

PRESS AND MEDIA LIAISON P-07 – REVISED EDITION SEPTEMBER 2007

No member of the public or communities we serve, no Police Officer, Special Constable or Police Staff member shall receive less favourable treatment directly or indirectly on the grounds of, Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Religion or Sexual Orientation.

If you consider this policy may adversely affect any of these groups please raise with the author of the policy without delay.

1 NEWSDESK

1.1 HOURS OF DUTY

The Press and Public Relations Department at Headquarters is open from 0630 to 1900 hours Monday to Thursday, 0630 to 1800 hours Friday and from 0730 to 1530 hours on Saturday. It is directly supervised by the head of news who has responsibility for deciding on the nature and distribution of information to the media.

1.2 Outside normal office hours the department operates a call-out system through the duty officer at the Force Communication Centre. A duty officer from the Press and Public Relations Department is available to provide advice and, if appropriate, arrange for a representative from the department to attend the scene of incidents.

2 FORCE POLICY

2.1 FORCE POLICY/RELEASE OF INFORMATION

OCUs may deal with local media enquiries about routine matters although the Press and Public Relations Department should be informed of any information, which is given to the media. Media handling regarding more serious and major incidents, and requests for information about force policy, should be directed through the Press and Public Relations Department.

2.2 POLICE AUTHORITY MEETINGS/REPORTS

Officers should not comment on Police Authority reports prior to the date of the relevant meeting. Such comments could compromise or prejudice subsequent discussions and decisions. Approaches from the media for comment on Police Authority meetings or decisions should be referred to the Police Authority press and public relations officer.

3 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

OCUs and departments seeking press releases and those commissioning PR campaigns are asked to consider the impact these may have on our communities.

To ensure a full impact assessment is carried out prior to the release of material, it is requested that any concerns flagged in the OCU or force Community Impact Assessments are shared with the Press and Public Relations Department.

The Press and Public Relations Department will then consider any issues in its initial departmental evaluation form prior to the release of material and will consult with force support groups (e.g. BAPA, Rainbow Network, Federation and staff associations etc) and focus groups as deemed necessary.

In addition this process will be adopted for all campaigns, publications and major incidents.

3.1 COMMUNICATION AND REASSURANCE OFFICERS

Each OCU has a Communication and Reassurance officer. Their primary role is to promote positive messages in relation to local policing initiatives both of a crime and anti-social behaviour nature, engage with the OCU key individual network to establish local community concerns and impart key messages to the community, support OCU driven campaigns and to establish links with the community through public meetings, newsletters and forums.

They will also commission low level press releases for the OCU in consultation with the Press and Public Relations Department.

3.2 BLACK MINORITY ETHNIC MEDIA (BME)

OCUs and departments are asked to consider the impact that reporting by the BME media can have on our communities.

The Press and Public Relations department will engage the BME media over all issues affecting our communities. The department will also seek to proactively engage specialist media where issues specifically affect an identifiable community.

In order to monitor impact, media monitoring will take place in conjunction with the Diversity Community Cohesion Unit (DCCU). Any reporting considered to have an adverse impact on our communities will be fed into force and local Community Impact Assessments via the DCCU.

4 CRIMINAL MATTERS

4.1 CRIMINAL MATTERS/RELEASE OF INFORMATION

In cases of serious crime or any crime likely to be of considerable media or public interest a message switch should be forwarded to the Press and Public Relations Department and Force Communications Centre as soon as the basic facts are established, using the serious crime message switch format. Special consideration should be given to the 'suitable for release' section and the reasons for any objections to a press release must be included.

4.2 ACTION BY HEAD OF NEWS OR FORCE COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE

The head of news or the duty officer at the Force Communications Centre will be responsible for subsequently releasing the information or, where necessary, informing the media of the reasons why certain information is not being released.

4.3 SERIOUS CRIME

In cases involving serious crime, the senior investigating officer, in consultation with the head of news and press officers, will be responsible for agreeing what information is given to the media. In appropriate cases the head of news/newsdesk will arrange for a press conference and information to be provided to the duty officer at Force Communication Centre.

4.4 SENIOR INVESTIGATING OFFICER INITIATING RELEASE TO MEDIA

Before the senior investigating officer or member of police staff releases information to the media they should consult on the content with the Newsdesk. If necessary staff on Newsdesk or the duty officer at the Force Communications Centre will arrange for other media outlets to contact the senior officer or enter details on the medialine. In any case the Newsdesk must be informed of any press release initiated by the senior officer or member of police staff as soon as possible.

4.5 PRESS CONFERENCES

The head of news and press office staff or, outside of office hours, the duty officer from the Press and Public Relations Department, is responsible for arranging press conferences and co-ordinating further media requests for interviews.

5 GENERAL MATTERS

5.1 GENERAL MATTERS/RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Responsibility for releasing information to the media on general matters will be exercised by officers of or above the rank of Inspector or member of staff nominated by the management team. Items of interest to the media should be notified to the head of news, Newsdesk or Force Communication Centre as soon as possible.

5.2 DUTY OFFICER/FORCE COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE

The duty officer at the Force Communication Centre can release information to the media on specific incidents and update the medialine. In appropriate cases they should seek advice from the Press and Publications Department or the on call press officer beforehand.

5.3 INTERVIEW REQUESTS/DOCUMENTARIES

Wherever possible requests for police officers or police staff to take part in radio and television interviews should be referred to the head of news/Newsdesk. Requests for members of the force to take part in documentary programmes or drama productions must be referred to the head of news/head of PR in the Press and Public Relations Department.

5.4 ENQUIRIES FROM THE NEWS MEDIA

When enquiries are received from the media concerning specific incidents, the Newsdesk or Force Communication Centre, unless in possession of the relevant information, should make the necessary enquiries with the relevant OCU or department to see how best the enquiry can be dealt with.

5.5 COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINE

Media questions regarding complaints against the police or internal misconduct matters should be referred to the Press and Public Relations Department, who will liaise with the head of the Professional Standards Department to prepare an appropriate statement. In cases which, are or are likely to be, supervised by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, the head of news or head of the Professional Standards Department should be contacted before any comment is made.

5.6 MAJOR INCIDENTS

In the event of a major incident or incident that is likely to attract considerable media attention, the head of news should be notified as soon as possible or, out of office hours, the duty officer from the Press and Public Relations Department should be contacted through the Force Communication Centre. Where appropriate the head of the Press and Public Relations, or other nominated representatives from the department, will attend the scene and arrange for support to be given in dealing with the media. They will be responsible for setting up a media reception point and briefing the media.

5.7 MARKETING STRATEGY

The Press and Public Relations Department provides advice on all aspects of marketing, including the promotion of a positive image of the force and various services provided internally and externally to the public. The head of Public Relations has specific responsibility for co-ordinating marketing strategies.

5.8 CORPORATE IMAGE

The Press and Public Relations Department, in liaison with the Corporate Services managers, are responsible for promoting a corporate image in terms of official documents, vehicles, notice boards and buildings. All new publications and productions should conform to the corporate image and be submitted to the Press and Public Relations Department for approval.

5.9 MEDIA VOICEBANKS

The Press and Public Relations Department operates one medialine covering the force. This is a phone number and code which journalists can input to access recorded information provided by the press office. These are available 24 hours a day to the media and include recorded details of incidents which are likely to be of interest to them.

Officers wishing to use these facilities should contact the head of news/Newsdesk or, out of office hours, the duty press officer via the Force Communications Centre.

6 GENERAL GUIDELINES ON THE DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

6.1 OPENNESS

It is essential in the release of any information to the media that a flexible and open approach is adopted. Police officers and support staff should use their judgement concerning the content of any disclosure and to consult a senior officer if in any doubt. Items likely to be of considerable media interest should be forwarded to Newsdesk and Force Communications Centre as soon as possible. Requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act should be dealt with in accordance with that policy.

6.2 IDENTIFICATION OF STAFF RELEASING INFORMATION

Staff releasing information to the media should give their name and rank/position. This is to ensure that comment in the press is known to have been contributed by a police officer or police staff and any further enquiry can be directed to that individual.

Head of news/Newsdesk/Force Communications Centre to be informed of all releases. Where information is supplied to the media, the releasing officer or police staff should inform the head of news/Newsdesk or the Force Communications Centre as soon as possible of:

- a) Date/time of release
- b) Whether press, radio or TV
- c) Name of releasing person
- d) Details of release

7 INFORMATION WHICH SHOULD NOT BE DISCLOSED

It is sometimes necessary to place restrictions on the supply of information to the media and this can, on occasions, lead to a breakdown in communications with the media representatives. The head of the Press and PR department may work in consultation with the senior investigating officer, legal services, the Assistant Chief Constable and/or ACPO to make a decision on the release of information.

The most important restrictions concern:

- a) Information which could seriously prejudice judicial proceedings either in criminal or disciplinary matters. See paragraph 4.5
- b) Information relating to discussions between the force and the Police Authority on policy matters. See paragraph 2.2
- c) Information of a confidential nature or which has been embargoed by a higher authority.
- d) Personal details of prisoners prior to their appearance before the courts.

e) Personal details of people involved in an accident should not be disclosed without their permission. Details of persons killed should not be disclosed without the permission of their next of kin.

f) A decision may be made not to disclose information that may be of assistance to criminals. Those reasons must be made clear to the Press and Public Relations Department.

g) Photographs owned by the force may be released after consultation with the Newsdesk. There are ACPO guidelines regarding the release of photographs of individuals. The Newsdesk can advise on these. Also see paragraph 11.

Matters concerning (a), (b), (c) and (g) must be referred to the head of news for consultation with the head of press and public relations.

Any difficulties concerning (f) should be referred to an officer of the rank of Inspector or above for authority to release information.

It is important that the needs and expectations of individual complainants or victims are addressed and that the rationale behind the force policy in seeking to heighten public awareness of crime and its possible presentation is explained. There should be no disclosure, having regard to the other matters referred to above, which could cause embarrassment or distress to individuals.

8 CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

8.1 INTERESTS OF VICTIM/COMPLAINANT

Victims or those reporting incidents on their behalf should be informed that details of the incident are likely to be made available to the media explaining that press coverage can stimulate public awareness and vigilance. It is also a useful way of appealing for witnesses.

If the victim insists on anonymity, the relevant report should be clearly marked, "name and exact address not for press". Where it has not been possible to notify the victim or next of kin this should be noted on the report and the name and address withheld until they have been contacted.

8.2 INTERESTS OF JUSTICE/PUBLIC SAFETY

There may be occasions when the interests of justice or public safety make the release of some details of a victim essential despite objections. In such cases authority to release the information must be obtained from an Inspector or above.

The head of Press and Public Relations department is available for consultation in cases of doubt or difficulty. Where any disclosure is made the person concerned should be given the reasons behind the decision to release the information.

9 ARTICLES FOR PUBLICATION

Articles for publication on any subject connected with police work or administration, the administration of justice, or items of a political nature, must not be submitted for consent. Such articles will be forwarded through OCU commander or heads of department to the head of the Press and Publications Department.

These provisions do not apply to articles submitted for inclusion in force publications. Before presenting articles for approval, officers should ensure the accuracy of the text, particularly in respect of technical or legal matters.

10 UK PRESS CARD SCHEME

Media identification cards are issued to accredited journalists, press photographers and representatives of the radio and television networks. Members of the media should be able to produce an accredited identification card to prove their authenticity. The possession of such a card does not entitle the holder to be supplied with information other than as outlined above. The holder of a press card has neither an automatic right of access to the scene of an incident, nor authority to pass police lines, since this must remain a matter for the judgement of the senior officer at the scene. However, under normal circumstances such facilities as are possible should be provided. Queries on the scheme should be referred to the Press and Public Relations Department.

11 PHOTOGRAPHS

Releasing of photographs will be subject to a separate disclosure policy.

12 CONCLUSIONS

12.1 The success of the procedures outlined will depend on the understanding by police officers at all levels of the need for a good relationship with the media. The advantages to be derived from avoiding unnecessary secrecy and by achieving mutual trust between the force and the media are great. A well established relationship will prove of great benefit to the police, the media and thus to society itself.

12.2 More detailed advice on information which can be provided to the media in specific incidents is contained in the booklet "Dealing with the Media". Copies can be obtained from the Press and Public Relations Department.

24 September 2007

