

National police response to the Hillsborough Families Report

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Widespread changes to policing made public as national police leaders respond to the Hillsborough Families Report

News 3 mins read

Leaders from the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) have apologised to the Hillsborough families as part of the national police response to a report by the Right Reverend James Jones — **'The patronising disposition of unaccountable power'** (also known as the Hillsborough Families Report) – on the lessons from the Hillsborough stadium disaster.

Video Transcript

Policing has profoundly failed those lost in the Hillsborough tragedy and those profoundly affected by it in the many years since the Hillsborough disaster. We are sorry that we got it so wrong. Policing was the main cause of the tragedy that happened that day, and we recognise that the impact of the tragedy has continued to blight the lives of those affected by it ever since and will continue to do so.

We are working across policing to develop and change the practice and culture of the way we go about our work, so that we are transparent and ethical. And this needs to be supported by the best possible training and the highest standards. We've already made significant changes. The way in which we have dedicated trained family liaison officers to respond to tragedy and the loss of loved ones. The way in which we maintain our records so that we can understand what happened when things do go wrong. And then later this year, we'll be releasing a revised Code of Ethics that has embedded and supported material to bring it to life for everyone involved in policing, so that they can go about their business with openness, transparency and candour.

I've been a police officer now for over 35 years. The appalling events of the Hillsborough tragedy have had a very significant effect on my career and the way I go about my work. Policing never

stands still. Events don't stand still. We either go forwards or we go backwards. Policing is committed to the reforms that we set out in the response to this tragedy. We need to be ethical and transparent and, of course, ultimately keep people safe. And that is my commitment.

Police officers work each day to keep the public safe. We failed to do this at Hillsborough in those tragic events in 1989. On behalf of the leadership of the service, I am deeply sorry for the tragic loss of life and for the pain and suffering that the Hillsborough families have experienced in the years that have followed. Collectively, changes made since the Hillsborough disaster, and in response to the Reverend James Jones report, aim to ensure that the terrible police failures made on that day and in the aftermath can never happen again.

Police chiefs today are committed to responding to major incidents professionally and with openness and compassion for the families involved and affected. Much has changed since the awful events of that day, and we are determined to continually learn and develop our practice and ensure that no further families suffer in the way that those from Hillsborough have. All police forces in England and Wales have signed up to the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy.

In signing this, the forces commit to support the bereaved, to protect the vulnerable, to approach public scrutiny with candour, and never to attempt to defend the indefensible.

The review was aimed at ensuring the pain and suffering of the Hillsborough families is not repeated. Following its publication in November 2017, the national police response can now be made public after the conclusion of legal proceedings and other matters.

Today's national policing response is a commitment to:

- avoid the failures made during and after the Hillsborough disaster
- embed strong ethical values in the service
- ensure there is humanity and humility in the police response to public tragedy

Policing has profoundly failed those bereaved by the Hillsborough disaster over many years and we are sorry that the service got it so wrong. Police failures were the main cause of the tragedy and have continued to blight the lives of family members ever since.

When leadership was most needed, the bereaved were often treated insensitively and the response lacked coordination and oversight.

Today's report explains long-term, and more recent, developments in how the police responds to mass fatality incidents. Hillsborough is a touchstone for long-lasting change in policing and there is a commitment from the leadership in policing to create a modern, dynamic police service which acts without fear or favour, and with integrity and empathy.

The changes include all police forces in England and Wales signing up to a charter agreeing to acknowledge when mistakes have been made and not seek to defend the indefensible; a strengthened ethical policy which makes candour a key theme; and new guidance for specialist officers supporting families during a tragedy which learnt lessons from the Hillsborough Families Report, the Grenfell Tower tragedy and the 2017 terrorist attacks.

I would like to sincerely thank the former Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt Revd James Jones, for his dedication and insight which continues to support the police service in undergoing essential reform.

Chief Constable Andy Marsh, College of Policing CEO

Policing reforms

The reforms include the following.

- All police forces in England and Wales have signed up to a [**Charter for Families Bereaved Through Public Tragedy**](#). This sets out that police organisations must acknowledge when mistakes have been made and must not seek to defend the indefensible.
- The College of Policing and NPCC have agreed the content of a new Code of Practice on police information and records management to prevent the problems faced after the Hillsborough disaster when records were lost or destroyed. This Code has been submitted to the Home Office for ministerial approval, following which it can be laid before Parliament in accordance with the Police Act 1996.
- The College of Policing's [**Code of Ethics**](#) – applicable to everyone working in policing – will be revised this year and candour will be a key theme. There will be a supporting Code of Practice,

which chief officers must have regard to, which will state that ‘Chief officers have a responsibility to ensure openness and candour within their force’.

- New national guidance for family liaison officers has been issued, incorporating learning from the Hillsborough Families Report, the Grenfell Tower tragedy and the 2017 terrorist attacks.
- The College of Policing released updated [disaster victim identification authorised professional practice \(APP\)](#) in August 2018 in direct response to the report, including an explicit statement that the terms ‘belonging to’ or ‘property of the coroner’ should not be used in future disasters.

Read the report

- [National police response to the Hillsborough Families Report](#)

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