



Bath & North East Somerset
Local Safeguarding Children Board



Communication and Media Protocol

Policy Statement approved by:	B&NES LSAB & LSCB December 2017
Implementation Date:	Implemented originally by LSAB Protocol only in June 2014
Details of any review	Communication contacts updated and clarity of responsibility regarding communication for both LSCB & LSAB June 2018 – change of Communications Strategic Manager
Author	LSCB & LSAB Communications sub group
Reviewed:	June 2018
Review Due:	December 2019

1. Introduction

This Communication and Media Protocol is for those involved in the safeguarding of adults and children at risk.

This Protocol is designed to provide specialist advice and guidance to those involved in protecting adults and children at a time of public and/or media interest in a given case.

2. Background

By its very nature a safeguarding issue can attract a high level of public interest, particularly if the subject is a child or an adult at risk, or if the conduct of a particular organisation is in doubt or under scrutiny. Issues can involve some of the most vulnerable people in society and can challenge an organisation's procedures, systems and training during a time of intense public focus. Whilst the majority of journalists will adopt a challenging but fair approach to a given alert, press and media attention can be intrusive, hostile and sensational – particularly national papers or broadcasts. To satisfy public appetite, the media will often look for an organisation to blame or for an individual failing in their duty of care. Poorly managed communications will certainly fuel a critical media approach and shake public confidence. A skilful and consistent approach to media handling is vital to mitigate against these effects. It will be a primary contributing factor to how the management of the issue is perceived by the media, public and colleagues and how the organisation's reputation is preserved or otherwise. The power and influence of the media must never be underestimated.

We want to be able reassure the public that safeguarding issues are being managed appropriately to protect children and adults at risk and the wider public interest. Therefore, it is important to take a positive and proactive approach when engaging with the media.

3. What Can a Communications Leads Offer?

Communications experts can provide strategic and practical advice to health and social care colleagues in terms of managing the immediate and longer term aspects of communications and media handling. They are also likely to have experience of dealing with communications aspects of major and untoward incidents.

4. Managing Communications

4.1 When Will a Safeguarding Issue Attract Media Attention?

Every issue is different but there is one overriding question, to which, if the answer is 'possibly yes', or 'probably yes', then the relevant communications department must be informed. That question is:

“If details of this case or potential case were to be in the public domain, would there be public interest, comment or criticism?”

If the answer is yes or even possibly yes, then the following must also be taken into consideration:

- How serious is the incident?
- Do we have a duty to protect other people at risk?
- How damaging are the circumstances now, or potentially, to the reputation of the organisations involved?

A quick assessment needs to be made against the above criteria and a decision taken as to whether communication leads need to be involved. It is however always better to inform the relevant communications leads as a precaution if nothing else, than not to inform them and be left facing an escalating crisis in terms of reputation management and public outcry.

4.2 Agency Engagement

At the very least, senior staff who may be involved in a safeguarding issue should establish a good working relationship with their respective communications leads and keep them engaged at all stages of a potential incident. The communications departments of the statutory and independent / voluntary and private sector LSCB/LSAB partners provide an important professional function towards the effective management of the safeguarding issue. This protocol establishes that whilst each agency is responsible for its own communications and will need to **work closely with the Council whom will generally take the lead in coordinating with the exception of cases where there is an ongoing criminal investigation** where the police are likely to lead.

Proactive engagement with these respective departments as an integral part of the safeguarding procedures will benefit the overall safeguarding process. See Appendix 1 for contact details.

4.3 Who Should Alert the Communications Department?

It is important that all agencies who are contacted by the media do NOT share any case details or provide a position statement without first contacting their own press office and discussing with the appropriate press officer. Any statement or press release must be agreed through the press office prior to release.

Having considered the above criteria (set out in 4.1) it is the responsibility of the safeguarding lead in each organisation to inform their communications lead and as soon as possible as well as any other safeguarding leads in relevant organisations. The communications leads should be trusted with all information surrounding any particular incident as they need to understand the full story and background in order to provide appropriate advice and identify the most appropriate response. Communications leads will often come back with a series of queries based on what they know from experience the media will ask.

4.4 Which Organisation Leads on Communications?

B&NES Council have the statutory responsibility for safeguarding adults and children and Virgin Care and AWP are contracted to provide the practical operation of the Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedure on behalf of the Council. The Council work in partnership with these agencies and the Police to deliver its statutory responsibility. B&NES Council Children Services retain the statutory responsibility to coordinate the response to safeguarding children alerts.

Given that the Council maintain overall statutory responsibility it is reasonable that the Council's Communications Team are involved in partnership with other communication leads to formulate the plan for media response. There is access to communications advice detailed in Appendix 1, including out of hours via on-call systems.

4.5 Making Information Available

Once a Communication Lead has been identified it is critical that they represent communications for **all** the organisations and become an integral partner at meetings where decisions relating to media interest are discussed in order to offer advice and guidance on media and communication issues. The focus of the media can shift very quickly indeed and its vital that all involved are aware of the impact the media can have on a safeguarding process and the potential risk to partner organisations reputations.

4.6 Sign- off Process

All statements and briefing material must be signed by the communication lead in conjunction with agreement from relevant senior management and safeguarding leads.

All media responses need to be swift and timely, messages need to be clear concise and simple and agreement must be sought by those agencies implicated in the case. However, given that timing is crucial, senior staff involved will have to take decisions on behalf of, and in the interests of partner organisations.

4.7 Training

It is the responsibility of each agency to ensure that the relevant staff involved in this protocol have appropriate training.

Appendix 1 Communication Contacts

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Communications and Marketing Manager
Telephone: 01225 477000

Andy Thomas, Strategic Manager
Andy_Thomas@BATHNES.GOV.UK

NHS

NHS England

Centralised out-of-hours contact number for on-call Communications Manager and on-call Director: 0844 5449633

NHS BaNES Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

Communications Manager
Dir Line: 01225 831861
Out of hours mobile: 07594 919733

NHS Wiltshire

Out of hours Duty Communications Officer: 0769 907 51809

Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership

Head of Communications
Dir Line: 01249 468099
Mobile: 07810 866162
Out of hours communications contact: 01249 468088

Royal United Hospital, NHS Trust

Senior Communications Manager
Dir Line: 01225 825849
Out of hours communications contact via switchboard on 01225 428331

Ambulance Service

South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASFT)

Head of Communication and Engagement
Dir Line: 01392 261520
Mobile: 07813 520136

Communications Manager
Dir Line: 01392 453805
Mobile: 07785 723514
Press Office
Dir Line: 01392 261649

Out of hours on call communications: 07824 626 312

Avon and Somerset Constabulary

Police HQ, Portishead

Main number: 101

mediahq@avonandsomerset.police.uk

Avon Fire and Rescue

Avon Fire & Rescue Service HQ

Main number (also for out of hours): 0117 926 2061

Media & Communications Manager Dir

Line: 0117 926 2061 ext.390

Media & Communications Officer Dir Line:

0117 926 2061 ext. 216

Out of hours duty press officer mobile: 0707 746 7634

Virgin Care - Bath and North East Somerset Community Health and Care Service

St Martin's Hospital, Bath

Head of Communications and Marketing

Dir Line: 07580 781 765

(Including out of hours for Comms support)

Director on call: 01225 831500