given the opportunity to come forward**

16. The Bishop informed families that the Panel would be mounting a media campaign at the end of July to reach out to other families who may not yet have been in contact. The campaign would continue through August and September. The Bishop said he would be offering media interviews; adverts were being placed in the regional press and posters would be displayed in libraries, GP surgeries and other organisations. An article would be included in the Gosport Council Magazine, Coastline. Full details of the campaign would be sent to families shortly. The Bishop encouraged families to share their experience of working with the Panel with other families who may have been affected.

#### **Holding people accountable**

17. The Bishop introduced Margaret Aspinall, Chair of the Hillsborough Family Support Group. Margaret explained that it had become clear following the events at Hillsborough and the stance taken by the police, media and other establishment organisations that a family support group was needed. This had been very important in getting the families' message out to a wider audience. There had been a number of inquiries into Hillsborough and they had had to fight every step of the way, as a result they didn't trust the authorities - Government, MPs or the Police. When the Independent Panel was formed, they had not trusted either the

Panel or the Secretariat. This mistrust continued until the Panel reported its findings. They are now supportive of the Panel process. She said that it was important to remember that Families came First.

18. Panel members and the Secretariat withdrew and families spoke with Margaret in private.

**Any Other Business**

19. There was no other business.