DRAFT

**Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link – Media Protocol**

Why we need a media protocol

In order to ensure that publicity is well coordinated, legal and cost effective, it is necessary to have a media protocol in place for the organisation.

This protocol is designed to provide Trustees, officers and members of the charity with clear guidance to follow specifically when dealing with the media.

The main purposes of publicity is to increase public awareness of the objectives and activities of the charity, increase public interest and support for the charity and the benefits it provides for the community in Hastings, Sierra Leone.

The objectives media handling are to:

* Improve people's understanding of the work of the charity and to provide information about how to participate.
* Support the delivery of the charity’s strategic objectives.
* Protect and enhance the charity's reputation as the deliverer of high quality support and assistance to the community in Hastings, Sierra Leone.
* Defend the charity from inaccurate and unfounded criticism by ensuring the public are informed of relevant facts.

We will do this by:

* Forming and maintaining positive relationships with local, regional and national media, including trade.
* Having a co-ordinated approach to media handling, linking it in with wider communications activity and taking a campaign based approach wherever possible.
* Taking a proactive approach to media planning, using a key events calendar to plan ahead.
* Issuing media releases and responding to media enquiries in line with the agreed principles of openness, consistency, responsiveness, accuracy, accessibility and legality.
* Actively promoting decisions of the charity in a way that people understand.
* Being clear about the legal framework within which we operate and clearly explaining roles and responsibilities to ensure the highest standards of conduct.
* Ensuring fair and accurate representation of the charity across all communication.
* Maintaining accurate records relating to media contact.
* Challenging inaccurate reporting in the media.
* Using media enquiries as a way to drive service improvements where appropriate.
* Working with services, partners and members to develop media awareness.

### Media Relations Policy

#### Working with the Media

We need to use every media enquiry as a positive opportunity to get our message across to the public. We therefore need to understand the needs of the media, the parameters they work to and how to ‘catch their eye’ with appropriately worded and headed press releases.

These procedures will help ensure dealing with the media is a well-managed experience for both the Charity and the media. Providing one central point of contact for the media to deal with is recognised as best practice. By operating in this way messages can be pre-arranged and the media rarely catches a Trustee, officer or member of the charity out who may be innocently straying from the official line of the Charity. Information is centralised and distributed in a clear, concise and consistent way.

#### Who Deals with Media Enquiries?

The Charity’s media relations and media releases will be managed by the Communications Officer in consultation with the Chair and, in their absence in consultation with Vice Chair. All media releases must be approved by the Chair or Vice Chair before release.

Most media enquiries come directly to the Communication Officer. It is the role of the Communication Officer to deal with that enquiry and decide what the best method of response is. The response can sometimes be handled with a written statement but often a Council spokesperson is needed to speak to the media.

The Communication Officer will contact the Chair and/or Vice Chair to decide the best method of response. It is imperative that the Chair or Vice Chair respond swiftly to the Communication Officer’s request to ensure a timely response to any media enquiry.

The media may contact the Chair, Vice Chair, other Trustees or members directly. The person receiving the enquiry should take the details of the journalist, the full nature of the enquiry and pass this on to the Communication Officer. The Communication Officer will liaise with the Chair or Vice Chair to determine an appropriate response and who is best positioned to give that response. The Communication Officer will liaise with the appropriate person and draft a response which must then be agreed by the Chair or Vice Chair before being released.

Who speaks to the Media on behalf of the Charity?

Trustees and members of the charity may be approached by the media in relation to the charity’s activities. The Communications Officer should be informed of any request for comment from the Media. The communication Officer will inform the Chair and or Vice Chair of the enquiry and agree who is the appropriate Trustee or member to provide a response.

In most cases this will be the Chair or Vice Chair.

On some occasions it might be the Chair of a sub-committee (e.g. Schools Liaison or Health) or other officer of the charity. In such cases the appropriate officer will agree the charity’s position and view with the Chair or Vice Chair before speaking to the media.

Who writes to the Media, Government Departments, Politicians etc. on behalf of the charity?

In most cases all communications from the charity to these categories of people should go out in the name of the Chair, Vice Chair or Secretary and any communication will be agreed between them in advance.

Where appropriate communications may also go out in the name of other Trustees or members, but only after agreement of the content with the Chair or Vice Chair.

Use of Embargoes

Embargoes will only be used when considered essential:

* When news releases are linked to an event
* When an issue of confidentially requires it; or
* When it is required by a third party

**Note:** Embargoes are not legally enforceable and are adhered to by a general local agreement.

Please inform the Communication Officer of any instances of an embargo being broken.

‘No Comment’

Whilst we should avoid being ‘unavailable for comment’ there are some occasions where it is inappropriate to comment. For example, where an issue relates to the personal affairs of an individual or where there is a need to respect the privacy of a member of the charity.

Handling unusually Sensitive Issues

Occasionally a major incident of a serious and or sensitive nature may occur. As soon as an officer becomes aware of an emerging issue, which may affect the Charity’s reputation, they must report it to their Chair who, in turn, will inform the Vice Chair and Communications Officer. They will together agree the appropriate people to inform.

The facts of the case should be assembled and disseminated on a confidential basis to the key individuals identified and an official response agreed for active or reactive releases to the media. This may involve the drafting of a statement, a question and answer sheet, and/or giving media interviews

The Communication Officer will be responsible for the monitoring of the communication of the issue and co-ordinating responses.

Bad News Stories

Our policy is for mistakes to be acknowledged and apologised for ‘on behalf of the Charity where appropriate and where we are able to do so. The Communication Officer should discuss any proactive statements, or answers to media questions such as these, with the Chair and Vice Chair.

Negative Media Coverage

There are occasions where the media coverage of a particular issue is negative. After discussion with the Communication Officer, Chair and Vice Chair, contact should be made with media concerned to redress the balance. If we still believe subsequent reports are unfair or not based on fact a complaint should be made to the Press Complaints Commission see Press Complaints Commission website.

Respecting Confidentiality

Occasionally issues come to the notice of the media that involve members and aspects of their private lives or employment contracts. It is not the Charity’s policy to comment upon such issues.

Complaints about Media Coverage

Complaints about media reporting should be referred to the Chair, Vice Chair and the Communication Officer to discuss appropriate action.

When a letter in the press requires a response, there should be a discussion between the Chair, Vice Chair and the Communication Officer and suitable reply sent in the name of the Chair, if thought appropriate.

Press Briefings

Press briefings have three main purposes:

* To help explain a complex issue that will aid the media understanding of the subject and more accurate reporting
* To communicate an important story (good and bad news) that will attract media attention
* To ‘launch’ an initiative, service or event

Trustees should liaise with the Chair and Communication Officer on the organisation of a press briefing, who should attend and what topics should be covered.

**Note:** Press briefings do not prelude the media from approaching other Charityrepresentatives for comment.

Media Launches

Media launches are a very effective way of publicising major new initiatives or events and to attract as much media interest as possible. If a media launch is being planned the Chair and the Communication Officer should be brought in to discussion at the earliest opportunity. The Communication Officer can then assist with ideas to attract the media, ensure that all the relevant Trustees are fully involved and that any proposed launch date is suitable for Chair and the media.

Identifying and Preparing Information for the Media

Proactive Public Relations

Positive media coverage comes from positive proactive media communications and the recognition of a good news story. It is essential that Trustees and members share all newsworthy issues (good and bad) with Communication Officer.

Identifying Potential Stories

To help the Charity communicate and create a stronger identity with local residents it is vital that it takes every opportunity to communicate to them what it is doing especially good news stories. An excellent way of doing this is by issuing media releases.

Media Releases

Media Release Content

The main purpose of a Charity media release is to:

* + Improve people's understanding of the work of the charity and to provide information about how to participate.
  + Increase public awareness of activities of the charity:
  + Publicise forthcoming events

Who writes Media Releases?

The Communication Officer is responsible for writing and issuing **all** Sierra Leone Friendship Link media releases.

Trustees are encouraged to draft a media release and forward it to the Communication Officer who will ensure that the release is approved by the Chair and/or Vice Chair and is issued to the media. The Communication Officer may re-write any draft that comes to them to ensure it fits with the charity’s corporate style and suits the requirements of the media.

**No Hastings Sierra Leone Friendship Link Media Releases should be issued to the media without liaising with the Communication Officer first.**

Who should be Quoted in Media Releases?

Quotes are devices to make the media release more interesting to read and to back up the information in the media release.

In most cases the Chair or Vice Chair will be quoted to give the view from the charity’s perspective. Other Trustees or officers may be quoted to provide operational and background viewpoint or technical or legal clarification.

In some cases it may be appropriate for just another Trustee or Officer to be quoted - and in a few instances where the media release is only aiming to provide a brief announcement or statement no quote is needed.

It is the Communication Officer’s job to decide, in consultation with the Chair and /or Vice Chair which is the most appropriate.

Contact Details on Media Releases

There must be contact details on the media release to enable the media to go to someone for more information. This should include anyone quoted in the media release; however, it is essential that the Communication Officer knows if they are going to be available at the time of the issuing of the media release. All contacts must make themselves available to the media for the first point of contact and let the Communication Officer know when the media contacts them and the nature of the call.

How to Write Media Releases

Rule 1 - Be prepared

Getting the message across needs to be planned in advance. Ask yourself the following questions:

* What messages do you want to get across?
* To whom?
* By what methods?
* What is the best time to do it?
* Why do you want to do it?

Rule 2 - Getting Noticed

Your story will need a good headline to stand out from the crowd on the news editor’s desk - Headlines that are memorable include:

**‘Freddie Starr Ate My Hamster’**

Don’t use ten words when one will do.

Headlines need to be punchy and direct. Get across as much information as possible in as few words as possible - but try to leave something to the imagination. Give the reader a reason to read on.

Rule 3 - When writing a story remember W, W, W, W, W, H.

Who, what, why, where, when and how.

Treat each of these words as a question. If all these questions are answered in your release, you will answer your reader’s questions.

Bear in mind, studies have shown that you have only the first two or three paragraphs of a story to get the reader’s attention. If you fail in that time they will skip to the next story on the page and yours will not be read.

But you have to retain some information until the end of the story so the reader has to read until the end to get all of the facts. It is a fine balance that takes time to get right.

Rule 4 - If you want people to read it - Keep it simple

We live in the age of the ‘sound bite’ - so keep your language nice and simple, so that everyone can understand it. Remember all Charity information has to be accessible - The clearer the better. So avoid using jargon and long paragraphs - if you have loads of information to get across try bullet pointing it.

Rule 5 - If you want media attention pull off a stunt

The best way to get the media at one of your functions are:

* + Pull off an outrageous stunt.
  + Think in visual terms! What can the media get from the opportunity? Visuals can always add to a story.
  + Can something quirky or fun be arranged?
  + Arranging for a famous face to be at a photo call will bring the media out of the woodwork.

Stages of Media Release Approval

Before issuing a media release the Communication Officer will seek the approval from the Chair and/or Vice Chair: