

Statement of Head of Corporate Communications Liz Young

Police Service of Northern Ireland

**Witness Statement to the Leveson Inquiry of Liz Young, Head of Corporate
Communications.**

Submitted to the Inquiry under Section 21(2) of the Inquiries Act 2005

28 February 2012

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Q1 – who you are and a brief summary of your career

Liz Young. Head of Corporate Communications, Police Service of Northern Ireland.

PSNI – 2008 to present

As Head of Corporate Communications for PSNI my current key responsibilities include:

- Development and implementation of the PSNI External and Internal Communication Strategies to support the delivery of the policing plan
- Providing advice and guidance to the Chief Constable, Senior Executive Team and the organisation in relation to Media, PR, Public Affairs and Internal Communication.
- Providing leadership and guidance to a team of 27 staff ensuring ongoing commitment and motivation to deliver a personal and professional service
- Providing input into organisational strategic plans and policy particularly where there is a media, PR or Internal communication impact
- Proactively develop relationships with key stakeholders including the media
- Reacting decisively and manage response to escalated media enquiries in an open, robust and transparent way
- Co-ordinating the management of media response to major incidents.

NI Water from July 2005-March 2008

As Head of Corporate Communications for NI Water my key responsibilities included:

- Providing strategic communications advice and guidance to the NI Water Board, Chief Executive and senior management team

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- Development and implementation of the NI Water External and Internal Communication Strategies
- Proactively developing relationships with key stakeholders including the media
- Management and development of a team of 18 communications staff
- Major incident communications management
- Development and positioning of the NI Water Brand

Q2 – role and remit of the Press Office within the PSNI

The Press Office sits within the PSNI Corporate Communications Department, which has a responsibility for dealing with press queries and for the management and delivery of broader corporate communications.

The PSNI Press Office, which has responsibility for facilitating all media requests, provides a comprehensive, efficient and effective news service for the organisation. One of its key objectives is to build confidence amongst stakeholders and the wider community in relation to the services we provide.

The Department also leads on the PSNI corporate communications strategy, focussing upon both external and internal communication. This is guided by the Communications Programme Board, which plans and implements broader communication via traditional media, social networking, and written material.

The PSNI needs to provide information to the public and also needs to obtain information from the public to assist in investigations. The media is a key conduit for disseminating information in a timely manner. It is critical that the flow of information, via the media, is managed responsibly and professionally, and the Press Office plays a critical role in doing so.

Within the Department we also have a District Media team who are primarily responsible for supporting each District, at a local level, with Internal and external

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communications which includes liaising with local press and managing issues at a local level.

Attached is an organisational chart of the Department.

Q3 – please describe your role and responsibilities within the press office. To whom do you report.

As Head of the Corporate Communications Department I am ultimately responsible for the management and operation of the Press Desk. The Media Centre Manager reports directly to the Deputy Head of Communications on a day to day basis and only issues of serious concern are escalated to my level otherwise I have very little day to day dealing with the desk.

The senior team within the Department, including the Media Centre Manager, meet with me on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning for a brief discussion of events in the last 48 hours and a forward look to the next 48 hours. In these meetings any emerging media issues are discussed.

I report to the Deputy Chief Constable but am also a member of the Senior executive team and in this role I provide strategic advice and guidance on communications to the Chief Constable, ACCs and Heads of Department.

Q4 - Describe the culture of relations between the press office on the one hand and other PSNI 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?

The relationship between the press office and PSNI staff and officers is a very sound relationship. All media enquiries are handled centrally through the Press Office and as such we are the first point of contact when officers need to release information to the public via the media or respond to media coverage. Outside of the Press Office we have a dedicated Senior Press Officer responsible for managing the relationship with our Crime Operations Department. This Senior Press Officer has been vetted at

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the highest level which means that officers can take him into their confidence and ensure sensitive information is managed carefully and is not disseminated on a wider basis.

The relationship between my staff and the rest of the organisation is solid and is based on very constructive relationships.

I would not make any changes to the existing arrangements.

Q5 - Does the press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling the flow of information to the media?

Yes, the press office manages the flow of information from the organisation to the media and facilitates all engagement. All media interviews, briefings, conferences are organised centrally and staffed by members of the Press Office.

Q6 - Does the press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling access to PSNI personnel?

I believe it is only on a rare occasion that press will contact an officer or member of staff directly. Officers and staff, at senior level, may well respond directly to the media or engage with them on a face to face basis, where the occasion arises. However on most cases the Press Desk will be notified of this contact and will record it on our Solcara information management system.

Q7 - What is your impression of the culture within the PSNI in relation to its dealings with the media (the media in all its forms)?

I believe there is recognition among senior officers of the important role that media play in fulfilling the organisation's commitment to openness and transparency; for public confidence; and at times, for public safety information. I believe that the culture is professional and mature and is one of mutual respect and trust.

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Q8 - 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?

In general I think there is a very healthy tension between the press office and media. The press will invariably always want more information, quicker, than what is generally provided. In addition they would like 24/7 direct access to a press officer. However the media in NI recognise that they get a very good service from the PSNI press desk and this is evidenced by feedback surveys and letters of appreciation to the CC.

We do know that the media would like the Press Office opening hours to be extended however given budget constraints this is not possible. The Opening hours of the Department were reduced in 2010 following an internal review of demand.

Generally I think the media's attitude to the PSNI Press Office is a positive one based on an understanding that the press office functions effectively as an authoritative source of accurate and timely information – a service which is critical to them being able to perform their function.

Q9 - 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.

Press Office staff will be in contact with the local print and broadcast media on a daily basis both proactively and reactively for example releasing information on traffic and travel, security alerts, investigative issuing appeals and dealing with incoming media enquiries.

Contact with national media is limited unless in response to UK wide FOI enquiries, major security incidents (i.e. terrorist attacks), enquiries in relation to national events such as Olympic Torch Run.

Q10 - Are contacts with the media restricted to certain staff or are all personnel within the PSNI able to deal with the media?

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In general all contact with the media should be co-ordinated via the Press Office, however on occasions officers will talk directly to the media i.e. at a crime scene, at a community meeting. Officers are not restricted from speaking directly to the media but we would ask that they advise the desk of all contact and content of discussion and must comply with the PSNI Media Policy.

Article 3 of the PSNI Code of Ethics (2008) states that all police officers and support staff must comply with the Police Service media policy in their dealings with the media.

When the press office facilitates an interview with the media, the focus is on who is the most appropriate person to deal with the inquiry – there is no restriction on rank of officer or member of staff engaging with the media.

Q11 - 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 do not prioritise contact however when dealing with any incident, event or situation we will assess the most appropriate media channel to communicate messages depending on the audience. In general we would ensure local media are included in all media briefings to national media. Our primary “customer” is the local community which is best served by local media. Access to media is fair, open and inclusive of all outlets.

Q12 - 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?

When releasing information to the media on a proactive basis it is sent to all media outlets on our contact database, this will include local, national and worldwide media outlets. Where we receive an enquiry from one media outlet we will only release information directly to that outlet.

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We regularly conduct media briefings and we ensure that all local outlets are represented on a fair basis at these briefings. However we also host one-to-one briefings with selected media in response to a particular issue they have raised publicly or have enquired directly about.

Q13 - 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 the PSNI?

I think the media inevitably would like direct contact with as many officers and staff as they could have. However I think there is the recognition that the organisation has a legal and ethical responsibility to be professional in its approach to communication.

The Press Office does have a policy of trying to facilitate all media requests for interviews or briefings and as such I think the press view the relationship as being generally positive.

Q14 - 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.

Most of my contact is with local media, examples of this contact are listed below:

- Weekly or more frequent contact in relation to corporate issues – i.e. rationalisation of police estates, crime figures, confidence figures, inspection reports, audits, employment issues, legacy issues
- Contact when the media have picked up a potential story which is outside the routine e.g. loss of police officers phone containing sensitive information, allegations of misconduct, procurement issues – generally issues of a sensitive nature which may impact on public confidence.

Contact will either be by phone, email or infrequently face to face meetings.

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In addition the Deputy Head of the Department and myself meet with each of the media outlets twice a year to review relationships and address any issues of service.

I attend the monthly meeting of the Northern Ireland Policing Board which is in public and covered by print and broadcast media. Following the meeting there would normally be bids to speak with the Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable or Senior Officers. In these occasions I liaise with the media, agree or reject bids and facilitate interviews where appropriate.

Q15 - Describe what you are seeking to gain for the PSNI through your personal contact with the media.

Constructive and transparent relationships which will allow me to manage issues of reputational risk to the organisation and also to ensure that the media report in a balanced and responsible manner on policing operations, strategic priorities, critical incidents and other issues which may impact on public confidence.

Q16 - 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?

In general the media will contact me in relation to a number of things:

- Clarification or guidance which expands on information already provided by the press desk. From a more senior position I can sometimes provide further guidance or context to a story than that which would be released generally
- To give me a “heads up” on a sensitive story or story which is likely to impact on the reputation of PSNI or confidence in the service we provide
- If they are short of material and want to know is there anything that they can report on
- Strategic advice and guidance on the organisation’s external communication strategy – key priorities, key messages, opportunities for broadcast/print etc

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Q17 - To what extent have you accepted hospitality from the media whilst working in your current position?

I have not been offered or accepted any hospitality from the media since appointment as Head of Communications of PSNI.

However personnel are permitted to accept a meal or a drink from a journalist or reporter but all such hospitality must be recorded in line with PSNI policy.

The gifts and gratuities register is checked and reviewed regularly in line with PSNI Policy (attached)

All hospitality registers are liable for inspection by auditors.

Q18 - 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?

Not applicable – Please refer to question 17.

Q19 - To what extent have you provided hospitality for the media?

I have hosted a number of media lunches and dinners details of which have been recorded in my register of hospitality and in the departmental diary. These have included two dinners with the media and the Chief Constable:

- 23 November 2009 – dinner with selected print and broadcast media to introduce the Chief Constable and to provide an opportunity for the Chief to outline his key priorities for the PSNI
- 12 December 2011 – the purpose of which was to discuss current performance and outline current and future challenges

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I have also hosted a media BBQ in 2008 where all local media were invited to attend an informal gathering to meet the former Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde, and the senior command team of PSNI.

A number of journalists would also have attended the Annual Chief Constables Christmas Reception which was also attended by a range of other key policing stakeholders.

Hospitality afforded is in line with PSNI Policy Directive 04/05 (attached).

Q20 - 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?

Hospitality has been of an informal nature but in settings where the media had an opportunity to interact with senior command members as detailed in Q19.

Hospitality afforded is in line with PSNI Policy Directive 04/05 (attached).

The gifts and gratuities register is checked and reviewed regularly in line with PSNI Policy (attached)

All hospitality registers are liable for inspection by auditors.

Q21 - 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).

No

Q22 - Have you ever discussed the media, or media coverage, with politicians? If so, how important is such communication and why?

The PSNI is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board, membership of which includes representatives from each of the main political parties in NI. In my role as Head of Department I provide a performance report twice a year to the

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Board, on occasions media coverage has been raised but in the context of recent critical incidents which have resulted in significant media coverage.

Outside of this forum I have had occasion to discuss media coverage with politicians usually to clarify accuracy of reporting or context in which politicians have made comment on operational policing matters.

On a number of occasions I have been involved in facilitating joint media briefings with the First and Deputy First Ministers for Northern Ireland and/or the Minister of Justice for e.g. on a number of high profile terrorist related incidents murder of Constable S Carroll, Massereene Murders, Murder of Constable Ronan Kerr

Q23 - What do you know about the level of hospitality accepted by the PSNI, 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?

The hospitality register for senior officers is published online on the PSNI internet. It would appear from reviewing the register that hospitality is a rare occurrence and if so is extremely modest.

Personally I do believe police officers or staff should accept any hospitality from media other than coffee, lunch, dinner in a formal working capacity.

Q24 - Do you consider that you have been adequately trained and/or given sufficient guidance on the appropriate handling of the media?

Yes I believe I am adequately trained and have developed a depth of experience in handling the media. However at times I do seek guidance from the Chief, Deputy or other Senior colleagues in responding to certain queries or dealing with sensitive issues.

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I do accept that media is very fast moving and continually developing and new situations arise regularly which need to be assessed and managed, based on experience. In particular social media.

Q25 - 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?

Yes

Q26 - 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?

- I. Guidance has been issued to the organisation by the PSNI Corporate Communications Department and is attached. This guidance is in line with the ACPO Communications Advisory Group (CAG) Media Policy. This guidance does not directly address the issues of integrity of the relationships between police and media however following this enquiry it is anticipated that the CAG guidance will be expanded to deal with the integrity of police/press relationships.
- II. Guidance in relation to accepting/offering hospitality is available to all officers and staff – PSNI Hospitality Policy – policies and procedures relating to, or having a bearing upon, the provision of and receipt of hospitality by members of the PSNI.
- III. Steps to educate PSNI personnel about bribery include having a policy on the acceptance of Gifts, Gratuities and Hospitality, which not only provides clear guidance as to what is and is not acceptable, but also discusses the rationale for such a policy – i.e. perception of the public; potential for corruption; and the negative impact on reputation of the organisation and community confidence if inappropriate acceptance of gifts, gratuities or hospitality takes

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place or even if the perception exists that it is happening. Specific reference is made within the policy to the Bribery Act and the policy provides direction on the transparent and accountable recording of any gifts offered or accepted, and the oversight arrangements for inspecting gifts registers.

Other steps taken to prevent bribery of personnel include having confidential reporting procedures in place (from both internal and external providers) and provision for officers to also self-disclose if they feel they have made themselves vulnerable to corruption. In the rare event that any issues cannot be progressed via investigation and misconduct procedures, the PSNI has 'Service Confidence Procedures' and may also conduct 'ethical interviews'. These measures are designed to manage the risk posed by any officer about whom there are serious concerns, and may involve removing an officer from a particular policing role or area, or restricting their access to particular classes of information. It must be emphasised that recourse to these measures are rare, and the PSNI will always seek to progress criminal or misconduct procedures where possible.

PSNI are also in the process of reviewing our business interest policy, and individual applications are being reviewed to ensure no conflict exists.

PSNI has an ant-corruption unit which conducts defensive operations to detect instances of bribery. They also have the capability to retrospectively investigate any allegations or concerns should they arise.

If, following investigation, inappropriate disclosure to the media or acceptance of bribes is proven, disciplinary action would be taken against the staff member (police or civilian) involved.

- IV. Training and guidance in relation to "off the record" comments is covered within the media guidelines. In addition training of press officers is a continuous process of active coaching and mentoring which covers guidance and advice on any contact with the media.
- V. Police Officers and support staff are bound by the Official Secrets Act and all Officers are bound by the PSNI Code of Ethics, Article 3 of which requires them to comply with the PSNI Media Policy.

Q27 - 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.

Media training is carried out by the CCD. The current training programme does not cover the specific topic of “appropriate contact” however this is loosely covered in our media guidelines. I am very confident that press officers fully understand the boundaries of relationships with media and act at all times with integrity and professionalism.

All officers and staff are aware that all contact with the media should be channelled through the CCD and appropriately recorded on Solcara.

My understanding in relation to “appropriate contact” is that it is open and transparent and access is equal and fair. I believe that a record should be kept of all meetings and the record should be open to scrutiny and justification at all times.

Q28 – Do you consider that press office staff generally feel comfortable briefing the media and responding to media requests for information?

In general I believe that our press officers do feel comfortable in dealing with the media, however the majority of my team are fairly new to the job and are still learning and expanding their own experience and knowledge. To counter the current skills gap the senior team within the Department provide hands on support and guidance on a daily bases.

Q29 - 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?

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Policing in Northern Ireland is always in the media spotlight and as such we are well equipped and experienced to deal with issues of national interest. We have however found, that on occasions, relationships with some national media can be quite challenging. For e.g. national media are not as versed with politics in NI and the legacy of “the troubles” and as such when reporting on incidents such as terrorist attacks they need a greater degree of handling and briefing than local media.

In addition we also find that National media are not interested in future relationships and as such, at times, may act in an unprofessional way if they don't get the access to the office or officers that they think they should.

When dealing with National media in a face to face situation we would tend to utilise the experience of our Senior Press Officers who are quite comfortable to operate in challenging environments.

Q30 - 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?

Currently less experienced press officers have very little face to face contact with media and all contact is recorded on our contact management system so the risk of inappropriate conduct in this area is deemed as being very low. Senior Press Officers and District Media Officers have regular contact with local media both written and verbal and again the contact of these conversations is recorded.

We currently use the ACPO Media Guidelines to guide our relationships with the media and in on-going training we consistently review our relationships with the media to ensure consistency and transparency.

I believe that the relationships which my team have with the media are ethical, professional and transparent and as such would not propose making any changes, in the meantime, to how we conduct our business.

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Q31 - 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?

I am a member of ACPO and also a member of the ACPO Communications Advisory Group and a member of the Association of Police Communicators.

The Communications Advisory group are very hands on in developing guidance for Officers when dealing with the media. The guidance that was issued in 2010 is extremely comprehensive covering most eventualities and as such provides a good basis for consistent decision making.

In addition, in August 2011, in response to the phone hacking scandal, Media Relationships Guidance was issued by ACPO to all Chief Constables.

Q32 - Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from the PSNI to the media and/or private detectives a problem for the PSNI?

Disclosure of information is one of the strategic threats identified by the PSNI, although this is much wider than leaks to the media. Disclosure of information is a matter which PSNI takes very seriously, and whilst any leak to the media (deliberate or otherwise) can damage public confidence in the PSNI, it is not an area which we consider poses a major problem in terms of scale or scope. PSNI Professional Standards Department (PSD) has conducted a number of investigations around potential leaks and constantly the Corporate Communications dept constantly monitor "public" information to ensure it is in line with what has been officially released from the organisation. Any issues of concern are reported to the PSD.

Q33 - Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from the press office specifically to the media and/or private detectives a problem for the PSNI?

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Refer to answer to Q32.

Q34 - 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?

An anti-corruption Unit is established within Professional Standards Department, which thoroughly investigates any allegation, information or intelligence relating to disclosure of information, including any to the media. A range of overt and covert investigative techniques are available to this unit. This Unit conducts periodic defensive operations proactively seeking evidence of any inappropriate contact with members of the media.

In addition the Corporate Communications dept constantly monitor “public” information to ensure it is in line with what has been officially released from the organisation. Any issues of concern are reported to PSD.

Q35 - 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?

There have been no investigations into leaks from the press office. However, throughout the rest of the service, five investigations into leaks to the media have been conducted in the last five years. One case related to an officer who sent a text to a journalist providing his opinion on the anticipated level of disorder in a forthcoming operation. This officer appeared before a misconduct hearing and was fined. The second case relates to an officer making allegations to a newspaper about the personal activities of their partner (also a police officer), in the context of a domestic dispute. This officer appeared before a misconduct hearing and was reduced in pay. The third case related to an officer providing unauthorised briefings to the press following an incident: This officer received a written warning. In the

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fourth investigation it was proven that the officer concerned had not been in contact with the media. A fifth investigation is ongoing.

Q36 - 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.

There have been no investigations and hence no disciplinary action into leaks from the press office to media. However within the last five years, throughout the rest of the organisation, disciplinary action has been taken against three police officers for inappropriate contact with the media. One officer was reduced in pay another fined, and a further received a written warning. No civilian members of staff have been disciplined for leaks to the media.

Q37 - 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 have been no leaks within PSNI of information to the media from press officers therefore I can only comment generally in that I believe any "leaks" from press officers are more likely to be inadvertent disclosure of information as opposed to malicious intent.

In general I think there are a number of driving forces behind leaks to the media the most likely of which is disgruntled employees who for some reason or another are unhappy about something within the organisation. In other cases loose talk either to friends, family or social contacts can also result in information being leaked from the organisation.

I also suspect that there could well be instances that information is seen as power and individuals may disclose information to elevate their own stature in certain situations.

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Q38 - To what extent do you believe bribery of police personnel by the media to be a current problem for the PSNI (if at all)?

Bribery of personnel by the media has not been identified as an issue for the PSNI. I am unaware of any cases of alleged bribery in this context. However defensive operations are conducted to identify any inappropriate contact with media operations so as to detect and mitigate against any potential vulnerability.

Q39 - 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.

Yes, we do provide “off the record” briefings and have “off the record” conversations with certain journalists. These discussions are usually in relation to issues or cases of a sensitive nature but are essential in providing context which helps inform understanding and reporting.

A number of examples:

- Rumours the Chief Constable was unhappy in his new post and intended to return to England – we were aware of where the rumours were emanating from and that various pieces of information had been pieced together to give a totally inaccurate reflection on the situation. It was critical that we provided journalists with the background story to ensure they appreciated that they had got their story wrong
- Where we need to disclose sensitive information on an investigation but cannot have it broadcast in order to protect the integrity of an investigation but at the same time we had to guide the media in a direction which was based on fact not on guess work
- Pre-trial briefings

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A note of “off the record” conversations will be kept by the press officer in their own notebooks but will not be recorded on Solcara.

Q40 - 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.

Yes, we occasionally guide the media, if we believe it is in the best interests of individuals or investigations but only on information which is submitted to us by media, i.e.:

- Sudden death where suicide is suspected
- Where the media identify a victim
- Where the media have some facts about an incident from a scene or from other sources and it needs to be clarified or put in context

A note of “off the record” conversations will be kept by the press officer in their own notebooks but will not be recorded on Solcara.

Q41 - 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?

Individual press officers will record details of conversations with the media in their own records. These are not recorded on our central contact management system Solcara.

Q42 - 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?

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My interpretation of “off the record” is that any information provided or the context of any conversation should not appear in print or broadcast in any shape or form or should not be discussed with anyone else other than those that the conversation took place with.

Q43 - What is your view of the practice of police officers and police staff having “ off-the- record ” communications with the media?

My belief is that it is critical that this form of contact takes place where appropriate. Relationships with the media must be transparent, professional and ethical and above all built on two way trust. To prevent this channel of communication would be detrimental to relationships and I suspect the end result would be unqualified information leaking from the organisation or misreporting – both of which would ultimately damage the reputation and confidence in PSNI.

Q44 - 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 my time in PSNI the media have always honoured my direction regarding sensitive information which I have provided to the media. Relationships are built on trust. We provide an excellent level of service to the media which is both personal and professional. Should the relationship break down the media are well aware of the impact on them being able to do their job and source content.

Q45 - 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.

The media do comply with requests not to publish or broadcast material when asked.

Examples of when we have asked them not to make information public include:

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- Incidents of serious crime where the community have named individuals they suspect have been involved in the crimes
- Reports on detail of injuries or suspected cause of death, where the details may be disturbing to victim's families or friends
- Fatal RTCs where the press have identified the victim but we have as yet informed victims' family
- Showing faces of serving officers at crime scenes or involved in other operational activity.

Q46 - 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.

I am not aware of any cases whereby the media have published information when specifically asked not to. However there have been times when the media have published or broadcast information without asking for a PSNI comment which has in the past caused concern in relation to security of our own officers or could have led to the identification of a victim, witness or suspect.

Q47 - 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.

In my time in this role there have been quite a few occasions where media have voluntarily not published information, but more so in the interests of justice. For example releasing photos of individuals involved in public disorder at an early stage in the investigation which could lead to false identifications; releasing details of a

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crime prior to a court case; releasing details about information recovered from a crime scene prior to trial.

Q48 - 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?

I don't believe that there should be any restrictions on individuals leaving the police service to work for media, however all former officers remain subject to their legal obligations under the Official Secrets Act.

I would have no concerns about recruiting employees from a media background into the Department, in general a good understanding of how the media works can only be an advantage to the organisation.

Q49 - 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.

No, I believe guidance and standards should apply to officers and staff equally.

Q50 - 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 welcome the fact that HMIC found no evidence of endemic corruption in police relationships with the media and that the relationship between the Police Service and the media for the majority of forces and individuals the relationship is professional

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and business like. However I also note that despite no evidence of this being found a significant majority of the public have doubts about the integrity of the police.

I agree with the recommendation that the Media Guidelines and policies in use within police Services should be further developed to include appropriate levels of interaction, social interaction and relationships, alongside practical guidance and supported by a structured training programme. This piece of work could be taken on by ACPO CAG.

In addition, I fully support the need for all forces to develop guidance to effectively protect their reputation through staff use of social networking practices – this is an area which presents significant risk. Again I think there is a need for consistent practices and policy right across all UK police forces and perhaps this should sit centrally with ACPO CAG to develop.

I fully appreciate that there is scope to “tighten” up in some areas of our business but on the other hand I would not support regulating the business relationships with the media to such an extent that it stifles the scope for professional judgment. In my view if Press officers were forced to operate in a highly governed way the flow of information to and from the media would be totally restricted and relationships would be unproductive.

Q51 - 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).

The Filkin report was focussed on relationships between the Metropolitan Police and the media, the practices and culture which this investigation highlighted, in my view, are not representative of the ethical and professional relationships that the majority of other police services and forces have with the media.

That said I do agree with the key messages from this review, which I think are applicable to all police services and indeed public bodies:

- Relationships and dialogue between police officers and staff and the media should be open and transparent

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- The media is vitally important in holding police services to account
- The media is essential in informing the public about the work of the police service and its role in the justice system
- It is impossible for every organisation to control every contact with the media, however contact should be governed by clear policy and guidance and supported by training and supervision
- Contact with the media should be recorded, where possible
- Flow of information must be equal and access fair with all media outlets
- Improper and unauthorised disclosure of information must be robustly investigated and where appropriate disciplinary action and/or criminal proceedings initiated
- Hospitality can at times be totally acceptable but should be reasonable and sound judgment should be exercised when accepting any hospitality

Q52 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?

- The ACPO CAG Media Guidelines and policies should be further developed to include appropriate levels of interaction, social interaction and relationships
- Guidelines and policies should be applied consistently by all police services
- The guidelines should be updated to include guidance in relation to the use of social media