

**IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY CHAIRED BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
LORD JUSTICE LEVESON UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE INQUIRIES ACT  
2005**

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FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF AMANDA HIRST

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AMANDA HIRST, Head of Corporate Communications at Avon and Somerset Constabulary, PO Box 37, Valley Road, Portishead, Bristol BS20 8QJ will say as follows:-

1. I make this witness statement in response to a Notice under Section 21(2) of the Inquiries Act 2005 dated 7th February 2012 ("The Notice") which identifies 68 matters or issues upon which I am required to address.
2. The Notice makes clear that the identification of these matters or issues is not intended to limit the evidence which I may be able to provide.
3. For the sake of convenience, I propose to set out the matters or issues listed in the Notice using the numbering from the Notice and to set out my response after each one or, where questions suggest a similar answer, after each group.

**(1) Who you are and a brief summary of your career history**

**Response:** I am Amanda Hirst, Head of Corporate Communications for Avon and Somerset Police since April 2009. My responsibilities span media and public relations, marketing and communications, web, social and other digital media.

I have worked in the public sector for many years, previously as Head of Communications and Customer Relations at the London Borough of Southwark for seven years and prior to that as Head of Communications at Reading Borough Council for a similar length of time. My early career was spent in marketing and communications roles within the private sector. I have never worked directly for a media organisation.

**(2) Please describe the role and remit of the press office within Avon and Somerset Constabulary**

**Response:** The term 'press office' is no longer adequate to describe the breadth of communications undertaken by the police service. In Avon and Somerset, the Corporate Communications Department (CCD), of which media relations is a part, is responsible for all aspects of the Force's internal and external communications, including proactive and reactive dealings with the media, campaigns, events, web and social media and of course internal communications. Whilst media relations is an important part of our work, we are increasingly integrating this with other forms of communication to expand the reach and timeliness of our communications and meet public expectations of more instant news.

**(3) Please describe your role and responsibilities within the press office. To whom do you report?**

**Response:** I head up the Corporate Communications Department, and report to the Deputy Chief Constable.

**(4) Describe the culture of relations between the press office on the one hand and other Avon and Somerset Constabulary staff/officers on the other. Do you consider that there is a relationship of trust and confidence? What changes, if any, would you wish to make to the working relationship and why?**

**Response:** The Corporate Communications Department is well respected and trusted across the organisation and highly valued for the support we provide.

**(5) Does the press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling the flow of information to the media?**

**Response:** The CCD is the conduit for contact with the media and responsible for proactively issuing information, responding to media enquiries, arranging media briefings and conferences and all other aspects of media relations.

**(6) Does the press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling access to Avon and Somerset Constabulary personnel?**

**Response:** All requests for media interviews with Avon and Somerset Police officers and staff are managed through CCD.

- (7) **What is your impression of the culture within Avon and Somerset Constabulary in relation to its dealings with the media (the media in all its forms)?**

**Response:** We have a culture of openness, honesty and accountability in our dealings with the media taking account of legal constraints and operational policing considerations. This flows from a healthy interaction between the CCD and the rest of the Constabulary. Communications officers spend time on Districts and in Departments to provide advice, support and guidance and CCD is usually the first port of call for anyone who wants to communicate via the media.

- (8) **Describe your impression of the culture of dealings between the press office and the media (the media in all its forms)? Do you consider the relationship between the press office and the media to be a successful one? What changes, if any, do you consider should be made to the relationship?**

**Response:** On a day to day basis, the team's dealings with the media are generally positive. Like any relationship where the desired outcomes do not always coincide there can be tensions, but I think it is important to differentiate here, between those journalists with whom the team has regular contact and, in the main, a good professional working relationship – predominantly local, regional and some national crime reporters – and the generalist reporters, who appear in the event of a major investigation or incident, with whom there is less interaction on a regular basis.

- (9) **Set out your understanding of the type of contact which press office staff have with the local and national media covering nature, extent, frequency and (in general terms) topics / content.**

**Response:** The nature of the Avon and Somerset Police area and its associated crime profile draws a high level of interest and calls from the media. On a day to day basis we work with regional and local

broadcast and print media but as the geographical base for a number of regional reporters covering national titles and broadcast channels including Sun, Times, Guardian, Mirror, BBC, ITN and Sky we also have a relatively high proportion of calls from national media organisations. Media calls are answered in the office from 8am-5.30pm Monday to Friday. Out of hours a Duty Communications Officer is available to take calls. The nature and frequency of the calls reflect those of a busy police communications team, from localised road traffic collisions, acquisitive crime and distraction burglaries through missing person enquiries to sexual assault, drug trafficking, organised crime and murder. Avon and Somerset Police also leads a regional south west serious organised crime team and the CCD is responsible for its media relations.

We also work on a limited basis with some of the national broadcast channels and their appointed production companies to produce documentaries for national television. These are strictly governed by legal agreements signed by both parties and carefully selected to promote greater public awareness and understanding.

**(10) Are contacts with the media restricted to certain staff or are all personnel within Avon and Somerset Constabulary able to deal with the media?**

**Response:** Generally contact should be made through the CCD and officers and staff across the force generally adhere to this. However there are occasions when officers are authorised to talk to the media about routine police matters which are relevant to their daily duties, predominantly in road traffic collisions, where officers from the Road Policing Unit (RPU) may talk to journalists who attend the scene. Many RPU officers are also trained as family liaison officers and therefore well versed in the rules of media handling. The CCD has an input into this training.

**(11) Does your office prioritise some sections of the media over others? For instance, does it prioritise communications and relations with the national media over those with the local media? If so, please give details and explain why.**

**Response:** All our dealings with the media are equitable and fair. However we do work particularly closely with local and regional media who provide an important day to day public service for witness and information appeals, and public information announcements. Local media play a crucial role in our communications planning; through them we are able to target local communities and keep them well informed. For example twice during the Joanna Yeates investigation we facilitated exclusives for the Bristol Evening Post, once with Joanna's best friend and the second time with the SIO after the trial.

- (12) **Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that information is disseminated widely to the media rather than to select journalists or titles? If so, please specify. If not, do you consider that there should be?**

**Response:** We do not routinely offer exclusive information to individual media. However we do respect the exclusivity of a single journalist who comes to us with an enquiry about a story, allowing them to publish or broadcast that story before we proactively offer it to any other media outlet. The media's use of Freedom of Information means that we are often called upon by individual journalists to respond to enquiries or make a comment but those responses are placed on our FOI site for all to see.

Occasionally where there is a substantial national appetite for a story, as in the case of Joanna Yeates, we may also work exclusively with a local media organisation to provide wider reassurance to the local community.

Otherwise, releases and statements proactively issued by us are usually sent to all relevant media and / or journalists. There are some occasions, usually based on geographic considerations or the specialist nature of a certain operation, when some media may be targeted ahead of others. In certain other circumstances where the level of media interest is very high we adopt a 'pooling arrangement' where attendance is usually restricted to, at most, one TV crew, one radio journalist and one print journalist and photographer. It is usual practice for the media to be asked to select from amongst themselves who will make up the pool. If they collectively are unable

to decide or a decision is taken to restrict the pool even tighter, it is common practice among police forces to choose whether to use a single media organisation, usually the Press Association, on the basis that they will provide copy, stills and footage to all other media organisations without charge.

- (13) What is the media's attitude towards the press office? In particular, are they satisfied by the provision of information and the routing of communications through the press office or do they prefer direct contact with individual personnel within Avon and Somerset Constabulary?**

**Response:** On a day to day basis the attitude is pretty positive but I think it is fair to say that the media suffer the existence of Corporate Communications Departments/press offices. Any journalist would say that their preference is to deal directly with an individual officer because they believe they would get more from them. We know from direct conversations with individual journalists subsequent to the Joanna Yeates murder investigation that the media became particularly frustrated by the perceived barrier of the CCD because of the paucity of information they felt they received from us.

- (14) Describe in general terms and with illustrative examples, the personal contact which you have with the local and national media. The Inquiry would like an overall picture of the type, frequency, duration and content of your contact with the media.**

**Response:** I have minimal regular day to day contact with the media. I meet very occasionally with editors of some local and regional print and broadcast media, for example the BBC, ITV and the Bristol Evening Post, but most of the contact is via the members of the CCD. I speak with various national journalists on an ad hoc basis to keep in touch, as they do with me, but the contact is relatively infrequent.

- (15) Describe what you are seeking to gain for Avon and Somerset Constabulary through your personal contact with the media.**

**Response:** My aim is to build positive professional working relationships with the media. There are advantages on both sides in doing so. As I have already said, the media are crucial in helping us to reach and communicate with the communities of Avon and Somerset. My personal contact is a means of strengthening the relationship and building mutual respect between our organisations. It also means that on those occasions where the decision or view of a member of the department is challenged or when a journalist is unwilling to take no for an answer the media organisation and I are in a far stronger position to reach a resolution.

The other main area of my contact with the media is through our work on documentaries. Our involvement in these has already been mentioned. I take a keen interest and oversight in these and we have strict criteria for deciding those which we pursue, based on the value they add to public understanding and awareness about specific aspects of policing. We don't participate in 'reality' TV shows such as 'Coppers' or 'Police, Camera, Action'. Recently broadcast examples (within the last eighteen months) of documentaries we have undertaken include BBC3 "The Boarding School Bomber", Channel 4 Despatches "The thief catchers" and BBC3 "Cannabis - What's the harm?"

- (16) Describe in general terms and using illustrative examples what you consider the local and national media have been seeking from you in your personal dealings with them?**

**Response:** I think most journalists recognise, as I do, the importance of a good working relationship. In major investigations or incidents, when there is significant pressure on each of us to fulfil our respective roles, it helps if there is mutual trust and respect. I believe those journalists and editors who make a conscious effort to keep in touch during quiet news times know that we are far better placed to discuss and resolve issues or differences of opinion as they arise rather than in the heat of a high profile news story, or in the aftermath of a complaint or breakdown in communication.

- (17) To what extent have you accepted hospitality from the media whilst working in your current position?**

- (18) Insofar as you have accepted hospitality from the media, what has been the nature of the hospitality that you have accepted? What records have you kept of such hospitality?**

**Response:** In the last three years I have accepted hospitality on three occasions from the media. All three were lunches and have been recorded as items of corporate hospitality.

- (19) To what extent have you provided hospitality for the media?**

- (20) Insofar as you have provided hospitality to the media, what has been the nature of that hospitality? What records have you kept of such hospitality?**

Twice a year the Chief Constable holds an event for local and regional editors and journalists, including those regional representatives of national media based in the south west. The purpose of the event is for the media to raise issues (and likewise us) in a less pressurised environment, away from deadlines and the hothouse environment of busy news and press desks.

The Deputy Chief Constable and I also hold a media breakfast on a bi-annual basis to give local and regional editors and key journalists the opportunity to raise any operational issues about the mechanics of the service the Corporate Communications Team provide.

These are also recorded as hospitality.

- (21) Have you ever accepted gifts from the media? If so, please give full details (including who gave you the gift, when, what the gift was, and why you believe they gave you the gift).**

**Response:** No.

- (22) Have you ever discussed the media, or media coverage, with politicians? If so, how important is such communication and why?**

**Response:** Not in my present job. Of course, it was common practice when I worked in local government for the Head of Communications



to discuss the media and media coverage with the Leader of the Council and lead Cabinet members or the Elected Mayor. I am not aware that this has changed.

- (23) What do you know about the level of hospitality accepted by Avon and Somerset Constabulary, including by officers of the rank of Assistant Chief Constable and above? Do you consider the level to be appropriate now and to have been appropriate in the past? In addressing this issue please give your reasons and set out what you consider to be an appropriate level of hospitality for police personnel to accept from the media (if any). What records are kept of such hospitality?**

**Response:** There is a Force hospitality register on which I believe all gifts and hospitality are listed. I do not view it on a frequent basis and when I have done there has been nothing that drew my attention. I have no cause to believe that the levels of hospitality are at all inappropriate.

- (24) Do you consider that you have been adequately trained and/or given sufficient guidance on the appropriate handling of the media?**

- (25) Do you consider that you have been adequately trained and/or given sufficient guidance to enable you to give sound advice and/or leadership on handling the media to your staff?**

**Response:** I have fourteen years experience of working with the media in the capacity of Head of Communications, spanning local, regional and national print and broadcast media. In November 2000 whilst at Southwark Council I led the council's media response and my team and I provided strategic and practical support to the police in crafting local witness appeals following the tragic death of Damilola Taylor.

All staff in the Corporate Communications Department are members of ACPO Association of Police Communicators. Although I am no longer a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations I do attend events at the invitation of the Chair of the South West Region. Additionally the Heads of Communication from the five South West

forces speak monthly and meet quarterly to share experience and best practice.

I do consider this and my previous experience equip me to guide and lead the Department in media handling.

- (26) Do you provide training or guidance to your staff on (i) conducting and maintaining appropriate relationships with the media; (ii) accepting/offering hospitality; (iii) bribery and (iv) requests for 'off-the-record' comments? If so, please specify. Does that training/guidance reflect/follow the ACPO guidance?**

**Response:** Each new member of Corporate Communications staff receives a personal induction by me and is made fully aware of the need to maintain appropriate relationships with the media. All new staff also attend a force induction course which includes input from the Internal Investigations Unit covering amongst other things, hospitality, bribery and confidentiality. Offers of hospitality from the media are very rare indeed in my experience and would be registered should they be offered. The CCD does not have any budget for hospitality. Our media protocol, which was written following the Joanna Yeates investigation as a guide for staff and officers inexperienced in dealing with the media, is clear on the question of 'off the record' information or 'guidance'. It states that this is only provided when it is 'beneficial to the force either by a journalist delaying the publication of a story (where such publication may, for example, jeopardise an imminent arrest), change the tone/approach taken towards a story by a journalist, or even deter them from running the story at all.'

It also states that the decision to give guidance or off the record briefings must be based on knowledge of the media organisation and, most importantly, the integrity and trustworthiness of the journalist.

- (27) Do you consider that press office staff feel confident that they understand what is, and what is not, appropriate contact with the media? When answering this question, please explain what you consider to be "appropriate contact" with the media.**

**Response:** Corporate Communications staff are very clear about what is and what is not appropriate contact with the media. I consider appropriate contact with the media to be professional, honest, proportionate, relevant and reflective of an agreed organisational view.

**(28) Do you consider that press office staff generally feel comfortable briefing the media and responding to media requests for information?**

**Response:** The role of the media relations officer has become increasingly challenging with the advent of 24 hour broadcasting and social media. Deadlines are shorter and there is a far greater pressure from journalists to respond swiftly and extensively to an often relentless flow of enquiries. Consequently the media relations officer must be assertive and robust in their dealings with the media. This is not always a comfortable position as was eminently clear in the Joanna Yeates case. However I had and continue to have absolute confidence in the CCD staff to withstand media pressure and remain robust and professional in their approach. My team know that should they encounter any difficulties with the media I am always available to support them and intervene should it be necessary.

**(29) Do incidents that attract national media interest present particular challenges? If so, what are those challenges and do you consider that the press office is adequately equipped to respond effectively and appropriately to such media interest?**

**Response:** In most instances national media interest presents little additional challenge. Other than an increase in the volume of calls the principles of media handling remain the same. On rare occasions however, and the Joanna Yeates investigation was one of these, a high level of interest over a sustained period in the absence of other news presents very particular challenges which go beyond the communications team right to the heart of the investigation, and its continuing integrity:

**Contempt:** it has become almost common practice amongst certain media now to name suspects pre-charge and the anonymity of social media increases this risk. We still maintain a rigorous adherence to

the law and will never confirm the identity of anyone unless and once they are charged. Clearly this puts those answering media enquiries under additional pressure. We were under considerable and continuing pressure to confirm the arrest of Mr Christopher Jefferies in the Joanna Yeates investigation but did not do so. Throughout the investigation members of the CCD reminded journalists of the need to be circumspect about what information they published because of the potential for contempt and for any eventual trial being prejudiced. When we became aware of the involvement of the Attorney General's office we kept in regular contact so that they were aware of our concerns as they arose. Journalists were also specifically reminded of the Attorney General's media advisory notice.

- **'Jigsaw identification'**: Media speculation on lines of enquiry can get out of hand and there is real potential for journalists to pin down crucial investigative strands through mass media enquiries using a process of elimination. The boundaries of what is reasonable have become very blurred. During the Joanna Yeates investigation the print media in particular adopted a tactic of elimination via multiple speculative media enquiries daily to get the heart of the investigation. Such was the relentless nature and volume of such enquiries that by agreement between the Chief Constable, ACC Hansen and I, we ceased to provide a response to many of them in order to protect the SIO and preserve the integrity of the investigation. This was a significant part of many journalists' frustrations.
- **Leaks / investigative journalism**: As we have seen in a number of high profile cases, there is a tendency for the media to conduct their own investigation and call their own 'experts' in what they perceive to be an absence of regular information from the police. Such 'experts' comment without detailed inside knowledge of an investigation. Used irresponsibly or quoted out of context, the inclusion of their comments often serves to fuel speculation. In the Joanna Yeates case we know that journalists made contact directly with forensic and other external service providers to find new leads or confirm their own particular line of enquiry. Similarly, a number of 'experts' were called upon to give their analysis of the investigation. Our decision to exclude ITN from a press briefing was underpinned by what we believed to be irresponsible and ill-conceived use of a so

called 'expert' in a substantial prime time news programme to which we were given scant opportunity to respond prior to the piece being aired, being asked only whether we had done vehicle stops and not mentioning the views of the 'expert'.

- **Dangers of comparison:** Journalists showed a lack of understanding between the Joanna Yeates case where the offender was still at large and undetected and those of Derek Bird / Raoul Moat where in each case the offender was known. There was an unrealistic expectation that more information should be shared about the focus of the investigation and the investigative leads that were being followed. Clearly this could have compromised the integrity of the investigation.
- **'The public have a right to know';** There is a view amongst some journalists that detailed information should be made available on the basis that the public have a right to know. This expectation is unrealistic and creates another focus for tension between the media and police media relations teams.

Following the investigation I reviewed the media contact for the 34 days from the first missing person appeal on 20 December 2010 until 22 January 2011 when Vincent Tabak was charged with Joanna Yeates' murder. I produced a summary of that contact entitled "The murder of Joanna Yeates – the inside story" to illustrate the nature of media interest which I have submitted with this statement.

**(30) What improvements, if any, do you think could or should be made to the systems, policies and/or training in your office to ensure that press office staff conduct and maintain appropriate relationships with the media?**

**Response:** We are continually reviewing the way that we work and our interactions with the media. Following significant cases and incidents we hold a Lessons Learnt session. In the light of the Joanna Yeates investigation for example we reviewed and rewrote our Media Relations Protocol and the Communications Module for SIO Training.

- (31) Are you and/or your staff members of the Association of Police Communicators? From your perspective, what are the benefits of membership of this Association? Could the Association assist or assist further in ensuring that relations between police personnel and the media are appropriate. If so, how?**

**Response:** The CCD has membership of the Association of Police Communicators and I or a member(s) of my team attend the conferences. I think its main strength as a forum lies in sharing best practice and specific case studies / experiences. Our e-services manager sits on the APC advisory group as the chair of the digital communications sub-group.

- (32) Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from Avon and Somerset Constabulary to the media and/or private detectives a problem for Avon and Somerset Constabulary?**

**Response:** I am not aware of any leaks from the Constabulary and have never come across private detectives.

- (33) Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from the press office to the media and/or private detectives a problem for Avon and Somerset Constabulary?**

**Response:** They are not but that does not mean to say we should be complacent.

- (34) What systems and procedures do you have in place in the press office, if any, to identify, respond to and detect the source of leaks? Do you consider that they are effective? What changes, if any, do you consider should be made?**

**Response:** The size of the Department and the media logging systems within it would make the suppression of any leaks extremely difficult. If leaks were to be discovered I personally would deal with the media response. The detection and subsequent investigation would be a Professional Standards and potentially a criminal and disciplinary matter and would be dealt with as such, with my support in whatever capacity it was required.

- (35) **In the last 5 years, how many investigations have been conducted into actual or suspected leaks from the press office and how many have led to the successful identification of the source of the leak? What was the outcome of the other investigations?**

**Response:** None to my knowledge.

- (36) **In the last 5 years has disciplinary action been taken against any member of press office staff for leaking information to the media and/or private detectives? If so, please identify the number of cases and their outcome. There is no need to identify the person or persons the subject of the disciplinary process.**

**Response:** None to my knowledge.

- (37) **Insofar as applicable, what do you consider are the driving forces behind, or the main causes of, leaks from (i) police press offices and (ii) the police service in general?**

**Response:** There is no doubt that journalists are under significant pressure from news desks and editors to deliver the next scoop or the next exclusive – I was told during the Joanna Yeates investigation by a national news desk editor that sales had increased as a result of their constant coverage, hence the imperative from on high to sustain the flow of exclusives and new leads. In such circumstances it's easy to see where the drive is coming from to try and persuade people to leak information.

- (38) **To what extent do you believe bribery of police personnel by the media to be a current problem for Avon and Somerset Constabulary (if at all)?**

**Response:** I have no reason to believe bribery of police personnel by the media is a problem in Avon and Somerset.

- (39) **Do you or, to your knowledge, staff working for the press office, ever give "off-the-record" briefings or have "off-the-**

**record" conversations with the media (both local and national)? If so, please give full details and illustrative examples. Please also explain why they take place and what you consider to be the benefits of such communications.**

**Response:** Staff in CCD do not proactively undertake any 'off the record' briefings nor have 'off the record' conversations. But on occasions they do give guidance to individual journalists in response to an enquiry from them as I have referred to in my response to Question 26. These are tightly governed and must be approved by either the Head of Corporate Communications or, where appropriate, the SIO or Bronze / Silver / Gold Commander.

- (40) Do you or, to your knowledge, staff working for the press office ever confirm information for the media (i.e. information which the media have obtained from other sources) on an "off-the-record" basis? If so, please give details and explain why this is done.**

**Response:** I would refer you to my responses to questions 26 & 39

- (41) Insofar as applicable, what records are kept of the information shared on an "off-the-record" basis? Are records kept of all "off-the-record" briefings and the information provided at them?**

**Response:** All contacts with the media within CCD are logged on a computer-based system which is used by all members of the CCD. This covers full details of all interactions between the media and individual members of the team, and includes media enquiries and our responses, the issue of press releases and statements, arrangements for media briefings and press conferences, details of interviews and so on. It also includes details of any guidance given to individual journalists.

- (42) What do you understand "off-the-record" to mean in this context? Do you believe that members of the media always interpret it this way? Is there scope for the media misunderstanding the intentions of the police officer/police**



**staff member when s/he provides information on an "off-the-record" basis?**

**Response:** As I have already indicated in my response to question 26 our media protocol is clear on the definition of 'off the record' information or 'guidance'. It states that this is only provided when it is 'beneficial to the force either by a journalist delaying the publication of a story (where such publication may, for example, jeopardise an imminent arrest), change the tone/approach taken towards a story by a journalist, or even deter them from running the story at all.'

It also states that the decision to give guidance or off the record briefings must be based on knowledge of the media organisation and, most importantly, the integrity and trustworthiness of the journalist.

I do not know whether all journalists interpret it in that way so there is always scope for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. It would be my hope that by working with the guidance in the Protocol we can minimise this.

**(43) What is your view of the practice of police officers and police staff having "off-the-record" communications with the media?**

**Response:** In my view there are only a very few instances where this kind of briefing is appropriate and those are outlined in our media protocol. I believe the term 'off the record' is a misnomer – at some stage any journalist who is privy to off the record information is going to want to publish to steal a march on other media. At best in any but the most rare occurrences, off the record briefing can only buy a delay rather than a complete avoidance in material being published.

**(44) In your experience, insofar as applicable, where information is provided on an "off-the-record" basis, do the media tend to honour the wishes of the person providing the information? Please give illustrative examples.**

**Response:** As already indicated, an off the record discussion or guidance is only ever used by CCD on a very selective basis for sound

operational or judicial reasons and, if possible, with journalists who we know and whose professional integrity is such that we can trust them to adhere to such an agreement. Of course, the pre-existence of a professional working relationship cannot always be guaranteed and in such cases the decision whether or not to have an off the record discussion or give guidance must be balanced against the operational risk of not doing so.

**(45) What was the media strategy for the Joanna Yeates murder enquiry?**

**Response:** The aims of the media strategy for the Joanna Yeates murder investigation were:

- To consider the media as an additional investigative tactic as and when appropriate and beneficial to the direction and progress of the investigation.
- To work with the media as a means of making public appeals for information and witnesses.
- To fulfil our duty of care towards the victim's family and immediate friends, provide protection from excessive media intrusion, and support when they choose to speak to the media to aid the investigation.
- To work with the media as a means of reassuring the community strategy in Clifton, the wider Bristol area and beyond.
- To adopt a proportionate approach to ongoing media speculation and its potential impact on the investigation.

We used a broader number of communications channels than just print and broadcast media in the Joanna Yeates murder enquiry as is our usual practice. These included Facebook, Twitter, our own Avon and Somerset website. These were crucial in targeting appeals for information and witnesses and in providing a 'trusted source' of information throughout the enquiry.

**(46) Who set this strategy?**

**Response:** The SIO set the media strategy and we continued to review and develop it throughout the investigation with my assistance with oversight from ACC Rod Hansen as Gold Commander.

**(47) What was the goal of the media strategy? What was Avon and Somerset Constabulary seeking to achieve?**

**Response:** The goals of the media strategy were to:

- Regularly review and consider the media as a tool in progressing the investigation on an ongoing basis.
- Schedule press conferences / briefings at timely points in the investigation as a means of achieving strategic aim(s) of the media strategy.
- Avoid interaction with the media at crucial times to preserve the integrity of the investigation, witnesses and information.
- Establish 'if asked' position where appropriate in anticipation of and response to questions.

In so doing we sought to achieve the aims of the media strategy set out in my response to question 45.

**(48) To what extent do you consider that the media strategy was successful in delivering the outcomes for which Avon and Somerset Constabulary was aiming? If the media strategy was not entirely successful, please outline what the issues were. Were any lessons learned incorporated into any force policy, guidance or operating procedures? If so, please specify.**

**Response:** Detective Chief Inspector Phil Jones will comment on the success of the media strategy from an investigative perspective. From a communications / media perspective there are some areas where I believe we could have done things differently – more media briefings at regular intervals for example - although I'm not convinced that it would have made any difference. I think the appetite for new information was so insatiable that certain media

would still have conducted their own investigations and used their own "experts" to give another view.

In summer 2011, prompted in part by a review of various cases and incidents including the Joanna Yeates case and the April disturbances in Bristol, and also in part by the rapidly changing impact of social media in the way we handle our media relations, I undertook a wide-ranging review of our communications related policies and associated training for SIOs and critical incidents.

As a result we have new media, social media and critical incident protocols which govern the way we work, taking account of the impact of 24 hour broadcasting, tweeting journalists and the general immediacy of social media. All new SIOs undertake a full day of communications and media training. Two highly experienced ex-print and broadcast journalists, now specialist consultant trainers, run the session throughout the day. I introduce the session and attend at intervals throughout the day. To maintain consistency of approach, all existing SIOs have also undertaken similar training.

**(49) Who directed and controlled police contact and communications with the media?**

**Response:** Our contact and communications with the media was led by me, working closely with the Chief Constable and the ACC for Protective Services. We held a meeting each morning to discuss developments in the case, overnight media coverage and strategic media handling going forward. These meetings relieved some of the pressure on the SIO enabling him to focus on the investigation.

**(50) What role did the press office have in handling and briefing the media? To your knowledge, what was the media's attitude towards the press office during this enquiry? Were they happy for communications to be routed through the press office or did they prefer to speak to individual police personnel?**

**Response:** All contact with the media relating to the Joanna Yeates murder investigation was channelled through the CCD. Media interest grew rapidly after the missing person investigation began – by Thursday 23 December there was significant national interest and

it was the lead story on at least one national broadcast channel. Once this became a murder investigation the media interest was unrelenting. Night news desks called in the early hours once first editions were published and national TV breakfast programmes followed soon after. Within days we ceased to take overnight calls on the basis that these calls were unreasonable and speculative and that we would inform the media when we had anything further to say. On Tuesday 11 January at our daily meeting we took a tactical decision not to respond to any further speculative media enquiries at any time following real concerns that the media collectively would, through a process of elimination (or 'jigsaw identification'), get to the heart of the investigation and prejudice the integrity of the investigation itself and any subsequent trial.

Journalists, pressurised by news desks and editors, were not happy with this arrangement and the relationship between the media and the CCD became very strained. Clearly the journalists would have preferred direct contact with the investigation team but that was untenable and completely unrealistic. It was our job to protect the SIO, the team and others as far as possible to allow them to focus on catching the killer, and that was never going to be an easy task.

**(51) What was the senior investigating officer's role in handling the media?**

**Response:** We tried wherever possible to free up the SIO to focus on the investigation. He was present and spoke at all media conferences but otherwise the media handling was carried out by the Corporate Communications Department.

**(52) How were the media briefed? Were briefings confined to open press conferences or were there occasions where reporters/titles were briefed individually or in small groups?**

**Response:** The media were briefed collectively at a series of media conferences however as has already been indicated, we responded to many individual enquiries from journalists as is common practice.

**(53) How were ad hoc enquiries from the media dealt with?**

**Response:** Ad hoc enquiries were dealt with in the usual way via the CCD. The lead Media Relations Officer took many calls outside of normal hours and I was also involved in a number of discussions with journalists on some of the more difficult or challenging speculative issues.

- (54) **What records were kept of contact with the media? Please explain how contact with the media was recorded, if at all. Were records kept of all information shared with the media? If not, why not?**

**Response:** As already indicated, all contact with the media is logged on a computer based system.

- (55) **Were there any leaks/unauthorised disclosures to the media in respect of the investigation which were believed to have originated from Avon and Somerset Constabulary? If so please give details and the results of any investigations conducted into the leaks.**

**Response:** There were a number of inquiries or press reports that gave cause for suspicion that there may have been leaks of information about the investigation. The investigation team were very cautious about the extent to which investigative information was known in the Constabulary and a criminal investigation into possible leaks has run since the early stages of the investigation. I am aware that there is no evidence that any of those leaks originated from Avon and Somerset Constabulary.

In my response to question 29 I refer to the use of 'experts' by the media and 'jigsaw' identification. This sort of activity was very prevalent in the reporting of the Joanna Yeates murder enquiry giving an impression of leaks when there may well have been none. We were aware that the press were following our every move, scrutinising activity at 44 Canynge Road, at Longwood Lane where Joanna's body was found and, later Aberdeen Road where Vincent Tabak stayed with his girlfriend. Whilst the investigation team followed the recognised methodology for a murder investigation, the media had no such constraints and interviewed witnesses before or after they were seen by the police, neighbours, friends and anyone

who might have any connection with any aspect of the investigation however slight.

I am aware of one unauthorised disclosure. This was in connection with the arrest of Mr Jefferies. A press statement was issued at about 07.40 shortly after his arrest on 30 December 2010 and after receiving confirmation that the family had been informed stating as follows:

*'Just after 07.00hrs this morning, police attended an address in Canynge Road and arrested a 65 year old man on suspicion of murder. He has been taken into custody at a police station within the Avon and Somerset force area and detained for questioning. Detectives investigating Joanna's murder are continuing to carry out forensic examinations, and are also continuing to appeal for anyone with any information that can help the enquiry to call the Operation Braid incident room on 0845 456 7000 or the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111'.*

The first call asking for confirmation that it was Mr Jefferies who had been arrested was received in CCD at 08.10 that day. Calls of that nature continued to be received throughout the morning but in accordance with usual practice no steer or guidance was given and callers were repeatedly told that would remain the case. Reporters used a number of means to seek confirmation. For example even before 9am a caller asked for confirmation on the basis he had overheard reference to Mr Jefferies being arrested on a police radio. Confirmation was refused. Shortly afterwards still before 9am, reporters from ITV and BBC attended Canynge Road stating they had police permission to speak/interview with the landlord of the property. They were advised that was not the case. Despite lack of confirmation ITV said they were planning to name Mr Jefferies but were beaten to it by Sky News.

At just after 9.30am we received a call from a Press Association reporter asking whether the arrested man was Mr Jefferies as Sky were running that story and he 'had a right to know'. Subsequently later that morning a journalist from the Press Association went to Trinity Road Police Station, Bristol and asked the front office member of staff if Mr Jefferies was there. She checked internally how to

respond and it was confirmed that Mr Jefferies was being detained within Avon and Somerset Constabulary but his location would not be confirmed. This was apparently done on the basis that Sky News was already broadcasting Mr Jefferies identity as the arrested person and without reference to the CCD or the Investigation Team. As soon as we became aware this had happened we contacted the Press Association and told them this was not official confirmation and should not be used.

We continued to be pressed for confirmation of his identity throughout the day.

- (56) What is your reaction to paragraphs 6 to 11 of Richard Wallace's second witness statement, which is available on the Inquiry's website (16th January 2012)?**

**Response:** The alleged briefings he spoke of did not happen.

- (57) Was any of the contact between the media and you, or to your knowledge, any press office staff, in relation to the murder investigation/Christopher Jefferies on an "off-the-record" basis? If so, please give full particulars, including details of the information provided.**

**Response:** We did not undertake any off the record briefings with the media,

- (58) Did you, or to your knowledge, any press office staff confirm any information to the media, relating to the murder investigation/Christopher Jefferies, on an "off-the-record" basis? If so, please give details and explain why this was done.**

**Response:** We did not undertake any off the record briefings with the media.

- (59) Insofar as applicable, where information was provided on an "off-the-record" basis, did the media honour your wishes/the wishes of the person providing the information? Please give illustrative examples.**



**Response:** We did not provide information off the record. However there were occasions where we attempted to negotiate with journalists in order to stop the disclosure of information that could have had a material impact on the investigation. One such occurrence happened on the evening of Sunday 2 January when there were negotiations with a journalist and the editor of a national tabloid newspaper to avoid the publication of potentially compromising detail relating to DNA found on Joanna. In this instance we reached a compromise.

**(60) Did you, or to your knowledge, other police personnel ask the media or any individual reporter(s) to keep confidential particular information relating to the murder investigation/Christopher Jefferies (including information obtained by the media/reporter(s) from non-police sources)? If so, did the media or the individual reporter(s) comply with the request? Please give details of the circumstances concerned.**

**(61) In your experience when police officers/staff ask the media to delay publishing particular information because of the risk of prejudice to a criminal investigation or future criminal trial, to what extent and in what circumstances do the media comply with the request? Please give illustrative examples.**

**Response:** As has already been indicated, in normal circumstances, we only do this on very rare occasions. However during the Joanna Yeates murder enquiry we spent a great deal of time negotiating with journalists and editors about content, timing and detail on a range of enquiries as the two examples below demonstrate:

Example 1: At the end of December the Sun contacted us about a reward which the SIO was not keen to pursue at that time. Nevertheless the Sun went on to contact Crimestoppers to offer £25,000 to add to their existing £10,000 reward. On 29 December the Communications Manager of Crimestoppers wrote to the Sun setting out their conditions for a joint reward. A week elapsed and there was no further progress. Then on 6 January the Sun called to say that they were going ahead after all with a £50,000 reward.

Crimestoppers were unable to support at such short notice and the Sun planned to ask readers to call in to a Sun number with information. We expressed concerns about the lack of proper administrative processes and the potential for vital pieces of information to be mis-recorded or inappropriately used. The Sun was going ahead whatever we said. After discussions with the News Editor, who made it clear that this story was selling newspapers, it was finally negotiated that a police incident room number be used.

Example 2: On 4 January 2011 we were contacted by the crime editor of the Sun who had heard that three items of clothing - a sock, a shoe and something else - were missing when Joanna's body was found. This was information that the SIO did not want in the public domain as it may have been a matter which he wanted to put to any possible offender. However it was clear that the Sun would run the story on a 'scoop' basis regardless of our view. As a result the decision was taken to hold a press conference the following day when the Sun story broke.

**(62) In your experience, when police officers/staff ask the media not to publish particular information at all because of the risk of harm to the public interest, to what extent and in what circumstances do the media comply with the request? Please give illustrative examples.**

**(63) Have there been occasions where, to your knowledge, the media have obtained information (from whatever source) and voluntarily not published the information because of the harm it might do the public interest or the interests of justice? Please give examples of the circumstances in which this has occurred.**

**Response:** On the whole, the media are largely cooperative and responsible. In a case last year, we had extensive discussions with one national broadsheet paper about the nature and application of a section 39 reporting restriction in the case of a paedophile teacher. The result of these was positive and the identification of the school and the individual were not disclosed for fear of identifying the victims.

- (64) What limitations, if any, do you consider there should be on police officers and police staff leaving the police service to work for the media and vice versa?**

**Response:** I think it would be very difficult to enforce limitations on police officers and staff leaving the police service to work for the media but it is has not been an issue for Avon and Somerset to my knowledge.

- (65) In relation to dealing with the media in general, do you consider that there is a basis for applying different standards and rules to police staff from those that apply to police officers (the latter having the powers of the office of constable). If so, (i) do you consider that different standards and rules should apply and (ii) please specify what you consider the differences should be.**

**Response:** I cannot personally see any benefits in having different sets of standards and rules for police officers and staff. Each should operate to the same rigorous set of rules.

- (66) What is your view of the recommendations contained in the HMIC's recent report "Without Fear or Favour" insofar as they concern relations between the media and the police? (If you have not seen it, the report is available online).**

**Response:** Avon and Somerset is reviewing its policies and procedures in the light of this and as a senior manager I am involved in those discussions.

- (67) What is your view of the recommendations contained in Elizabeth Filkin's report "The Ethical Issues Arising from the Relationship Between Police and Media"? (If you have not seen it, the report is available online).**

**Response:** This Report clearly focussed on relationships between the Metropolitan Police and the media and any changes we feel are necessary as a result of the Report will, I believe, be picked up in the review referred to in my response to question 66.

**(68) Do you consider that there are different or further steps which could and/or should be taken to ensure that relationships between police personnel and the media are and remain appropriate?**

**Response:** As I have already said, I think it is important to operate in a culture of openness, honesty, transparency and accountability. The existence of such a culture is far more powerful than endless rules and processes. There is a need to have some processes in place to provide a structure within which everyone can operate.

4. Where they exist, the documents I have been asked to provide to the Inquiry are being sent separately.
5. Where the facts set out in my responses are within my direct knowledge they are true. Where information is provided, but supplied to me by others, that information is true to the best of my knowledge information and belief. Where I have been asked to express a view or opinion, they are mine and genuinely held.

DATED THIS

28

FEBRUARY 2012

Signed.....

[Redacted signature box]

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Amanda Hirst