



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

**Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich**



**How to deal with
a media crisis**

Contents

The purpose of this document is to provide the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich with a media crisis plan. This document is distributed to Clergy, Ministers, Church Officers and Church Schools and will explain:

- How to respond to a potential media crisis
- The role of the diocesan communications team including Prominent
- The different levels of crisis alert (red, amber and green)

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1. Roles and responsibilities

Suffolk-based PR agency Prominent are employed by the diocese to handle all enquiries including those relating to reputational risk. They are the first point of contact for any related press or media concerns.

When contacted by a representative of the press or media:

- Please do not make any personal comment or response
- Record their name, who they are representing, their contact details and the issue that they would like to discuss with the deadline
- Advise them that their request will be passed on to the appropriate team for a response
- Call Prominent to raise a press enquiry with the team on 01473 276127.

Do not:

- Try to handle this alone
- Engage in conversation with the journalist
- Engage in speculation

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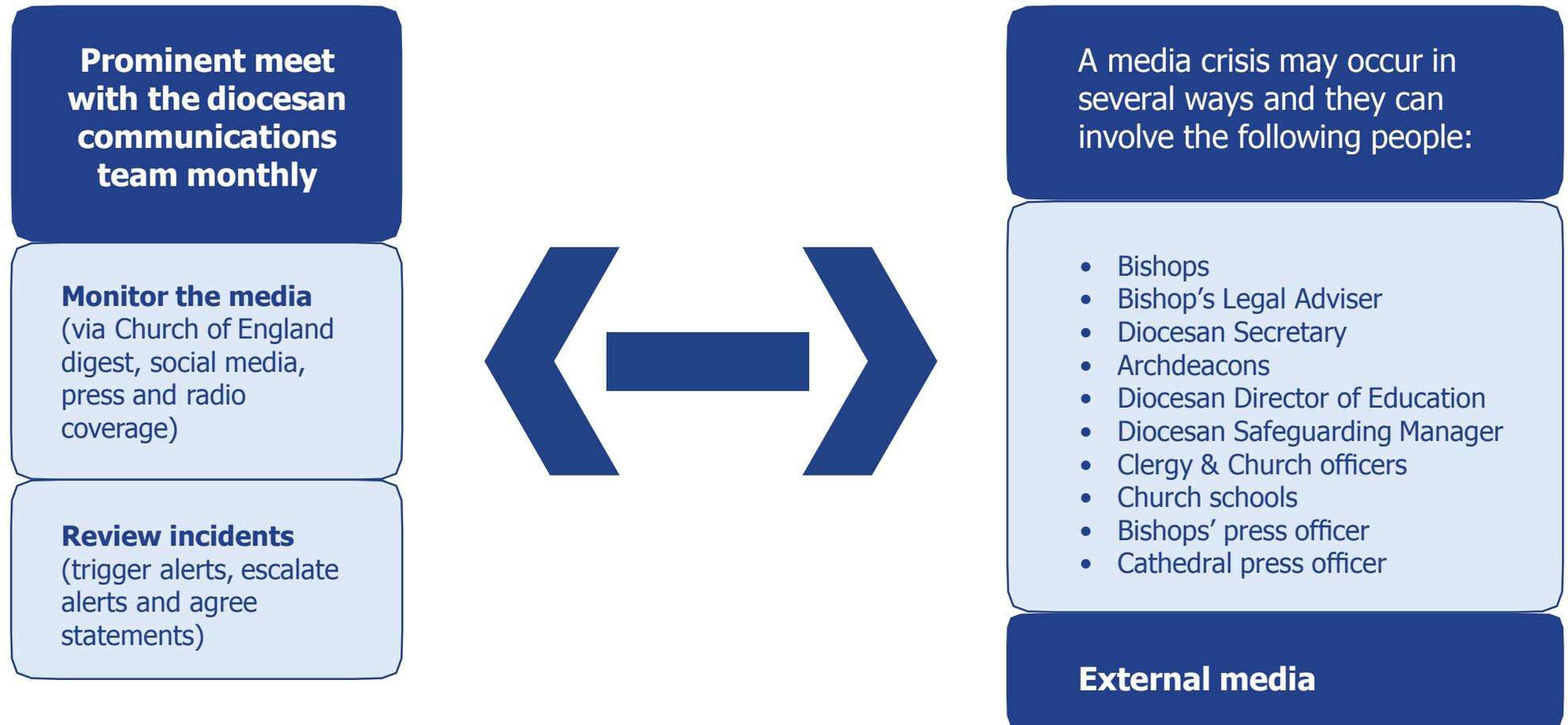
communications@cofesuffolk.org



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How the team works together



2. Our strategy

A crisis management strategy deals with any situation which threatens to destabilise the standing of the diocese or undermine its reputation.

Our strategy allows us to determine what is a major threat, what has the potential to escalate and what is simply a flash in the pan. It will help you negotiate a series of steps involved in handling the problem from the moment it is identified.

In every crisis situation, Prominent is your first port of call. They will agree a level of response and liaise with the diocesan communications team.

Prominent will then monitor the response and review.



3. Identifying a crisis

You (the referrer) might be alerted to a crisis in several ways:

- You may be contacted by a journalist
- You may see a story in your newspaper without prior warning
- You may see a social media post
- You may overhear rumours or speculation which needs addressing
- You may be aware of an impending situation such as a court case, a report or an announcement.

A crisis can be minor, mediocre or massive - we rank them as green, amber or red.

Regardless of how severe the crisis, contact our external PR team on 01473 276127 before you act.



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4. Different levels of crisis

Green

What is it?

- Low-level grumbles or complaints
- Personal opinions
- Social media moans
- Speculation or gossip

Example:

Your church has erected a new monument on its premises after receiving the support of the congregation. One neighbour has complained they don't like the look of it and called it an eyesore in a few disgruntled social media posts which you have been shown.

ACTION

This is a low-level crisis and is unlikely to be picked up by the press. However, it could result in a small story if it escalates and therefore needs monitoring.

Prominent will inform the diocesan communications team.

A statement or social media response may be drafted.

Prominent will monitor the response and Prominent and the diocesan communications team will review at the monthly communications meeting.

The statement may need to be issued and Prominent will elevate the crisis to Amber alert.

Who could be involved?

- Archdeacons or Diocesan Director of Education if required
- Staff with specialist expertise if required

4. Different levels of crisis

Amber

What is it?

- A one-off news item which has appeared in the local newspaper as a small story.
- A situation which involves a response from several organisations

Example:

A mobile phone mast which is positioned on the roof of a church is interfering with the TV signal of dozens of neighbours living in the vicinity. The mast is the responsibility of a telecommunications company and they pay the church a fee to have it on the premises. A local journalist has been in touch asking for a comment.

ACTION

This is likely to make a story in the local paper and could escalate.

Prominent will inform the diocesan communications team.

The diocesan communications team will then inform the relevant personnel and if necessary, seek advice from a specialist (such as a church building representative) to form a response.

Prominent will edit the response for sign off and issue on behalf of the referrer.

Prominent and the diocesan communications team will monitor and review the crisis at the monthly communications meeting.

Who could be involved?

- Archdeacons or Diocesan Director of Education if required
- Staff with specialist expertise if required

4. Different levels of crisis

Red

What is it?

- A situation which could seriously damage the reputation of the diocese
- A major story that will likely run high for more than one news cycle and attract national news interest
- Any legal issues or personnel issues, questions that involve the dioceses' integrity - such as safeguarding or issues that may result in harm to others
- Any criminal activity or court case involving - but not limited to - anti-social behaviour, arson, burglary, childhood abuse, criminal damage, fraud, hate crime, murder, manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, terrorism, violent crime.

Example:

A review into safeguarding has highlighted several issues concerning the way complaints about sexual abuse have been responded to – and your church/school (and several of its staff) are among those being singled out for repeatedly failing to take the issues seriously.

ACTION

This is a high-level crisis that is likely to attract considerable attention.

Prominent will inform the diocesan communications team.

The diocesan communications team will implement the Crisis Policy.

Prominent will manage all subsequent media.

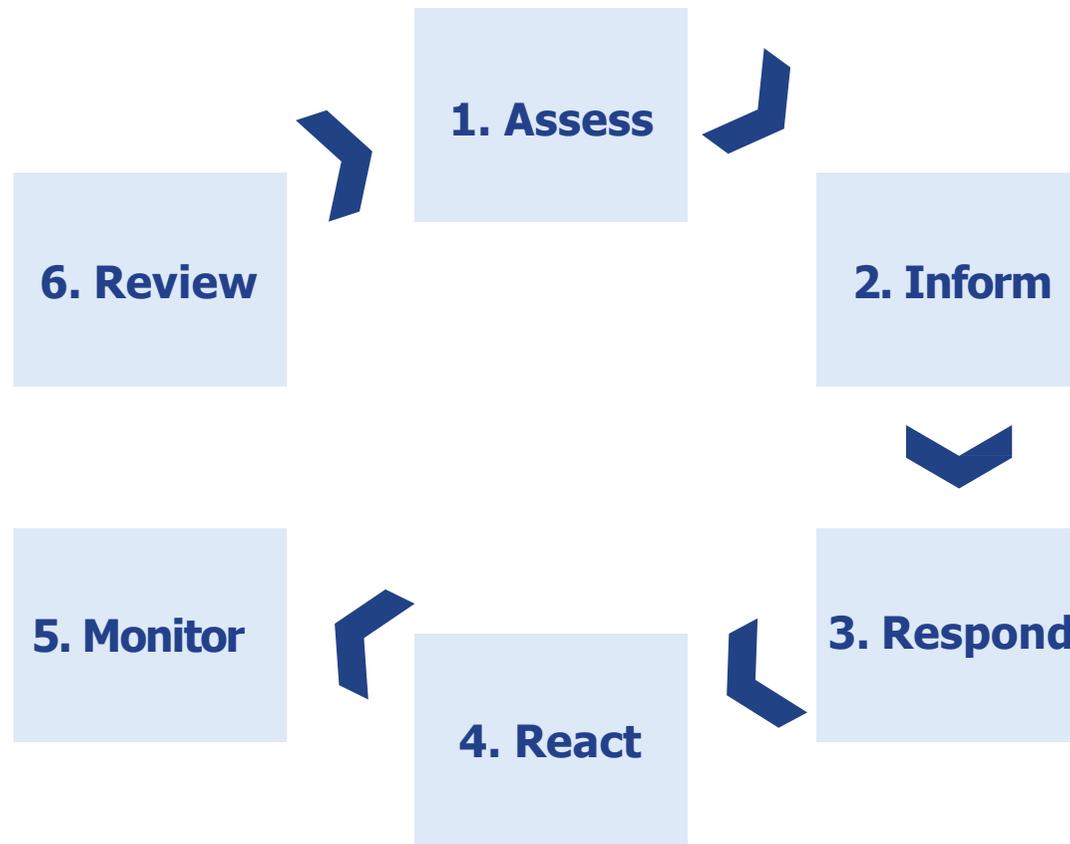
Prominent will monitor the response and Prominent and the diocesan communications team will review at the monthly communications meeting.

Red personnel

- Bishops (Bishop's Legal Advisor and Press Officer)
- Diocesan Secretary
- Archdeacons
- Diocesan Director of Education
- Diocesan Safeguarding Manager
- Diocesan Receptionist staff
- Staff with specialist expertise
- Church of England press office

5. Next steps

The process for handling any crisis is as follows:



Assess

When situations arise, Prominent will assess the situation:

- What is known?
- What can be anticipated/what could happen next?
- Who is involved?
- Who might be affected?
- Is there public/media interest?
- Is the public/media interest anticipated?
- What are people feeling?
- What next steps are needed?

You may be asked a number of questions to clarify what steps should be taken next.



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Inform

Throughout a challenging situation, many people may be involved. As the referrer who raised the concern, you are likely to be one of these.

Identifying who is responsible for what in a crisis plan is essential. Prominent and the diocesan communications team will ensure all key people are kept informed.

In every crisis, Prominent should be the central point of reference and will manage all communications – internal and external.



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Respond

Any response should come from Prominent. All new and subsequent media enquiries received during the period of crisis should be passed onto Prominent.

Prominent and the diocesan communications team may choose a spokesperson for a situation. This will be someone who is an expert in the relevant field. This person will also need to speak clearly and compassionately on the subject with the ability to connect with both internal and external audiences.

If you (the referrer) are expected to speak to a journalist or appear at a press conference you will be fully briefed by Prominent.

All important messages and media statements created by Prominent will be sent to all media, posted on social media and be available on the diocese's website as well.

A key messages document on a crisis will be prepared to help those involved understand what information is to be made public.



React

During a media crisis, there are many audiences to consider as well as many media channels.

Prominent will monitor reactions on the media and respond accordingly depending on the alert level.

Prominent will:

- Provide factual information as quickly as possible
- Provide regular updates throughout the crisis
- Ensure everyone knows the next steps
- Ensure the tone of voice is consistent and appropriate.



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Monitor

Prominent will manage and monitor the crisis throughout. They will also provide ongoing information as appropriate and determine what additional actions and communications are needed depending on the scope of the crisis.

Ongoing and post-crisis communications should be considered for both internal and external audiences.

Continual monitoring of the situation will be key.

This will include social media monitoring.



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Review

All crisis communications efforts will be evaluated.

Prominent will update the crisis communications plan following this important evaluation.

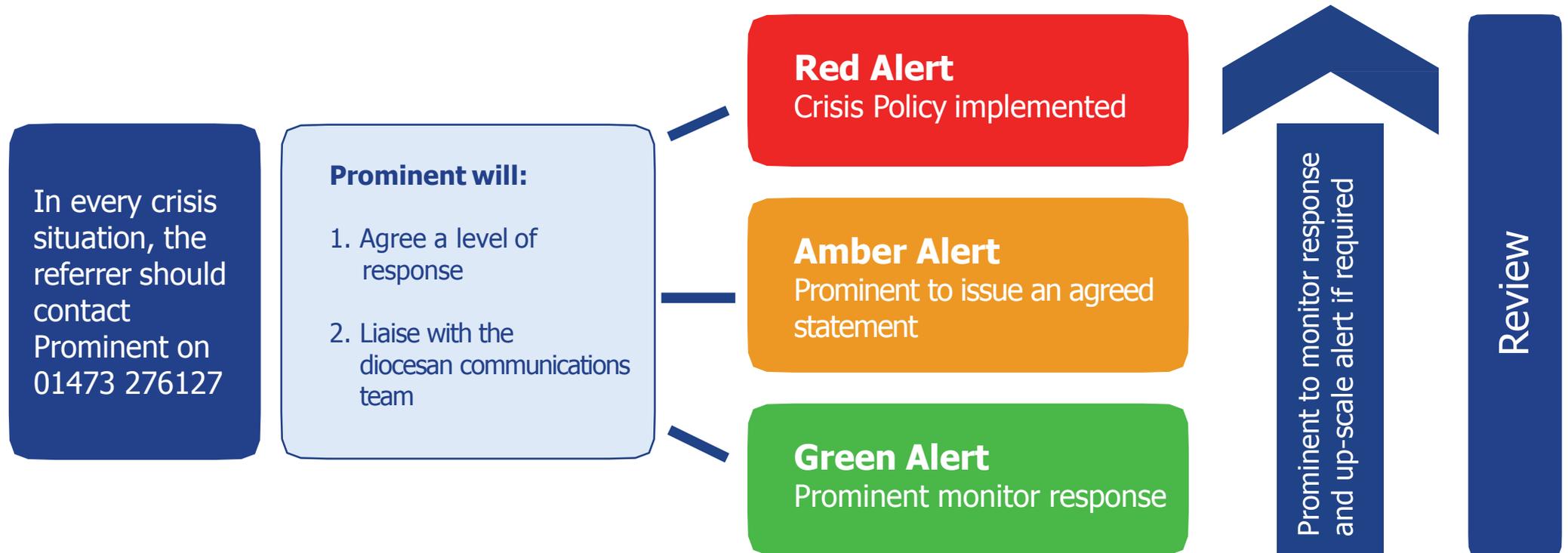
A service questionnaire will be given to all parties involved following a crisis, so the diocesan communications team can improve our offering.



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6. Summary



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7. Further support

If you need further support you can contact the diocesan communication team who will be able to refer you to someone who can support you throughout the duration of the crisis and beyond.

If you have any questions regarding this document or you have a potential situation, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via the contact details on the contents page of this document.



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