

Time, as well as truth, is of the essence for inquiry

HOSPITAL DEATHS

The former Bishop of Liverpool, the Right Rev James Jones, gave great succour to 96 bereaved families through his calm and authoritative handling of the Hillsborough inquiry.

Now he has been asked to play a similar role to give answers to 92 grieving families who are desperate to know what went on in Gosport War Memorial Hospital in the 1990s.

The Baker Report, which had lain in secret for years, was published last year and provided a methodical, scientific explanation of what went on in the wards. Its remit was to look at the statistics and the medical methodology, and it was an admirably detailed piece of work, examining among other things Gosport's mortality rate from year to year and from

season to season, and whether the presence or absence of doctors in the hospital made any difference.

What the Baker Report did not do, however – nor did it set out to do – was to look into why there was such a rash of unexpected deaths at that time.

A year ago the families were promised that either a full public inquiry, an independent investigation or a Hillsborough-style panel would be convened, and now it has been revealed that the latter will be put in place.

This, it almost goes without saying, is to be welcomed.

While there have been inquests, professional hearings and police investigations, there are still unanswered questions.

It is absolutely right that the fullest picture possible is put together, not just for the sake of the bereaved families but in order to make sure that nothing of this nature ever happens again.

But, as we have argued before on these pages, it is not only truth that is a priority here. It is also imperative that proceedings start as soon as is possible. The children of those who died in Gosport are themselves elderly in many cases, and there is nothing to be gained by waiting.

We hope this inquiry achieves its aims. And we would urge anyone who has anything relevant to place in front of the panel to ensure that they participate. This isn't a witch-hunt. It's much more important than that.

The News
11/7/14