

PRIDE AWARDS 2017

Category: Issues, Crisis or Reputational Management

Company: Morrison Media

Entry title: Launch of report into death of Bailey Gwynne

Explanation of issue/crisis and objectives:

In October 2015, schoolboy Bailey Gwynne was killed by a fellow pupil (Child A) at their school, Cults Academy, in Aberdeen. The Chief Officers of Aberdeen City Council (ACC), Police Scotland and NHS Grampian (Chief Officers Group (COG)) jointly commissioned an independent report into the circumstances surrounding his death, at the end of the trial in March 2016.

Morrison Media was appointed from August to October 2016 to handle all media relations and associated activity surrounding the release of the report and to uphold the reputation of COG.

Our objectives were to:

- Minimise reputational damage to COG
- Present COG as open and transparent
- Ensure key stakeholders were informed about the report's recommendations
- Ensure all media enquiries and engagement were handled in a fair and open way
- Elevate the report to a national level

This was a highly sensitive and complex issue and required careful handling and approach throughout.

Research, planning and strategy:

Morrison Media conducted a full audit of media coverage on the death of Bailey Gwynne to identify potential areas of criticism.

In the months preceding the release of the report, we met with COG to discuss the potential content of the report, created a strategy for its release and identified media and key stakeholders with an interest in the story.

Key stakeholders:

- Aberdeen community
- Local governments across UK
- Education professionals - internationally and locally
- COG officials, police officers, health workers
- Public across Scotland and UK

- Scottish government
- Media – Scottish and UK

In advance of the release, we arranged a media opportunity for broadcasters at Cults Academy, allowing them to interview the head teacher and head boy about Bailey and how the school had coped with his death.

We worked with COG to organise and manage a press conference on the day of the report release, at which the chief officers and the author of the report were available for interview. We advised that reading time of the report should be given to the media prior to the conference to further underpin COG's drive for openness and transparency.

In the weeks leading up to the launch, we worked with increasing numbers of media to ensure that they were kept informed on all relevant aspects of the report, agreed activity and access. A statement log was kept to record all statements, actions and contact.

Tactics and their implementation, including creativity and innovation:

Morrison Media created a robust set of key messages, which underpinned COG's objectives and ensured consistency.

These were:

- The incident at Cults Academy was a tragedy, which saw a young life lost and had a traumatic effect on many others
- The commissioning bodies are determined to implement any changes to practice that will help decrease the likelihood of such an awful event happening again. Work will begin immediately on all recommendations
- The Chief Officers Group pays tribute to the dignity and fortitude shown by Bailey's family, as well as the incredible work undertaken by staff across the organisations
- The report contains legally restricted information and so could not be published in full today. The COG is committed to gaining full permissions so this can happen in future
- A helpline has been set up which will be manned by educational psychologists. Counsellors will be available in Cults Academy as well.

Over three months, Morrison Media delivered:

- Seven meetings with COG plus weekly conference calls
- Media training sessions
- A broadcast media event at Cults Academy
- A fully managed press conference, chaired by our MD, John Morrison and broadcast live by BBC, STV and Sky
- A 24/7 press office, managing daily engagement with the media as interest and awareness of the report launch grew
- Round the clock access to our senior consultants for members of COG.

Demonstrate how negative impacts were avoided, positives achieved and improvements made:

To ensure the most effective outcome, Morrison Media:

- Kept key messages consistent throughout all written and verbal communications
- Delivered bespoke media training sessions to ensure all identified spokespeople were fully prepared
- Managed regular meetings and conference calls
- Provided a 24/7 press office

- Coordinated, managed and chaired a press conference, allocating time for reading and asking questions
- Logged all media enquiries and issued statements, flagging up any reputational issues
- Analysed media and social media in the run-up to, during and after the release of the report, highlighting and addressing potential issues.

Measurement and evaluation:

A total of **152 high-quality pieces** of launch and post-launch coverage were generated, comprising: **68 print, 44 online and 40 broadcast pieces.**

This amounted to **41.8m OTS**, via a mix of news, opinion and discussion pieces in outlets including Sky, Daily Telegraph, The Times, Guardian, Daily Mail, P&J and BBC Scotland.

96% of coverage was positive or neutral.

Social media: Twitter was the main platform for conversation around the report launch, with **433 public tweets**. The topic of 51% was the findings of the report directly, whilst 8% focused on the Scottish Government and 18% on tackling knife crimes in young people and schools.

A core objective of the campaign was to elevate the report to a national level. Beginning with a lengthy discussion about knife crime in schools on BBC Radio Scotland's Good Morning Scotland programme on 12th October 2016, 48 of 61 post-report pieces had a national focus.

Post-report coverage included editorials in the Herald, the Scotsman, the Daily Record, the Courier and the Scottish Sun. Three of these placed responsibility at a national level, one insisted that change was required at a national and local level and one blamed Child A for the incident.