
The Leveson Inquiry into the Culture Practices and Ethics of the Press

Witness: Barbara Brewis
Occupation: Media & Marketing Manager, Durham Constabulary
Address: c/o Aykley Heads, Durham City

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true

Signed. Dated.....20/02/12

1. Who you are and a brief summary of your career history:

My name is Barbara Brewis. I am Media and Marketing Manager for Durham Constabulary. I have been involved with the media my entire working life, which started in 1971 when I became a reporter on a local newspaper. After a varied newspaper career which culminated in my appointment of chief sub editor on a major regional evening paper, I moved into public relations when I was appointed press officer to Gateshead Council in 1990. I remained in this post until 1999 when I was appointed Deputy Head of Media Services at Northumbria Police. I left the post in 2010 when I was appointed to my current role, Media and Marketing Manager at Durham Constabulary.

2. Please describe the role and remit of the press office within Durham Constabulary

The Media and Marketing Team, which comprises myself and 4.5 (Full Time Equivalent posts) Media and Marketing Officers, is part of Tasking and Co-ordination Command. Our role is to present a positive image of Durham Constabulary; to assist the force in the reduction and prevention of crime; to promote a two-way flow of information between the force and the communities

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to increase public confidence and satisfaction; to protect the force's reputation. The team provides a full media and marketing service to the force. This includes: issuing proactive news releases; responding to enquiries from regional and national media; updating the news section of the force website and our Facebook, Twitter and YouTube sites; providing communications support for major incidents; developing, co-ordinating and implementing forcewide and area-based external and internal communication campaigns; developing and producing promotional material; editing and producing neighbourhood newsletters; writing, editing and producing the online staff newspaper; taking photographs as required for internal and external use. Members of the team also have an input into various officer training courses with regards to media relations, and provide ad hoc media advice to individual officers. We provide a 24/7 service to the force, via a callout rota in which all team members take part.

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

My role is to act as the strategic lead on media and marketing issues for the force. My responsibilities are to manage and carry out all of the above activities. I report in the first instance to the Tasking and Co-ordination Commander and thereafter to the Deputy Chief Constable.

4. Describe the culture of relations between the press office on the one hand and other Durham 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?

I consider that in Durham there is a general culture of trust between the Media and Marketing Team and officers and staff, which has been built up over a

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number of years of positive interaction. Officers are aware of the benefits of engendering good working relationships with the media, they generally react positively when asked to engage with the media and regularly seek advice from the team as to the best way of doing this, as well as offering their own ideas for items which could generate positive publicity. They are also very enthusiastic about working with the team to use social networking sites to engage with local communities.

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

The Media and Marketing Team acts as the main, but not the sole, communication channel between the force and the media. Officers are empowered to have good working relationships with the media at local level to publicise local issues, but will contact the team in relation to more complex or controversial issues, particularly those which could present a reputational risk to the force.

6. Does the press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling access to Durham Constabulary personnel?

Durham Constabulary personnel are empowered to speak directly to the media, but less experienced personnel are naturally more cautious about doing this so will take expert advice from the Media and Marketing Team. In general, requests from film companies for the force to take part in documentaries, TV programmes etc are routed through the Media and Marketing Team. Officers have access to a Media Guide and receive an input on media issues as part of their development programme.

7. What is your impression of the culture within Durham Constabulary in relation to its dealings with the media (the media in all its forms)?

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There is a culture of openness and transparency between the force and the media, within a professional framework. There is a general willingness to engage with the media as way of communicating with our communities, but without compromising operational effectiveness, ongoing investigations or forthcoming legal proceedings.

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?

The relationship is largely successful. In my short experience with the force (just under two years) I have not come across any large scale resistance to working with the media or, conversely, any over-zealous use of the media. We have good working relationships with the reporters who contact us on a regular basis, including those who work for local media outlets and local representatives of national media outlets. If any changes were needed, it would be to promote the value of media training for officers and encourage more of them to have the confidence to carry out radio/TV interviews.

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.

We receive dally calls from local, regional and national media on a wide range of topics. This will typically include requests for information about ongoing incidents, comments to accompany policing-related articles, requests for photos of offenders who have been sentenced, comments following trials, and comments for articles relating to individual complaints. Over the last 18

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months there has been an increase in media enquiries about police funding, redundancies and closure of police stations.

10. Are contacts with the media restricted to certain staff or are all personnel within Durham Constabulary able to deal with the media?

All personnel are empowered to deal with the media, but it is usually officers from the rank of sergeant upwards who are most likely to do this on a regular basis. However, PCs and PCSOs will speak to the media on occasion, if they are the best people to address a particular issue. The neighbourhood inspectors in particular have regular contact with local media.

11. Does the press 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.

We tend to have closer working relationships with journalists working for local media as they are in regular daily contact. However, we also have good working relationships with the North East representatives of national media outlets, including the Press Association and Sky News. Our aim is always to get the best possible coverage of a particular item, so this may mean that we offer a story to a local media outlet first and expect the nationals to follow it up. On occasions, items have been put out on general release but are only followed up nationally when other media outlets read the local coverage.

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?

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This depends on the news item. Local items are tailored to local contacts but general good news items about the force are sent to all relevant media contacts, including national representatives. Items of particular note will be publicised via the Durham Police Voicebank, to which all the media have equal access. Some items will be of specialist interest only, so will be sent to selected outlets. The majority of news items are replicated on our website, to which all the media have access.

No media outlet is given preferential treatment, although if an individual reporter becomes aware of a story or issue exclusively it would be unprofessional not to take this into consideration when planning how we distribute information.

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 Durham Constabulary?

The vast majority of journalists do not seem to have any issues about routing their enquiries through the Media and Marketing Team. This includes enquiries where they have already spoken to an officer at local level about an incident but still come to us for an official police comment. However, many reporters have good working relationships with individual officers, especially in the neighbourhood teams, and this also works well. The two are not mutually exclusive.

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.

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With one exception, my sole contact with the media is in a professional capacity, although some local reporters follow my personal Twitter account. Some reporters contact me direct, as they have worked with me over a number of years; others will ring the main office number and speak to whoever picks up the phone. I do not generally socialise with the media. The exception is that since 1974 I have been a personal friend of a journalist who now works for BBC Radio Newcastle and we are in contact several times a year on a purely social basis. Another good friend is also a former journalist.

15. Describe what you are seeking to gain for Durham Constabulary through your personal contact with the media.

My contact with the media is on the basis of raising awareness of the positive work done by Durham Constabulary, so improving public confidence; assisting the force in reducing and prevention crime, through the dissemination of key messages and witness appeals; protecting the force's reputation. It is easier to do this if I can establish an atmosphere of mutual trust between myself and journalists.

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?

I would surmise that the media want me to be a source of information and to show some appreciation of their needs (e.g. deadlines, story angles) so that I can get the right information to them from the right people at the right time.

17. To what extent have you accepted hospitality from the media whilst working in your current position?

I have never accepted hospitality from the media in my current position.

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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?

As above.

19. To what extent have you provided hospitality for the media?

None in my current role.

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?

As above – not applicable

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).

To the best of my knowledge I have never accepted gifts from the media or any form of inducement to provide information.

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

On occasions we will discuss media coverage of a particular policing issue if the local MP is directly involved - this would always be at the direction of a senior officer. Last summer, for example a Media and Marketing officer was asked to liaise with Kevan Jones MP regarding the case of a County Durham

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man who had died abroad some years ago in controversial circumstances. Mr Jones was advising the deceased's family and the police had the task of exhuming his body from a cemetery in Chester-le-Street. The discussions with Mr Jones ensured the process was planned smoothly and a consistent strategy was devised to deal with media enquiries.

23. What do you know about the level of hospitality accepted by Durham 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?

I am not consulted about the level of hospitality accepted by any officers.

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

I consider that I have the benefit of over 40 years' experience working in a variety of roles in a media environment to enable me to have sufficient guidance on the appropriate handling of the media. I hold the Certificate of Proficiency in Journalism (1971) and in 2006 I completed the Effective Media Strategy Course at the national police training centre in Bramshill. In addition, I am a regular contributor to the national police communicator's course. In February of this year I acted as an umpire (media) in a major counter-terrorism exercise.

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?

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It is more a collaborative effort based on coaching and mentoring – some of the team are more experienced than others in dealing with the media and share knowledge, while others have a marketing background and share knowledge. Myself and colleagues have regular media inputs into force level training courses.

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?

There is general ongoing guidance amongst the team which reflects good practice in other forces and the ACPO guidance. Two members of the team have completed the national Police Communicators Course and arrangements are being made for three others to attend.

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.

Staff understand that contact with the media should be on a professional basis, that no unauthorised information is released, and no information is released which could compromise a victim's anonymity, an ongoing investigation or a forthcoming prosecution.

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

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I consider they do feel comfortable, based on the fact that it represents the bulk of their daily business.

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?

We have one of the UK's smallest police media and marketing teams but have shown that we can respond effectively to incidents which attract national media interest. On January 1, 2012, a County Durham man shot three members of his family then himself. This being a Bank Holiday, when very little else newsworthy was happening, we found ourselves at the centre of national media attention. The on-call media and marketing officer responded overnight, while two other team members joined him for the ongoing media response during the day. This high level of media scrutiny continued for the rest of the week and beyond, and although the team worked hard, long hours, they demonstrated both resilience and professionalism throughout. We were equipped to respond to this challenge so far as it went, but would have resilience issues in the event of a prolonged incident which attracted national and international media attention 24/7. Fortunately, such incidents are extremely rare in Durham.

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?

All contact between the Media and Marketing Team and the media is monitored throughout the day, via our Media Management System, so any issues would be quickly identified. If necessary, we could enhance this

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through a system of regular, documented checkpoint meetings to ensure we can demonstrate we are maintaining professionalism at all times.

31. Are you and/or your staff members of the Association of Police Communicators? From our 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?

We are members of ApComm, which provides an excellent forum for police communications issues, sharing best practice and disseminating information. I would recommend that ApComm be consulted about drawing up a national protocol for police / media relations, based on the conclusions of the Filkin Report. This would provide police forces with a corporate framework through which they could establish local protocols if necessary.

32. Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from Durham Constabulary to the media and/or private detectives a problem for Durham Constabulary?

The deliberate leaking of information to the media from within the force is uncommon, and has never been regarded as a significant issue. However, it should be acknowledged that Durham is a relatively quiet area in terms of major news events and has rarely been associated with police corruption or other issues which may be of significant interest to the media. We are unaware of any information ever being passed to a private detective.

33. 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?

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We would consider that investigating leaks should be a matter for Professional Standards.

34. 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?

This would be a matter for Professional Standards

35. 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.

That would be a matter for Professional Standards

36. 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?

There has never, to my knowledge and that of my colleagues, been a leak from the press office to the media or any other individual or organisation. Apart from being unprofessional, it would be counter-productive. Our aim is to provide appropriate information to the media in a controlled manner, which is the exact opposite of what happens following unauthorised leaks. As far as the police service is concerned, there may be several different driving forces behind leaks. An officer may wish to establish a good working relationship with a particular reporter so that they can be guaranteed good coverage in the future, or they may have a personal agenda.

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37. To what extent do you believe bribery of police personnel by the media to be a current problem for Durham Constabulary (if at all)?

I don't believe this to be a problem at all.

38. 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.

We use 'off-the-record' briefings to help steer journalists in the right direction, so that they can do a balanced, accurate report of a situation which may not otherwise be possible, and to allow the police to provide some context for a situation or investigation. We also use 'guidance' – this is where the reporter can use the information but not attribute it to an official police spokesperson. This can be useful, for example, in the case of a missing person – we may give guidance that the person went missing regularly, so they are less likely to over-hype the story. In the case of a sudden death, we may give guidance that it is probably not suspicious, so they don't raise the alarm about a possible murderer on the loose. This is about not raising public fears unnecessarily. However, there are some situations which are so sensitive that we will not even offer guidance. We will come under pressure from the media to offer guidance, we accept that that's their job but we don't have to bow to the pressure. I would confine use of 'off-the-record' and 'guidance' to trusted journalists only. This is why it is so important to establish good working relationships which are tried and tested.

39. 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

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obtained from other sources) on an "off-the-record" basis? If so, please give details and explain why this is done.

Our position is that if the media come to us to confirm or deny information, or a particular name, we will tell them if they are wrong. This is professional good practice – it is in no one's interest for the media to publish inaccurate information or wrong names. However, we will not take part in 'fishing' expeditions.

40. 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?

Records are kept of pre-trial briefings, which are held to facilitate accurate reporting of criminal proceedings and highlight the police investigation. We keep a data base of all daily contact with the media.

41. 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?

The media understand 'off-the-record' if it is stressed in advance that the information is being provided on that basis, especially if it is confined to trusted journalists.

42. What is your view of the practice of police officers and police staff having "off-the-record" communications with the media?

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It must always be done with a policing purpose, i.e. the prevention or detection of crime, to facilitate public reassurance or to assist the media in reporting accurately and contextually. It should not be done to offer or generate favours.

43. 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.

In general the media do comply, as they know that if they don't, they will never be given anything off-the-record again. This is why the use of 'off-the-record' is largely confined to trusted journalists with whom we are in regular contact. The sanction would carry no or little weight with a national reporter who has contacted us on a one-off basis and was unlikely to do so again.

44. 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.

If the position is made clear to a reporter and/or their news desk, it would be highly unusual for them to print or publish material which would jeopardise an ongoing investigation. Such requests are infrequent and are respected by the media in part because they are so rare. One recent example illustrates how this agreement works in practice. In January 2012 both the BBC and one of our local papers became aware of a major fraud investigation which had resulted in two conmen running up more than £60,000 unpaid bills with various suppliers and firms. As police enquiries were at a very early stage, we asked both reporters concerned if they would hold back from running stories

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in case the main suspect was alerted and went 'to ground'. Once he had been arrested we told the reporters and provided enough information for them to run stories, ahead of any other media outlets.

45. 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.

Reporters will often challenge the 'public interest.' Many think it means 'what the public are interested in', and it will always be open to interpretation unless someone can produce a hard and fast definition to which everyone subscribes. The Press Complaints Commission defines the public interest as including: detecting or exposing crime or serious misdemeanour; protecting public health and safety; preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation.

46. 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.

The most recent examples are rumours which start circulating on social networking sites. In one case, a rumour started on facebook about someone dressed in a clown's outfit going around scaring people with a knife. We stressed to the media that there was no truth in this, it was an urban myth, but the coverage persisted. Urban myths take on a life of their own and become treated as fact. This has a negative impact on public confidence.

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47. 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?

Moving into press office or PR work is a natural progression for a journalist and many reporters are attracted to work in police press offices. I think this only becomes an issue if someone joins a police press office from a local newspaper, goes back to a newspaper, then returns to the police press office within a short time. They will return to the paper with lots of inside knowledge and police contacts, and return to the police press office with lots of friends in the media. The only way to prevent this happening would be to introduce restrictions on applicants, but this could fall foul of equal opportunities issues and could prevent potentially good candidates from applying for jobs.

48. 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?

I don't think different standards and rules should be applied to police officers and staff. We should all work to the same professional standards.

49. 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).

I consider that this report presents a fair and concise picture of police integrity as it relates to relationships with the media and others. I was encouraged to

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find that the vast majority of the public do not think police corruption is a major problem and that there was no evidence of endemic corruption in police service relationships. In terms of direct contact with the media, I think it would be unfeasible and unworkable to require officers and staff to create a formal written record of every single interaction with the media. I found the comments about inconsistencies in the use of social networking sites to be valid. However, it must be remembered that these are a relatively new phenomena. As such, it will naturally be some time before we can reach a position where there are consistent standards for use. I think a degree of flexibility should be allowed about using these sites or we risk stifling what is an excellent communications and engagement tool.

50. 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).

I think the recommendations provide an excellent starting point for the development of a national framework for police / media relations, which will give clear guidelines to both the police and the media without recourse to statutory regulation.

51. 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?

One possibility could be a national code of conduct to which every police employee has to sign up on appointment, with compliance and awareness subject to annual review as part of the PDR process. Media awareness should be included in the basic officer training and reinforced throughout their careers.

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