

# CHCF Communications Policy.

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## 1. Objectives:

Communication is the key to running an effective organisation. Within CHCF CIC communication is vital both on an internal and external basis; it is necessary that all staff and committee members as individuals and teams interact with each other to keep up to date with what is going on in the organisation.

Externally, we communicate with people on many different levels: individual, local voluntary and community groups, strategic partners, and national bodies. It is important for CHCF CIC to think about these different audiences when communicating their key messages.

The objectives of this policy are to ensure that:

- All staff, and committee members of CHCF CIC communicate with each other regularly and effectively.
- CHCF CIC communicates externally to users, groups and organisations on a regular basis.
- The information and messages that are produced are clear and user friendly.
- The information is circulated widely and effectively between all staff, and committee members.
- The principles of equal opportunity are embedded in the policy, by using plain English and ensuring that the needs of disabled people and of people who don't have English as a first language are adequately reflected in the standards.

## 2. Mission Statement

CHCF CIC's mission statement is the key message which represents the aims and objectives of our organisation. It is important that this statement is included on our website and in our Annual Report.

### **Mission Statement:**

The Community and Health Care Forum CIC provides opportunities for voluntary organisations and members of the community to have their say in the planning and delivery of health and social care in North Tyneside.

### **Strapline:**

Consulting on health and social care in North Tyneside.

CHCF CIC's strapline and logo should be included on all publicity material, including all project leaflets and brochures.

## 3. Internal Communication

Internal communication relies on three fundamental principles:

- it needs to be a two way process
- it needs to have an open and clear style
- it needs to be accessible and reach everyone within the organisation.

Ways we communicate internally:

FORMAL	INFORMAL
<b>Staff</b>	
Team meetings Staff meetings & minutes Support and supervision Staff reports Presentations to Executive Committee	Face to face Telephone Email
<b>Executive Committee</b>	
Staff reports Reports Letters Agendas	Telephone Face to face Email

### 3.1 Telephone:

Telephone calls are a major channel of communication for CHCF CIC. Talking to people on the telephone is a skill; staff must be polite, show care and deal with the situation as necessary.

When answering **external calls** you should say the organisation name and your name

You must inform your colleagues when you will be out of the office, so they can take messages for you. There are two systems in place to do this. You must also use the office diary to record your meetings and holidays. This must be updated on a regular basis.

If you are out of the office, but still working and are able to receive calls, you should let people know your alternative arrangements. This could be your home phone number or mobile phone.

The main office number has an answer phone. This is switched on whenever the main office is empty or when the staff are unable to take telephone calls, such as when they are in a meeting.

If you aren't available to answer your phone, one of your colleagues will take a message for you. Before taking a message, you should ask if you can help the caller instead and deal with it yourself if you can. They may be calling about a simple piece of information, such as a phone number that you can easily get from the database.

If you need to take a message, it is important to get it right. You must give the caller some idea about when your colleague will be back in the office, especially if they are on annual leave.

You should record the following information

- date and time of call
- who called
- their organisation name
- their telephone number
- what the call is about
- if they need to be phoned back (they may want to ring back themselves)
- if the call is urgent
- when the call should be returned
- who took the message

In line with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, we must address the needs of deaf people who use our services. There are two main telephone options – text phones and RNID Typetalk. Some deaf people may prefer to use fax or email if they use English as well as British Sign Language. You should ask people what method they prefer.

If people are hard of hearing, do not shout - speak clearly and do not speak too quickly. Be prepared to repeat yourself if necessary. If this does not work, you should try to rephrase what you are saying in jargon-free, plain English.

Telephones and hearing aids can be adapted to improve communication for people who have hearing difficulties.

For people with English as a second language, speak clearly and do not speak too quickly. Be prepared to repeat yourself if necessary. If this does not work, you should try to rephrase what you are saying.

Mobile phones, both work and personal must be set at a level so as not to interrupt nearby workers. You must use your personal mobile phone with discretion, and make sure it doesn't impact on your work time

### **3.2 Emails:**

Technology enhances our ability to communicate effectively. However, it can also lead to complacency and some spectacular errors. At the press of a button confidential messages can be sent far and wide.

Internal email plays an important part in getting information to all staff quickly. However, the whole workforce may not have regular access to these systems and managers must ensure that time is invested in getting information to and from all employees and committee members.

All written communication standards (external communication section) apply when writing emails.

Staff should use standard signatures, which should be automatically attached containing:

Name

Job Title

Organisation and address

Telephone No.

Email address

Website address

### **3.3 Meetings**

Most organisations are involved in meetings and events, ranging from very informal, one to one discussions to large conferences. Meetings can be effective in delivering and sharing information amongst groups of people, however, they must be carried out in the appropriate way. For CHCF CIC, meetings and gatherings form a very important part of how the organisation communicates with each other and also how it communicates with its users and groups.

Internal meetings within CHCF CIC:

Although there are different types of meetings, many of the standards, rights and responsibilities are common across staff and the Executive Committee. The following standards are only a guide. However, the principles for working group meetings and team meetings are carried out on a more informal basis.

- i) **Roles** need to be clear before the meeting starts, including deciding who the chair is and who will take minutes.
- ii) **Agendas** should follow CHCF CIC's agreed agenda format, which provides details on what will be discussed at our formal meetings. They will be sent out in advance, according to the timetable agreed for each type of meeting, for example executive committee meeting agendas and papers must be sent out one week before the meeting. Items should only be tabled in emergencies.
- iii) **Papers** should be fully accessible. Papers relating to agenda items must be sent with the agenda. This allows people time to prepare properly for the meeting. Papers should only be tabled in emergencies. This is particularly important for blind people who cannot read documents tabled at a meeting. Where interpreters are to be used at a meeting, they should also receive advance copies of all documents.
- iv) **Minutes** or notes should follow CHCF CIC's agreed format. They should be sent with the agenda, or earlier if that has been agreed for that meeting. Sometimes actions are allocated to people who are not present at the meeting. The notes must indicate who is responsible for briefing the person on what they need to do.
- v) **Time** must be managed properly. Meetings are used to facilitate work, and should be short, preferably not longer than two hours. However, it is important that the agenda is completed. Meetings should start and finish on time. Meetings that are properly controlled recognise and respect that people attending them will have other commitments.

Training events and workshops will probably last longer than a normal meeting. It is important that these events are well structured and include plenty of breaks to maintain energy and concentration levels.
- vi) **Participants** should commit the appropriate time needed for the meeting and avoid being late or leaving early. If they expect to leave early, they must tell the chair before the meeting starts. If people know they can't attend a meeting, they must send apologies as soon as possible. Participants must commit to preparing fully for the meeting, including reading any papers. Participants are expected to feedback to the organisation that they represent.
- vii) **Venues** must be accessible to all participants. We should find out the access and support needs of all participants to make sure they have the support they need to attend. If we aren't able to do this, we must provide a range of support aids and services to accommodate people, such as meeting space on the ground floor and hearing loop.
- viii) **Behaviour** is important. All participants must be respected and have equal rights. The ability to listen in a meeting is as valuable as the ability to

contribute. Chairs have a particular responsibility to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

### **General standards for internal meetings within CHCF CIC:**

#### **General standards**

- Respect for each role
- Respect all views/civility
- Prompt attendance
- Standard style for minutes and agendas
- Apologies to be given, as soon as possible, when unable to attend
- Rotating chair and minute taking where appropriate.

#### **Agenda**

- Structured
- Specific
- Detailed
- Timely
- Include working papers

#### **Minutes and records**

- Standard format
- Timely distribution

#### **Rights and responsibilities of chair or trainer**

- You must set purpose and objectives, if necessary
- You must invite appropriate people
- You must arrange a suitable venue and provide equipment to allow full access
- You must give prior warning of date and time
- You must encourage participation and discussion
- You must keep to the agenda and time
- You must keep order
- You must give a round up of each discussion
- You must allocate actions where appropriate
- Trainers must know their subject

#### **Rights and responsibilities of people attending**

- You must be on time

- You must bring relevant paperwork or information
- You must prepare before the meeting
- You must fully participate in the meeting, and be constructive and honest
- You must tell people if you have any access or support needs, and you must ask others if they have any such needs
- You must take responsibility for action points
- You must give, and be given, apologies, as soon as possible, when unable to attend
- You must listen to and respect others

## **4. External communication**

External communication follows very similar principles to internal communication, but it focuses on the image of CHCF CIC projected to the outside world. It is about the information we are delivering, the support we are offering and the way in which we are communicating with members, groups and users.

### **4.1 Face to face contact**

Face to face contact is a major part of our work. We meet people face-to-face in a range of situations, including

- People coming into CHCF CIC office
- Meeting groups in our offices and in their own venues
- Job interviews
- Events and meetings – informal and formal

### **Helping people with disabilities**

Some people have difficulty accessing services. All people have an equal right of access to our services and we will make sure this happens. Disabled people are individuals just like everybody else. Don't make assumptions about their abilities or their needs. Don't forget some disabilities are hidden, for example epilepsy and mental illness.

If you think someone needs help - offer it! But wait until they have accepted before giving any help and only give the sort of help they say they want. If you aren't sure how something might affect a disabled person, ask them for advice.

Do not underestimate people's ability. Something that might seem a great problem to you may be something they are very used to dealing with.

If a disabled person is with someone, talk to the disabled person directly, not to the person who is with them. This also applies to a deaf person accompanied by a sign language interpreter.

When you are talking to someone with a speech impairment, concentrate on what they are saying, be patient and don't try to guess what they want to say. If you don't understand, don't pretend you do.

If someone has difficulty understanding you - perhaps because they have a learning disability - be patient and be prepared to explain something more than once. Concentrate on using simple language

### **Meeting or guiding a blind or partially-sighted person**

When you first meet a blind or partially-sighted person, introduce yourself. When you are going to move away, tell them so you don't leave them talking to an empty space.

Ask them if they would like to take hold of your arm. They will usually hold your arm above the elbow as it makes guiding easier.

Tell them the direction you are heading, if there are any obstacles and, if there are any steps, if they go up or down. Do not push or drag them.

Remember that guide dogs for blind people, hearing dogs for deaf people and other assistance dogs, are working dogs, not pets. They should not be fed, patted or distracted when they are working

If you are guiding someone to a seat, tell them when you've arrived and guide their hand to the back on the chair so they know which way the chair is facing. You should also tell them what other furniture is near them.

### **Meeting and helping deaf or hard of hearing people**

When talking to a deaf person, find out - if necessary in writing - whether they lip-read. If they do, make sure your face is in the light, look directly at the person, speak clearly and naturally, remembering to keep your hands away from your face.

Rephrase what you are saying if it is not understood.

If you know that the deaf or hard of hearing person uses English as well as BSL or other sign language, you could write down what you are trying to get across. You should only do this if there are no other options available, such as a BSL interpreter. If the deaf person has an interpreter with them, you should remember to speak to the deaf person, not the interpreter.

### **Meeting and helping wheelchair users**

When talking to a person using a wheelchair, try to ensure that your eyes are at the same level as theirs, perhaps by sitting down. Don't lean on the wheelchair - it is part of the person's personal space. If a person using a wheelchair is having difficulties, ask them if they need any help. Only push them if they say so.

## 4.2 Promotional material and publications:

Communicating through publications is a very useful and effective method of getting information across to the public. It is important for CHCF CIC that these materials are all produced to certain standards, as detailed below.

They must also all be reviewed on a regular basis, at least once a year. This will ensure that information is accurate and up to date.

### Document text

- i) The same standards apply regardless of whether it is an internal or external document
- ii) Use Arial font, point 14 for all main text as a standard. Point 12 can be used for internal documents and letters where appropriate
- iii) Arial is a sans-serif font, which is easy to read and accessible to most people. Be consistent with point sizes. Do not be tempted to reduce the point size to fit text onto a page. You can often reduce the amount of text by re-writing it using the plain English principles.
- iv) Use font size 14, 16, 18 or 24 for greater emphasis for all paragraph headings and titles.
- v) Use **bold** to highlight text, **never** underline. You can use italics sparingly, for a publication title, for example, but not for large amounts of text.
- vi) Use title or sentence case for headings, **never** use all capitals. All capitals can be viewed as shouting, and is thought of as bad manners. If using sentence case, you should start all proper names with a capital letter ie people's names or towns.
- vii) Left justify the main text so it has a jagged right edge. Justified text, where both edges are straight, is much harder to read. Headings can be centred.
- viii) Avoid hyphenating words at the end of sentences.
- ix) Avoid splitting up sentences and leaving one or two words on the following page.

### Layout and design

The keys to good layout are consistency, simplicity and generosity with white space. It is important that text is clear and easy to read.

- i) Use white or pale coloured paper with black or dark text to give a good contrast. You can use white or pale text in a black or dark text box. This is known as 'reversed-out' text.
- ii) All backgrounds must be kept clear. You must not run text over a background pattern as this can interfere with the words.
- iii) Use plain, non-glossy paper, (with the exception of posters). The glare from glossy paper can be uncomfortable and make it difficult for some people to read.
- iv) Break text into small blocks, using subheadings, bullet points, boxes or quotations broken away from the text to highlight key points.

- v) Keep information concise, using short sentences and paragraphs.
- vi) Allow plenty of space between lines of text, between paragraphs and around boxes. You should also give headings plenty of space.
- vii) Margins should be set margins to 2.5 where appropriate to ensure that paper is not wasted.

Be aware that people with dyslexia or other disabilities sometimes struggle with strong contrast and requests may be made for ink and paper colours that clash with these general guidelines. These document text guidelines will be circulated to all staff, and issued to new staff.

## **North Tyneside CHCF CIC logo**

The logo has an important role in providing the organisation with identity and image. The use of CHCF CIC's logo should follow these rules

- i) A standard size should be used – except when appearing on documents with a number of other logos where it is desirable for all to be a similar size. Care should be taken when increasing or decreasing the size of the logo.
- ii) The CHCF CIC logo's colours are blue, green and lime. If these colours are not used, it should be black and white. There should be no other variation.
- iii) Logos should be used on all written external communication (but not email).
- iv) Logos should **not** be used on documents used internally as they take up too much space. Any documents should include the title of the document, such as memo or message, along with our name.
- v) There should be an approved issue of the logo to be used by everyone. People must not create their own through scanning or image manipulation.

A colour version of CHCF CIC's logo is available electronically from the administrator.

## **Letterhead**

North Tyneside CHCF CIC uses only one letterhead; which includes the logo we've agreed to use on the letterhead. This meets the minimum standards set out below.

- i) A font that is easy to read, such as Arial, should be used for the address and other standard information on the letterhead at a minimum of point 12 (but 14 is preferable) – people with sight problems are equally as interested in a return address as they are in the main text of a letter. If 12 point is used, pick out important aspects – such as the telephone number – in 14.
- ii) Information included on the letterhead should be the main telephone number, logo, address and email address.

## Accessibility and plain English

We work with a wide range of people. These people all have different access needs. It is our responsibility to make sure that all our documents can reach as many of these people as possible. We can do this by using plain English and by providing documents in different formats.

- i) Collect and record individuals' special needs ie large print, tape or community language
- ii) If people ask for documents in a different format, we must provide them quickly. People must not be put at a disadvantage just because they can't access our standard-print documents.
- iii) Circulate draft versions of documents to other staff to make sure they are acceptable to send out to the public
- iv) Write in plain English. Many readers lose patience with long, rambling sentences and unfamiliar words. The Plain English Campaign defines plain English as 'language that the intended audience can understand and act upon from a single reading'. It is also more friendly
- v) Use plain English and keep documents as brief as possible. The Plain English Campaign has produced free useful guides, including how to write in plain English, design and layout, forms, writing reports and letters, websites and alternative word lists. These are available from [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)

### Plain English guidelines

- Keep sentences short, such as 15-20 words. Break up longer sentences into shorter ones
- Use you and we, rather than the organisation or North Tyneside CHCF CIC. This is friendlier and is what you'd use if you were talking to someone.
- Use words appropriate to the reader. This means using the simplest words and every day English to fit the situation. If you're writing technical information for people who will understand it, technical language can be used. Do not use it for the general public.
- Write for your audience – think about what they want or need to know, not what you want to tell them.
- Use active verbs eg 'North Tyneside CHCF CIC has published new guidelines', rather than 'new guidelines have been published by North Tyneside CHCF CIC'
- Avoid jargon and acronyms. Jargon is a barrier, which prevents many people from becoming involved. To make sure people understand, provide a glossary. If you have to use acronyms, give the full name the first time it's used in a document with the acronym in brackets. This includes our name.

- Use lists to break up text

### **4.3 Website**

Information posted on the website is available to everyone and people need to be particularly aware of the power of the internet.

The information posted on the website must not contradict the organisation's overall policies.

The Information and Communications Officer will regularly check and update all information on the website.

### **4.4 Other methods of external communication:**

Telephone – the main points covered in internal communication section.

Meetings – the main points covered in internal communication section.

There are other meetings that occur externally, but they should still follow the same standards which are detailed for internal meetings.

Strategic partnership meetings

Community group meetings

Focus groups

Public meetings

### **4.5 Press Releases and Media**

Press Releases are a vital tool for putting across CHCF CIC's image to the public. If there is an event or news story, all staff should be aware of using the local press for publicity. Staff should pass the details of the event to the Information and Communications Officer to prepare a Press Release.

Media Contact:

It is important to identify people who will comment or talk to the media.

If the media are asking for comments or responses of the organisation about a particular issue, then it must go to the Chief Officer. In her absence it will go to the Chairman.

If the media contact us regarding an article or press release, relating to an event or story, then the media can contact the Chief Officer or the Information and Communications Officer.

## 5. Document details

This document is also available in large print and in digital format as an MS Word and ASCII text file.

This policy has been adopted from the:  
Voluntary Organisations Development Agency  
Reg. Charity No. 1075060, Reg. Company No. 3703221  
Shiremoor Centre  
Earsdon Road  
Shiremoor  
NE27 0HJ

Community and Health Care Forum CIC  
205 Park Road  
Wallsend  
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