



Woodbrooke November 2012

Guidance for Meetings anticipating adverse media attention

Looking ahead

As Safeguarding Co-ordinators, you may have to handle media interest, particularly if a Friend is arrested and there is a court case. It is as well to think ahead and consider now:

- Has your meeting appointed someone to deal with the media? Could a journalist easily find their phone number?
- Agree the process you will follow: who will decide how to respond to a situation?
- If a difficult situation arises, you should draft a skeleton statement. Do not assume you should issue this as a press release: but hold it ready and adapt as the situation develops. If journalists ask questions you can offer the statement, without further comment.
- Decide who would write this statement, or a press release, who needs to sign off, who decides to which media you send it, who emails to media?
- Agree contacts and who may speak for the meeting
- Write template (what will the press release look like?)
- Build database of local media, noting emails and print deadlines
- Build relations with local media.

In a crisis

- Acknowledge the fact that there will be publicity and that the timing will be outside your control.
- Clarify aims: eg restrict publicity, maintain good media relations, convey something of Quaker principles.
- Recognise that this is not the time to try to publicise Quaker events or interests.
- Prepare a skeleton press statement as soon as possible. Keep it brief. This will be a template that may need to be adapted according to the questions you are asked. Only use the statement in response to an enquiry by the press. Don't release a statement unless you are asked questions.
- Limit contact with the media by choosing one contact person who will be responsible for issuing any statements and engaging with the press.
- The designated media contact should liaise with the media relations officer (MRO) at Friends House* as soon as possible to explain the situation. The MRO will be able to advise on how to proceed with the press, what to say and what not to say, whether or not a formal press statement is necessary, and on the wording of any such statement, according to the particular situation.

- All Friends should beware of talking 'off the record' and not allow themselves to be drawn into chats with reporters.
- All Friends should refer all media to the designated media contact, and inform the contact of any media enquiry.
- You should bear in mind that Quaker publications, newsletters, websites and social media will be in the public domain and therefore may be seen, monitored and quoted from by members of the media.
- Ask Friends to monitor the media and notify the contact of any reports, sending cuttings (with page number and date), and details of any radio or TV coverage. The media contact to keep a file of these for the Meeting's records.
- The media contact should be courteous to the media, return calls, be sympathetic regarding reporters' deadlines and be practised in responding with only essential information.
- The media contact should log details of contacts made by the media, including date, time, name and contact details of the reporter, name of publication/station, information requested, when the item will go out and any points of particular interest. You may need this information at some future point.
- Don't give out phone numbers of other Friends (except for the media contact). If asked, say: "I'm sorry I can't give you their telephone number, but X (media contact) would be willing to talk to you."
- Revise and update the press statement as necessary.
- If the story involves a court case, be prepared for increased interest once the plea is taken, when the case reaches crown court and again when the sentence is passed.

Difficulties

Despite all your planning, there will be the unexpected

- A Friend may knowingly or inadvertently talk to the media
- A Friend may decide that writing for a minor Quaker newsletter doesn't count. (Remind the friend of the decision to have one contact and that the Quaker publications are themselves media.)
- Knowing when to challenge any inaccuracies that have been published. (Whether it is important enough to do so; whether anything will be gained or correction achieved – weighing up the time and persistence required and that it might serve to stir up more negative publicity.)
- The defendant may give an interview to the media, including details or names the media might try to pursue.

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