**Press Guidance and Crisis Management**

**Almshouse Association Guidance**

1. **What you need to know before an interview**
   1. **Plan who should respond to press queries so that one individual is the key link for all press enquiries.**
   2. What type of interview is it? Check out the format, tone, and audience.
   3. Is it a phone/zoom link/in the studio or on-site?
   4. Is it going to be pre-recorded? The danger of pre-recorded is that they may tweak the content/comments - but it does allow you to repeat if you get into difficulties.
   5. Is anyone else being interviewed on the same subject – for example – Shelter? If so, you may need to prepare specific responses to their views. You might want to discuss this internally.
   6. Who is interviewing you? Do some background research on them, if possible, or listen to them in advance.
2. **Preparation Notes**
   1. You may not always have much time to prepare and your points need to be easily processed if they are to impact on your audience. Try and prepare your 3-5 key messages. They should be brief and easy to remember.
   2. Always rehearse what you are going to say– generic statements and key asks.
   3. Ask them what the first question will be – you don’t want any surprises.
3. **General Techniques**
   1. Be clear, simple and positive.
   2. Stick to your core messages.
   3. Show you care and are sensitive to needs.
   4. Try to make an ask at the end of the interview.
4. **BASIC GUIDELINES AND TIPS**
   1. Set boundaries first. If you are unexpectedly contacted by a journalist, you can stall by saying you are in a meeting at the moment and can you call them back. This gives you time to think about what you want to say and have some notes/information to hand.
   2. If you don’t want to discuss something, say so. Don’t fudge things.
   3. Tackle any distortions. Your name and title should be correct – always clarify any misinterpretation by the interviewer.
   4. If you are on TV – talk to the interviewer and not the camera and be as natural as you can be. Imagine you are talking with a colleague or friend.
   5. Clearly mention the full name of your charity at least once – don’t abbreviate!
   6. Use anecdotes if you can and facts if you know them well*. “There are 36,000 residents living in almshouses and enjoying life today…. This proves the success of this 1000-year-old housing model.”*
   7. Never respond with ‘no comment’. This implies you have something to hide.
   8. Never assume anything you say is off the record – it never is.
   9. Use a bridging technique to move around difficult questions:
      * “*Well, I am afraid I cannot comment on an individual case, but what I can say generally is….”*
      * *“Well, I am not the best person to answer that (ensure you know who is), but what is important to me is……”*
      * *“That’s an interesting question, but what might surprise you is….”*
      * *“Well, let me put that into context. We at (your charity) ….”*
      * *“There is nothing to say to mitigate that but what I can say is…..”*
   10. Ask for any quotes to be read back to you before they are printed.
5. **After the interview**
   1. Don’t expect to see pre-publication text.
   2. Offer to be available if the journalist wishes to check anything and respond as soon as you can.
   3. Keep your word if you have promised to send any follow-up material etc.
   4. Do check the article and de-brief for next time.
   5. Don’t complain unless the article is very misleading – it’s the overall impression that counts.
6. **Crisis Management – things to consider**
   1. Dealing with the media in a crisis can be more challenging than the crisis itself.
   2. Deal with this straightaway by contacting the journalist who has made the comment and discussing it.
   3. Gather as much information as possible and decide on your strategy – be active and use a holding statement while you collate your background information and decide on a plan. If under litigation you might like to say: *“It is difficult for us to say too much at the moment but as soon as we have any specific information we will get back to you.”*
   4. When news media gets hold of a story, whilst it might not be true, perception can become reality so listen to what they are saying and deal with this.
   5. Show a human face with understanding and sympathy for the public view. This will help diffuse any hostility.
   6. Don’t talk off the cuff – always prepare and be consistent in your approach.
   7. Monitor the situation and keep relevant parties informed internally.
   8. If handled well, a crisis can become an opportunity to create more awareness and positivity around your charity and/or the almshouse movement.
   9. Don’t fudge or stifle the truth.
7. **Techniques for Crisis Management on and offline**
   1. The Chairman or CEO should take personal charge.
   2. Keep a positive attitude and be clear and concise.
   3. Stick to your core messages:
      * Show you care/show sensitivity and concern.
      * Give reassurance.
      * Talk about the positive course of action you intend to take.
      * Say you will keep in touch – work with them, not against them.
   4. Monitor the media afterwards to debrief and assess.
   5. If the matter is ‘sub judice’ then say that you are consulting lawyers and will let them have a further update as soon as you can. You can then use a bridging comment if appropriate: *“However, this is a very rare scenario for the almshouse movement…..”*
   6. With social media ensure your message is aligned.
   7. Always be aware of what others are saying about you online; be human.
   8. Know when to respond and when not to – you don’t want to fan the flames.
   9. Don’t rise to troll baits and know when to take conversations offline.
   10. Make sure information still goes out, at least on your website, even if the issue fades. This ensures consistency.
   11. Turn off all scheduled posts/tweets when in crisis mode and be aware of personal accounts.
   12. After the crisis ensure to send positive output in the months to follow. Get the incident down in search engines by posting positive posts/tweets and website comments.
8. **Crisis Management – Managing the press without any notice or the full facts.**
   1. **Example incident:** Fire/Death
      * *“Our thoughts are with the family/friends/trustees/almshouse community.”*
      * *“We would like to thank – Fire/Ambulance/Police for their professional response.”*
      * *“We do not yet have the full facts– but when we do, we will contact you immediately.”*
      * *“We are aware of the incident and the volunteer trustees have asked us to release a statement on their behalf.”*
      * *“We will provide an update as soon as we have more information.”*
9. **General support statements and statistics when engaging with the press**
   1. **Key Messages -** Identify the key messages that you want to say to the press, for example:
      * ‘*Almshouses provide warm, safe, secure homes at an affordable cost’*
      * Social housing – *‘Unlike some of the bigger associations, we can be so much more personal…’*
      * Community/Compassion/Companionship – ‘micro-communities yet still living independently’
      * *‘The longevity of the model proves it works’*
      * *‘Almshouse living is about well-being, reduced isolation, and reduced loneliness.’*
   2. **Ask**
      1. Volunteers – trustees, and helpers – i.e. gardeners, handymen, fundraisers.
      2. Philanthropic giving – we need more philanthropists – to safeguard the movement in the future for another 1,000 years.
   3. **Statistics**
      1. There are over 36,000 people living in almshouses in the UK today.
      2. There are over 30,000 almshouses across the UK.
      3. In 2023 – The Bayes Business School, London, produced research that suggests people can live up to 2.5 years longer in an almshouse environment.
      4. In 2021, a report commissioned by The Almshouse Association and carried out by Housing LIN (housing research organisation) has shown that the almshouse movement “generates financial benefits to the social care and health economy of c.£1340 per almshouse resident, per annum”.  
         **In total, this equates to £43.2m every year:**
   * freeing up approx. 4,000 homes for others needing social housing
   * c. £56m per annum of value in employed staff through the voluntary positions of trustees
   * lower likelihood of residential care admission
   * lower likelihood of loneliness
   * reduction in the number of GP and A&E visits
     1. Over 500 almshouses in the UK are listed buildings and part of our national heritage.
     2. A report on how almshouses performed during the pandemic by The Smith Institute noted that almshouses were resilient because:

* They are small scale;
* The trustees worked as a team and were known and trusted by residents;
* Residents had strong relationships with neighbours and were less lonely and less anxious about their future.
  1. **Key Statements**
     1. Almshouses cannot be bought under a ‘right to buy’. They remain as a permanent part of the community in perpetuity meaning generation after generation of local people in housing need can live in a secure place they call home.
     2. Almshouses are often laid out in a traditional three-sided square that promotes neighbourliness and a community spirit yet still allows independent living.
     3. The Almshouse Association provides almshouse charities in the UK with support, guidance, grants, funding, and representation to government. They receive no government funding and rely totally on the subscriptions of member charities, legacies, donations, and the goodwill of others to continue their work.
     4. At a time when there is a severe shortage of affordable local rental accommodation, the role of an almshouse charity is now more vital than ever.
     5. In some rural areas, almshouses are the only provider of affordable, community housing.
     6. We are custodians of this housing model and are working to ensure the longevity of the movement into the next 1,000 years.
     7. Almshouse charities provide accommodation for those in local housing need. Needs are often based on the requirements of the local community at a specific time and are also guided by the wishes of the almshouse benefactor.
     8. Housing Associations can be perceived as very business-focused and remote from their tenants. They have only been around for about 70 years.

1. **Topics that might be challenging to respond to and potential responses**
   1. **Security of tenure** – almshouses have a different form of occupancy but we have evidence to prove they have security. It’s about the relationship between trustees and residents.
   2. **Eviction** – setting aside is only undertaken after an in-depth investigation. Mediation and support are provided to the resident during this process by the almshouse charity. Setting aside is only undertaken after all avenues have been explored. If the resident is unwell, a regular care package is researched until they can move into an environment that is more suitable for their needs.
   3. **Cost of living crisis** – almshouses not able to accommodate enough people? This is true we would welcome the development of more almshouses.
   4. **Diversity** – very few residents from diverse backgrounds. The almshouses reflect the needs of the local community at that time. We are seeing more and more diversification – young families – Poland Trust – Refugees – young people – Girton Town – Military – Buchanan Trust.
   5. **Slavery** – we cannot change the past and acknowledge that some almshouses may have been funded initially by benefactors with slave trade links – however, we focus on the present and the future and the positive effects of almshouse living and the benefits that residents gain from almshouse living.
   6. **No admittance of ‘transgender’** **residents due to charity criteria** – we recognise the sensitive nature of this subject and would need to consider a deviation of our Scheme via the Charity Commission.
   7. **Mismanagement by trustees** – we take each case very seriously and encourage a full investigation and mediation, if necessary. We have a complaints procedure or can refer to the Ombudsman, or The Almshouse Association Standards of Almshouse Management which is a manual of best practices for managing an almshouse.
   8. **Undiscovered death of a resident** – holding statement – we are waiting for more details but want to send our sincere condolences to the family and we thank the emergency services for their exceptional service. We will have a full report in due course and we know that all almshouses across the country will be deeply upset by this incident as the almshouse movement is about community and compassion.
   9. **Destruction of old almshouses to create new ones** – It is a sad truth that the costs of maintaining these beautiful historic buildings are rising and we are forced to consider the sale of these buildings unless we can fund the long-term maintenance. The Almshouse Association support us where possible and fundraises to support historic almshouses.
   10. **Clerks or trustees committing fraud** – This incident in under investigation at the moment and we will get back to you with a report when all investigations have taken place.

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