

# Issues and crisis communication plan

# To help you protect your public profile in an event of a crisis

# About this plan

This issues and crisis communication plan is a set of guidelines and steps to help you with the following:

* prepare for an emergency or unexpected event;
* protect your local Healthwatch’s reputation (and to some extent that of the wider Healthwatch network);
* maintain your organisation’s public image in an event of a crisis.

It includes information, such as:

* types of risk;
* steps to take when a crisis first emerges;
* how to communicate with the public and how to prevent the issue from occurring again.

These steps will depend on what the crisis involves and how all parties are affected by it.

# Types of risk

Reputational risk refers to the potential for negative publicity, public perception or uncontrollable events to have an adverse impact on a company’s reputation, thereby potentially affecting its funding streams and public confidence in it.

It may strike without warning and could generate unfavourable media coverage and political interest. It can be tied to events that aren’t Healthwatch’s fault but could significantly harm its reputation if a response is not handled well.

**Strategic risk**, on the other hand, is specific, measurable and predictable, and therefore it is controllable. All issues should be logged accordingly in a risk register.

Issues that affect local Healthwatch may be monitored by Healthwatch England so we can provide support and advice as required.

**RAG status codes and examples of risks and actions**

Red – high risk issue, which present a serious, immediate and widespread reputational risk for your Healthwatch or the wider network; needs to be responded to immediately and a plan of action potentially signed off by your lead/officer leadership team.

Amber – medium risk issue, presents limited reputational risk but needs resolving; careful monitoring and potential intervention by your lead officer/leadership team may be required.

Green – low risk issue; monitoring; key contact liaising with relevant stakeholders privately; leadership to be made aware.

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| Impact on reputation   | RAG status   | Action   |
| Panorama runs a story adversely affecting the reputation of your Healthwatch   | **R**  | Escalate to the Network Development Team at Healthwatch England. Provide facts and prepare a response; work closely with Healthwatch England and potentially your commissioners and host organisation to contact stakeholders; issue response; monitor the media and owned channels.  |
| Negative Twitter post reached 1000+   | **A**  | Response and reach out to the person tweeting to better understand the issue; liaise with local stakeholders if needed. |
| A stakeholder raises a concern about the behaviour of your staff/ volunteer   | **G**  | Determine what triggered the issue and next steps to mitigate it.   |

# Monitoring and crisis prevention

* Designate a person or several people (depending on capacity) to monitor external communications about your Healthwatch in the local area and handle potential risks. This can be referred to as your crisis response team (though it may only consist of one or two people).
* Designate a media spokesperson to represent your organisation in an event of crisis comms (this will usually be your lead officer but hosted HW may need to refer to their host organisation).
* Monitor the media and social media on a regular basis to be aware of what is being communicated about your organisation.
* Record out of hours contact details for the crisis response team, including your Healthwatch England representative and share with relevant staff.
* Prepare template media statements and fact sheets for possible crisis communications situations (get in touch with Healthwatch England’s media manager to see a few examples).
* Regularly escalate potential risk to the Healthwatch England Network Development Team and your commissioners/host organisation as appropriate.
* Create a checklist of every stakeholder group which must be informed in an event of a crisis comms.

# Steps to take in an event of a crisis

##### Below is a template you can use to plan and take immediate actions once a risk (R and sometimes A) has been identified.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Action  | Who  | Status   |
| The first person to discover an incident will alert the crisis response team and any other people who have key roles to play.  |   |   |
| Crisis response team to discuss within [*timeframe e.g. one hour*] of story breaking or coming to attention, to determine current known facts, position and key messages.   * What happened
* Where and when?
* Who was affected?
* Who is involved?
* When did we learn about the incident?
* What is the impact/likely impact?
* Is there any immediate danger?
* Do we understand the entire issue?

  |   |   |
| Crisis response team to escalate the issue and information to the Healthwatch England Network Development Team and work with them on a plan.  |  |  |
| Prepare and issue holding statement to media within [*time frame i.e. two hours*] and agree social media responses/approach.   A holding statement should include:  * A factual headline
* The date and time
* The location of the incident, where applicable
* Basic details that have been confirmed
* Actions we’re taking that you are willing to make public
* An expression of compassion or empathy (if appropriate)
* Contact details OR details on further updates

   |   |   |
| Communicate with key external and internal stakeholders, using distribution systems. |   |   |
| Put together full response within [timeframe e.g. 24 hours].  |   |   |
| Inform local Healthwatch board and other key stakeholders as appropriate.   |   |   |
| Provide flow of information for the media through further statements and interviewees.   |   |   |
| Begin detailed recording of actions in response to crisis.  |   |   |
| Begin to monitor media output and respond promptly to misinformation.  |   |   |
| Ensure adequate breaks and refreshments for staff managing crisis.  |   |   |
| Explain to media limitations to information that can be provided. Be honest.  |   |   |
| Arrange media briefings and notify media of times/venues.  |   |   |
| Brief and rehearse with media spokespeople before interviews/briefings, agreeing information to be released and feeding in expected media questions and angles.  |   |   |
| If appropriate, make arrangements with a broadcast media outlet to broadcast public information.  |   |   |
| Anticipate media demands/requirements.  |   |   |

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| Internal communication  |
| **Action**  | **Who**  | **Status**  |
| Ensure staff and volunteers are briefed on what is happening, how it is being handled and our position, and let them know to refer any media interest to communications team -keep them continually updated.  |  |  |
| Provide briefing information for staff managing social media and other channels   |   |   |
| **Third parties** |
| **Action**  | **Who**  | **Status**  |
| Establish links with communications personnel at key agencies involved in the crisis.   |  |  |
| Ensure they have immediate copies of anything we release and vice versa.  |   |   |
|   |
| **Media monitoring** |
| Ensure access to a TV and radio to record coverage.  |   |   |
| Take notes of main points made in the media and record online coverage including social media.  |   |   |
| Feed media intelligence (i.e. how the crisis is being covered) to crisis response team.  |   |   |
| Prepare daily press cuttings.  |   |   |
|   |
| **Record keeping** |
| Keep chronological record of information released to media and date/time of release.  |   |   |
| Keep log of key decisions made and reasons for them.  |   |   |
| Log all media questions and answers provided.  |   |   |
| Keep up-to-date file of media coverage.  |   |   |
| Keep log of staff hours.  |   |   |
|   |
| **De-brief**    |
| Obtain feedback from other parties for subsequent review of handling of crisis.  |  |  |
| Evaluation meeting to review the event and lessons learnt, and evaluate the crisis communications plan as well as relevant policies such as the social media policy.  |   |   |
| Plan future dates related to the incident (e.g. inquests, inquiries, anniversaries).  |   |   |
| Thank all who have assisted/cooperated, either publicly or privately as appropriate, including possibly the media.  |   |   |

# Have a question?

If you want to discuss risk and crisis comms, do get in touch with the Network Development Team at Healthwatch England either your regional manager or Campaigns and Central Region Manager Chris Gorman via chris.gorman@healthwatch.co.uk or 07393 754225.

If you have an urgent media related question, do contact Anna Galandzij, Healthwatch Media Manager at anna.galandzij@healthwatch.co.uk.