

THE LEVESON INQUIRY
Statement of Jonathan Russell

Jonathan Russell will say as follows in response to the Inquiry's questions, using the numbering contained in the Inquiry's Section 21 notice dated 11th January 2012:

- 1) I have been Editor of The Herald newspaper in Glasgow and Editor in Chief of Herald and Times Group, which comprises The Herald, Sunday Herald and Evening Times newspapers, since July 2010. Immediately prior to this I spent approximately four years as an Assistant Editor at the Daily Record and Sunday Mail. Previous jobs have included Scottish Correspondent, then Scottish News Editor then Scottish Editor of the Daily Mirror, Editor of the Paisley Daily Express and Scottish Bureau Chief of the Mail on Sunday. I have also worked for news agencies, weekly papers and the Evening Express, in Aberdeen.
- 2) In my experience Strathclyde Police have generally enjoyed a healthy and robust relationship with the media. There are times where we have a shared interest and times where interests conflict, however it is in the interests of both parties to enjoy a good relationship. There have been occasions when we have refused assistance to the police, for instance when we have declined to release to them unpublished editorial material without a court order where this might compromise the ability of our staff, particularly photographers, to report events in public places. The main change I would like to see in this relationship might be for more off-the-record advice to be given to editors about reasons why the police might decide not to release certain pieces of information. I understand why that may be problematic for the force during a criminal investigation, but it could prevent a newspaper inadvertently hampering that investigation.
- 3) I have had dealings on and off with Strathclyde Police since I first came to work in the force area in 1994. This has included dealing with the press office over stories and attending press conferences as a reporter. As an editor it has also involved meetings with senior officers, either to build relationships or to discuss specific issues. We do not have a designated 'senior crime reporter' as such, but various members of editorial staff will cover crime stories, and my answers in this statement are intended to reflect the general experience of my editorial staff as well as my own.

- 4) Shortly after I was appointed Editor of The Herald in July 2010 I was invited by the head of Strathclyde Police's press office to an informal meeting with the Chief Constable. The purpose of this meeting was simply for the Chief Constable and I to meet, get to know each other and begin to build a relationship. The head of the press office was off sick on the day of the meeting, so one of his staff joined the Chief Constable and me for the meeting. The meeting included general discussion about the possibility of cutting the overall number of police forces in Scotland and issues affecting the press and police in the Strathclyde area. Since then I have also had a small number of conversations with the head of the press office, usually about general police policy or for clarification about story facts. These calls could be initiated by either of us.
- 5) I have the mobile telephone number for the head of the press office.
- 6) My initial meeting with the Chief Constable was simply to introduce ourselves to each other and discuss some of the issues each of us face and our views on the relationship between our respective organisations. In dealings since then I have generally been seeking to gain better understanding of general issues or particular stories to ensure accurate and non-prejudicial coverage in the newspaper.
- 7) On general issues, Strathclyde Police have usually been trying to ensure accurate reporting of issues or stories they are involved in. As with most major organisations, they know they will be criticised by newspapers from time to time and generally accept this as long as it is fair, in context and they are given a right to reply. On specific stories where an unsolved crime has been committed, they generally want publicity to assist with witness and information appeals. And sometimes, of course, they like to see their successes publicised.
- 8) I have never accepted hospitality from Strathclyde Police beyond a cup of coffee at a meeting.
- 9) See above.

- 10) I cannot recall ever offering Strathclyde Police hospitality on The Herald. An Assistant Chief Constable recently accepted an invitation to attend the Glasgow Business Awards at a table sponsored by our sister title the Evening Times.
- 11) See above.
- 12) I have attended press conferences called by Strathclyde Police as a reporter several years ago. I cannot remember the detail of them but they involved appeals for information regarding crimes.
- 13) I have had no contact from Strathclyde Police regarding Operation Rubicon.
- 14) I personally have never been given prior information about arrests, however, there are occasions when reporters and photographers are invited to accompany police on a raid. I understand this to be common practice around the UK. There are frequently arrests on those occasions. We see this kind of co-operation between police and the press as a legitimate way of increasing the profile given to police action, particularly because it can be seen as a deterrent to other criminals.
- 15) I and my reporters have received off-the-record briefings from police. These have generally been to ensure incorrect information does not appear in the newspaper and to explain why certain facts are omitted from police press releases or press conferences.
- 16) I have to fill in a gift register each month in which I have to declare any gifts or hospitality I have accepted. The company's Ethical Guidance and Bribery Act guidance is issued to all staff and these documents (which have been previously supplied to the Inquiry) give clear directions about where the lines are drawn. I would expect staff to alert a manager if they were planning to attend any sort of hospitality which had potential for a conflict of interest.
- 17) As above. I would expect staff to apply the Ethical Guidance to their dealings with the police in the same way that they must apply it to all their other dealings.

- 18) Our reporters will generally have dealings with police every day. They answer to their managers who, in the course of their work, will ask questions about what information police have given a reporter regarding a specific story. I may then ask similar questions and/or the information may be passed to me, particularly if the manager involved believes the information is relevant to the decision-making process in producing the newspaper. Of course, official police statements are valuable to a newspaper because they are covered by statutory privilege, and so we know we can rely on a degree of legal protection if the statement turns out to be factually incorrect. This will not apply to casual discussions with police officers, and so it is important to assess the status of any statement or information we are given.
- 19) A professional relationship needs to be maintained by both sides at all times but also an understanding of the needs and priorities of the other party. Journalists should be wary of going down a road which hampers their ability to report facts simply because they are inconvenient to the police and police should go to all reasonable lengths to divulge all information which is not prejudicial to a criminal inquiry. We must always be alert to the possibility that the police may use the press for their own purposes in order to further an investigation; this may sometimes bring mutual benefits, but we must keep sight of our primary duty, which is to ensure that the information we give to our readers is accurate and not misleading.
- 20) There should be no payments made to police officers by the media for information. However, my company does have a commercial arrangement with Strathclyde Police in that the force contributes a sum of money to the Evening Times Community Champions campaign. This is entirely open and legitimate and in no way influences coverage of police matters.
- 21) Access to police by reporters is usually by telephone, but occasionally in person for specific interviews or at press conferences. Police press releases also come into the office via email.
- 22) I believe professional press officers are essential in a modern-day police force. Their job is to provide information to the press on behalf of the police. They can act as a central point of contact for all press inquiries, but a good, forward thinking police force or chief constable

will also use his press office to advise him on media strategy. However, to make this arrangement work effectively, the police force must be genuinely committed to a policy of openness rather than a policy of manipulation. Strathclyde, I suspect, is better than most. Handled badly, the press office can become a means of obstructing public scrutiny of the investigative process, issuing sterile responses couched in institutional cliché devoid of real information. Therefore I do not accept that the press office should be the only conduit of information. Sadly, crime reporters find it more and more difficult to speak directly to investigating officers, who frequently have a misplaced fear of data protection obligations and are trained to refer all enquiries to the press office.

- 23) It would be inappropriate for me to comment in detail on this as HMIC is not responsible for Scottish police forces. However, my general observation is that the report identified, as we have, the risk of the press office obtaining a stranglehold on the control of information. This merely confirms my impression that the Freedom of Information Act and similar initiatives in recent years have disguised a drift precisely in the opposite direction. Respectfully, I would say that the Leveson Inquiry should in my view be less concerned about inappropriate disclosure – the risk of which HMIC apparently finds to be very low – and more about institutional secrecy in all agencies of government.
- 24) In my experience my paper's current relationship with the police is a good template for how a force and newspaper interact. It is professional, mutually beneficial and conflicts of interest are avoided. But nevertheless I believe that individual police officers at all levels could be better trained to be less distrustful and more open with the press where that does not interfere unduly with the investigative process. In turn, the police will find the press equally understanding of where the proper balance of public interest lies.

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed



Jonathan Russell

Date

1/2/12