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**Joint RBSCP/RBSAB Media**

**Relations Protocol**

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| **TITLE** | Title: Joint Media Relations Protocol  Version: 7 |
| **BOARD APROVAL** | Approved by: RBSAB Policy and Procedures sub-group  Approval date: 31st March 2017  Approved by: Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Adults Board  Approval date: 14th April 2017 |
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**1. Introduction**

**1.1** Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Adults Board and Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership members are committed to effective communication to ensure that the public, in particular Rochdale residents, are well informed about the services that affect their lives. The media plays a valuable role, including the ability to reach large numbers of local residents. It also helps the Board/Partnership to be open and transparent about decisions. However, the media is also key to our reputation, with the power to challenge our actions and sway public thinking, so good communication is essential if we are to convey accurate and consistent messages about our work.

When a serious incident or death of a child or an adult at risk of abuse or neglect happens, it can often generate public and media interest. Emotions can run high and public confidence in services can be undermined. It is vital to use carefully managed communications at this time to make sure the information is both accurate and reassuring.

This protocol covers all communication intended for the public or any section of the public, including media releases, reactive statements, broadcasts or other media interviews, social media platforms including Facebook or Twitter, press launches, public surveys or other events that may attract media attention. It provides guidance on the management of media interest and coverage of matters relating to the functions and objectives of the Board/Partnership. This includes the safety and welfare of children or adults at risk of abuse or neglect in Rochdale, or placed by Rochdale Borough Council in other local authority areas that may be of public interest or result in media interest.

The protocol also applies to matters arising from any of the Boards’/Partnerships’ partner agencies in relation to its activities and focuses on the need for the Board/Partnership and their partner agencies to manage how such matters are brought into the public domain and how they should react to situations and events that attract public or media interest.

The protocol does not cover the wider context of strategic communication, awareness raising and marketing activity such as the development of internal communications, marketing campaigns and general content of the Boards’/Partnerships’ websites and newsletters.

The protocol arrangements should be incorporated into commissioning arrangements for all children’s and adult services.

**2. Media and Public Relations activity**

**2.1** Rochdale Borough Council’s Press & Media Team will lead all proactive and reactive communications to the public and the media on behalf of the Board/Partnership but independently of the Council and any related activity. For specific Board/Partnership campaigns, communication officers from partner agencies may take the lead and deal with media enquiries.

**2.2** The lead Press & Media Officer will be drawn from the Council’s Press & Media Relations team unless there is a conflict of interest. In such a situation then the Board/Partnership will look to another of its member agencies to take on the lead.

**2.3** The Press Officer will make the media aware that the Board/Partnership are multi agency bodies, independent of the Council. They will also make the media aware that the Independent Chair is not likely to be available at short notice for interviews or to provide statements.

**2.4** The Press Officer will be alerted by a member of the Children’s Social Care or Adult Care Leadership Team at the earliest opportunity when there is a serious incident or death of a child or an adult at risk of abuse or neglect and will ensure that the Board/Partnership Business Unit Manager and Chair have also been made aware.

**2.5** The Press & Media Officer will be alerted by the Boards’ Business Manager as soon as a decision has been made to begin a Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) or a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) and provide details for the CSPR/SAR panel members/author.

**2.6** The Business Unit Manager will regularly update the Press & Media Officer about the progress and estimated timeline of the review, including the date when the CSPR/SAR is due to be published.

In most cases a CSPR or SAR will be published on the Board/Partnership’s website and be accessible there for twelve months. Where, for whatever reason, publication if not possible then a learning brief will be published.

**3. Scope of the Media Protocol**

**3.1** The protocol covers:

* High profile incidents involving all the partner organisations and within their safeguarding children/adult remit;
* National issues which require a combined media response from the Board/Partnership;
* Significant media interest in any issue or development involving the Board/Partnership.

**3.2** The protocol does not cover day-to-day media handling which is the responsibility of the individual organisations.

**4. Aims**

**4.1** The main aims of the media protocol are to ensure that arrangements are in place and there is a clear understanding of specific responsibilities to support the delivery of timely, accurate and co-ordinated responses to media enquiries, the issuing of media releases and the organisation of media briefings and press conferences.

**4.2** Delivering this within what are often tight media deadlines will be challenging. It is essential that all of the partner organisations are in full agreement with this protocol to ensure there are effective arrangements in place. Any dissent to this protocol must be raised at the Board/Partnership.

**5. Media Protocol**

**5.1** The Council will act as the lead agency within this media protocol.

**5.2** Issues identified by Board/Partnership members that may fall within the scope of this protocol should be brought to the attention of their agency press/communication officer. The press/communication officer will then share information with their counterparts in all partner agencies in order to facilitate the process through which agencies agree their approach or response to a situation or event.

**5.3** E-mails will be the main method of communication for all media enquiries between nominated press, media, communication and marketing officers. All email responses will need to be agreed by the Chair of the Board/Partnership and the Council Media Officer. Nominated press, media, communication and marketing officers should ensure all of the recipients are copied into any response. Telephone will be used as a back-up in the event of a problem with e-mail systems.

**5.4** The Business Unit Manager will liaise with the Council Media Officer for issues where there has been adequate warning before the media are likely to hear about a story to agree a media plan.

**6. Procedures**

* 1. **Responsibilities of Lead Agency**
* To act as the main initial point of contact for all general media enquiries about the Safeguarding Board/Partnership.
* To deal with all media activity for the Board/Partnership as set out in the procedures
* To log all media enquiries and record actions and responses
* To liaise with partner organisations as set out in the procedures
* To maintain a list of the contact details for the press, media, communication and marketing officers at all partner organisations
* To advise all partner agencies of issues that fall into the scope of this protocol
* Provide information and reports for the Board/Partnership as set out in the procedures.

**6.2 Requirements for all Partner Organisations**

* To have a nominated press, media and communication officer and deputy in place who can act on their behalf in their absence
* For nominated press, media and communication officers to have arrangements for their e-mails to be responded to in their absence or forwarded to their deputy when they are not able to access them, for example, out of office
* For nominated communication officers to ensure that they provide the lead organisation with their up to date e-mail, telephone and other contact details, including out of hours.

**6.3 Responding to Media Enquiries**

* All Board/Partnership members and their nominated press, media, communication and marketing officers should direct any media enquiries they receive regarding the activities of the Board/Partnership to the lead Press & Media Officer
* Nominated press, media, communication and marketing officers understand that they have a responsibility to provide information and agree messages within the set deadlines
* Nominated press, media, communication and marketing officers will be responsible for checking the media responses with their Board/Partnership member so that there is full Board/Partnership agreement
* All requests for information or agreement for media responses sent by the lead Press & Media Officer to partner organisations will include a deadline. Where a response is not received within deadline, the Press Officer will ring the contact person to chase a response. If the contact or their deputy does not respond within deadline, it will be assumed that agreement has been given. Where the issue is of particular significance for the relevant organisation, the lead Press & Media Officer will pursue the matter with the Board/Partnership member or representative to ensure that the organisation is given adequate opportunity to respond.

**6.4 Issuing Media Releases and Statements**

**6.4.1** Draft releases will be e-mailed to press, media, communication and marketing officers including an indication of the planned release date. Press releases should be approved by the relevant Board/Partnership Chair. Nominated press, media, communication and marketing officers are expected to respond within the given deadline. If the matter is urgent, attempts will be made to contact the relevant officers, should they not respond within the deadline. However, if there is no response after reasonable efforts have been made the lead press & media officer will assume that the organisation has given their agreement to the issuing of the release. If the release is not urgent the release will not be issued until all organisations have provided their agreement.

**6.4.2** The lead Press & Media Officer will make reasonable efforts to request responses from press, media, communication and marketing officers who do not respond. However, persistent failure to respond within the deadline without an explanation will compromise the effectiveness of the protocol and the issue will be referred to the Board/Partnership to ensure that the matter is addressed.

**6.4.3** Positive communication and good media relations will be beneficial when implementing some of the recommendations made by the CSPR/SAR panel. In these instances, it is important to seek the advice of the Press/Communications Officer to make sure any publicity campaign achieves maximum impact and is effective in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Children and Adults

**6.4.3** The Press/Communications Officer will try to determine when articles will be published and reach agreement with the reporter on what is to be said to ensure quality and accuracy.

**6.4.4** Embargoes should only be used when considered essential. This may be when a release is linked to a launch event, when a confidentiality issue requires it or when a third party requests it. However, it should be noted that embargoes are not legally enforceable.

**6.5 Press Conferences and Media Briefings**

**6.5.1** Arrangements for Board press conferences and media briefings will be co-ordinated by the lead Press & Media Officer or if the Board/Partnership have agreed in advance that an organisation other than the Council will be the lead on a particular subject or issue, the communication and marketing officer for that organisation will lead on the co-ordination of arrangements.

**6.5.2** Press, media, communication and marketing officers from partner organisations will be informed of any press conferences or media briefings and invited to attend. Deciding on attendance will be the judgement of the individual organisation based around whether their Board/Partnership member will be a main spokesperson and require media support.

**6.5.3** Press releases for press conferences and media briefings will be organised as per the arrangements set out at 6.2 unless the lead organisation is not the Council. In those circumstances, the lead press, media or communication officer for the lead organisation would take on the co-ordinating role as per the responsibilities set out for Rochdale Borough Council Press & Media office.

**6.5.4** The Board/Partnership will agree the lead Board spokesperson for the press conference and they will be supported by the lead Press & Media Officer.

**6.5.5** Media briefings may be considered to explain CSPR/SAR findings and recommendations in order to ensure transparency about outcomes, while working to achieve balanced and sensitive reporting

**7. Crisis management**

**7.1** Where a situation arises that is deemed to be a crisis or in need of urgent attention, this protocol should be followed with the exception of:

* The spokesperson will be the Chair of the Board/Partnership, or their nominated deputy if the Chair is not available
* All press enquiries will be responded to by the lead press & media officer in collaboration with the Chair and any legal team where applicable.

**8. Confidentiality**

**8.1** Media responses will maintain the anonymity of the subject of any CSPR/SAR or other investigation, in line with agreed protocols. The requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) should be observed by all agencies throughout any media contact.

**8.2** Details of individual case discussions are confidential and in no circumstances should details be given to the media.

**8.3** Where a Freedom of Information request is submitted, consideration will be given to whether the information requested is exempt from disclosure. Where a response is to be given, the Press/Communications Officer will see a copy in advance to assess the risk of negative publicity and consider whether an additional statement should be prepared.

**8.4** Although the media pressure will abate as the incident becomes old news, a serious incident may continue to attract interest due to inquests, court cases, memorial services and anniversaries. Staff will be advised to remain alert to media interest and continue to direct all queries to the Press Officer.

**9. Spokespeople**

**9.1** The Independent Chair will be the official spokesperson for the Board/Partnership.

**9.2** When the Independent Chair is unavailable, a spokesperson nominated by the Chair will act as the spokesperson.

**9.3** The Press Officer will provide a briefing and/or statements to the spokesperson.

**10. Conflict of Interest**

**10.1** There should be no conflict of interest when a Board member is nominated as the spokesperson.

**10.2** Any nominated spokesperson should not comment on, or provide an opinion of, their own organisation.

**11. Media Training**

**11.1** The lead Press & Media Officer will arrange media training as required.

**12. Review and Monitoring Arrangements**

**12.1** Press, media, communication and marketing officers from the partner organisations will be responsible for keeping their Board/Partnership members informed of media enquiries and releases which have been issued in line with the arrangements set out in Section 6, Procedures.

**12.2** Where required, the lead Press & Media Officer will provide updates on media releases, issues and coverage for the Board/Partnership.

**12.3** The Board/Partnership will be responsible for reviewing the media protocol and making any changes, which may be necessary to support and improve effective co-ordination.