

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Media Policy

1. The purpose of the Media Policy

This policy outlines how Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will work with media partners to help it achieve its business objectives.

We want to create a climate of openness and dialogue with all stakeholders, but also ensures that the reputation of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is protected, and if possible enhanced, and that the chances of misrepresentation by the media are reduced.

In order to ensure a professional relationship with the media, due diligence must be taken to ensure that information originating is accurate, complete, reflects the official position of the organisation and is released to the media and target audience in a timely and professional manner

As a public service, it is also possible that we will also attract less positive attention from the media, which could have a damaging effect to our reputation. This requires careful handling and its part of good governance that the organisation has a policy in place to manage this.

2. Definition of media and earned media

For the purpose of this policy, when referring to ‘the media’, we mean reporters, journalists, researchers, editors and others working for the press in all forms: newspaper, magazine and other publications, radio, television and internet sites.

Earned media includes traditional media, but also includes blogs, vlogs or articles in organisational stakeholders’ online and offline publications. This may include such things as case studies.

3. Process for dealing with media enquires

There are various reasons why the media may try to contact our organisation. There may be positive or negative circumstances surrounding their need for comment, it is therefore important that all comments are fully considered and come through the correct channels to ensure that they have the required impact.

All correspondence with the media, including proactive press releases and replying to requests for information, must first be signed off by the Communications Manager or the CEO, depending on the nature of the enquiry.

If a journalist contacts a staff member directly, they should be directed to the Communications Team. Nobody should make comment on behalf of the organisation without speaking to the Communications Team.

Those with responsibility for media relations will be trained to an appropriate level including media interview techniques and drafting press releases. Official spokespersons must receive media training. Key staff may be given specific guidance and support from the Communications Team to speak to the media in relation to discrete pieces of work or to support a campaign activity.

4. Press releases

As well as responding effectively and punctually to requests for information from the media, it is important to be proactive in seeking out opportunities to promote the activities and reputation of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Maximising the opportunities for press coverage requires every employee, Director and volunteer to be alert to possible stories and subjects for articles and to let the Communications Team know about them as soon as possible.

Press releases should be considered in the following situations:

- To communicate key achievements of the organisation.
- To communicate key findings of the organisation.
- To promote the involvement of the local communities in the projects of the organisation.
- To promote attendance at special events and functions.

Any employee, Director or volunteer may draft a press release; however, they must all be authorised and distributed by the Communications Team in order to ensure that there is consistency and that factual content is accurate and that the use of the release can be monitored.

Advance copies of press releases will be shared with stakeholder organisations who are mentioned in them one working day in advance - where possible.

5. Duty to protect

We have a responsibility to our users, partners, employees, Directors and volunteers to ensure that certain information remains confidential. Unless information is already known to be in the public domain or we have the express permission of the person involved, no personal information or information that may cause an individual to be identified should be released.

We will ensure that we have written or audio consent to share any identifying personal information in a press release.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will put the wellbeing of the individual before the story. We will fully explain to any member of the public who is supporting one of our campaigns how their story may be viewed and make sure that they are comfortable with this. This is particularly important in dealing with issues that are polarising or when supporting people from communities who have been historically subject to hate crimes.

Where media content generates activities that are considered by Healthwatch to be a hate crime, these will be reported to the police after consultation with the Chief Executive, Chair or other Director in their absence.

6. Managing crisis communications

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a history of enjoying positive media publicity. However, given the nature of the organisation's services and projects, it is important to recognise that this might not always be the case.

Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of the need to manage any publicity - negative or otherwise - that may result from a 'crisis' situation which Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has been viewed to cause or been involved in.

Such a strategy will ensure any damage inflicted on the organisation - its reputation, services and projects - by negative publicity is limited. It will also assist in enabling the organisation to disassociate itself from the crisis should this be appropriate course of action.

A media spokesperson - which will be the CEO where possible - must be nominated when a crisis has arisen. This role must be agreed by the CEO and Chair, or two Directors in their absence.

It's important to act quickly as a speedy response and a good statement will help limit the damage and sometimes kill off an inaccurate story altogether

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is part of a network of local Healthwatch, and any activity that could negatively impact the Healthwatch brand could affect all Healthwatch.

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will keep Healthwatch England Policy and Communications teams fully informed of the crisis and seek further advice on how to manage issues from them.

Approved by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Board of Directors

Date: 16 September 2020

Next Review

Date: September 2023

Responsible Officer

Chief Executive Officer of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Appendix 1

Tips on dealing with media enquiries

To effectively deal with media enquiries:

- Take full details of the enquiry including the journalist's name, contact details, publication and deadline.
- Respond to the journalist in full by their deadline. If this is not possible, giving a holding statement until a full response is available.
- Make sure all the information needed to respond is in place. Check with the journalist how much detail is wanted, what is the angle of the story, who else they are talking to and what their deadline is.
- Be helpful, polite and positive.
- Make sure an appropriate colleague is available for interview and is fully briefed
- Understand what the organisation's stance is on an issue
- Never say 'no comment' - If there isn't enough factual information to give out, or if there are reasons to keep the information confidential. Give a holding statement which puts the story in context
- Stick to the facts and do not speculate.
- Be honest and open. Do not try to deceive the media.
- If there has been a genuine mistake, decide internally on your statement to journalists, and apologise swiftly and sincerely if necessary. Also explain what you are doing to put it right
- Avoid going 'off the record' - as what you say can be used, although not directly attributed to you.
- Be mindful that journalists are often welcomed to our public meetings; any comments made in public meetings could be used by a journalist in media reporting.