

Scott Hesketh
16] February 2012
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IN THE MATTER OF THE LEVESON INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF SCOTT HESKETH

I, **SCOTT HESKETH**, of The Northern and Shell Building, Number 10 Lower Thames Street, London, EC3R 6EN, **WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:**

- A. I am the Crime Reporter at The Daily Star Sunday. I make this statement in response to a request of the Leveson Inquiry (the "Inquiry") pursuant to a letter to the solicitors for Northern & Shell dated 3 January 2012.
- B. I confirm that all matters in this statement are true and, unless I specify to the contrary, are based upon my own knowledge and a review of the relevant documents. Where matters are not within my own knowledge, I state the source and believe the same to be true.
- C. For convenience, I have reproduced as subheadings the questions asked of me in the 3 January letter.

Who you are and a brief summary of your career history in the media.

- 1. I began my current role in April 2011 but have been a news reporter at The Daily Star Sunday since August 2008. Previously, I spent two years at Liverpool-based Mercury Press Agency after two years on the Congleton Chronicle, a local paper in Cheshire.

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What have been your impressions, over the years, about the culture of relations between the Metropolitan Police Service and the media?

2. As I am somewhat of a newcomer to the London crime beat and have spent much of my time in the North West, my dealings with the Metropolitan Police have been fairly limited.

3. In relation to my impressions on cultural relations between the Met and the media, I think it is important to point out that for any solid working relationship there has to be trust. It is difficult to build up allegiances from formal press conferences and briefings. That is why many journalists, including myself, make an effort to have that personal one-on-one contact. It is a chance to sell yourself, your personality and your professionalism. To win trust. And it is a chance to show how you can have a mutually beneficial working relationship. Journalists – especially crime reporters – need police contacts and vice versa. And both parties prefer dealing with people they trust. Reporters want exclusives, while detectives want to deliver their message accurately and without twist.

4. Of course, those vital one-on-ones often involve sharing a drink or a meal in a more relaxed environment. And that lends itself to the culture of hospitality being talked of today. Some police officials and journalists have chosen to take that hospitality further and exchange bribes for information. Others may use the press as pawns to leak information about a rival or a threat in the industry, or for political gain. My impression of the police and the media is the same as it is of most professions: some play it by the book, others bend the rules to get what they want. So while I believe that the majority in both trades are hard working honest professionals, it is no surprise to me that corruption claims have surfaced.

Describe the personal contact which you had with the Metropolitan Police at the various stages of your career. The Inquiry would like an overall picture of the type, frequency, duration and content of your contact.

5. Since April 2011, I have had several face-to-face dealings with the Metropolitan Police, some one on ones, but mainly formal meetings such as press conferences or off the record briefings – which I often attend as a member of the Crime Reporters Association. I have also spoken to press officers over the phone on many occasions.
6. I would not say I have had regular contact with the Metropolitan Police; there are no weekly drinking sessions or anything of that nature. Of the events that I have attended, I would include the Annual Police Federation Conference in Bournemouth.
7. The other calendar police-press date is the annual ACPO conference in Harrogate, Yorkshire. Again, it was a networking opportunity for me. In terms of the event itself, it was aimed at daily title reporters so my interests were for future stories and making contacts. During the conference itself I spoke to several detectives and police chiefs from across the country. There was also a drinks reception laid on for the media, where journalists mingled with ACPO officials and police chiefs. I had several conversations with force leaders from the Met, Manchester and Merseyside. The topic on everyone's lips was phone-hacking as it was a day when the Guardian broke the story accusing the News of the World of intercepting messages on Millie Dowler's phone. Most police chiefs were happy to talk on the subject, but mainly off the record. Journalists and ACPO press officers had dinner together and we later had drinks at a hotel where many police chiefs were staying, including, I believe, Sir Hugh Orde. Again, I had several conversations with detectives on a number of subjects from gun smuggling to gang warfare to topical murders.
8. Another informal event is the CRA's annual Christmas party. The police presence was not as big as that at the previous year's event.
9. Of the one-on-ones referred to above, the only meeting which I had was with a senior detective at a bar in London and we enjoyed a few drinks and a chat. We talked of the pressing issues in London and the big events of the year, as well as non work-related subjects. The meeting lasted a few hours. It was a

good, worthwhile chat for both of us. I didn't do a story on anything that was said but I made a contact for the future, as did he.

10. All other personal face-to-face contact came in the form of press conferences and briefings. I also attended several off the record briefings on subjects such as the Royal Wedding, the Stephen Lawrence murder and the London Riots. All other contact came in the form of phone calls to check on stories and get guidance and expert views on ones I was working on.

Without prejudice to the generality of question (3) above, please set out the contact which you have had with the person occupying at any given time the following posts giving, as best you can remember, the dates and summarising the gist of the communications which you had with:

- a. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.***
- b. The Deputy Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.***
- c. Assistant Commissioners of Police of the Metropolis***
- d. Deputy Assistant Commissioners of Police of the Metropolis***
- e. Head of Public Affairs.***

In each case, who initiated the contact, and why?

11. So far I have had little or no personal contact with the top five ranked Scotland Yard figures. I think the Assistant Commissioners were present at an off the record briefing on the Royal Wedding but I cannot recall.

Did you ever have the personal mobile telephone number or home telephone number of the people listed at a-e above?

12. I do not have telephone numbers for any of the above listed persons.

Describe what you were seeking to gain from the Metropolitan Police through your personal contacts with MPS personnel.

13. I have already stated above what I wanted to gain from the MPS. The sole reason and motivation for my dealings with the police is for stories. A crime reporter without police contacts will naturally struggle; struggle to get accurate inside information on breaking news stories, struggle to stand up a celebrity scandal, and struggle to get exclusives. Contacts are a journalist's lifeblood. I would not say I have made friends in the MPS, but rather that I have forged good relations with Scotland Yard and other forces.

Describe in general terms and using illustrative examples what you consider the Metropolitan Police has been seeking from you in personal dealings with them during your career.

14. I think that the MPS consider the press to be a link to the public; a mouthpiece for them to make appeals or help solve or prevent a crime. That is certainly true of the press conferences and off the record briefings.

To what extent do you accept, and have you accepted, hospitality from the Metropolitan Police?

Insofar as you accept, or have accepted, hospitality from the MPS, what is, or was, the nature of the hospitality that you accept, or have accepted?

15. I will answer the two questions above together. In terms of hospitality, as discussed I have accepted drinks from the MPS and I have returned the favour. I am happy for police to buy me a drink just as I'm happy to buy any officer or detective one – or lunch - in the name of business.

To what extent do you, or have you, provided hospitality for the Metropolitan Police?

Insofar as you provide, or have provided hospitality to the Metropolitan Police, what is, or was, the nature of the hospitality that you provide, or have provided?

16. I will answer the above questions together. The only hospitality I have provided to other forces is a drink and a meal. I have been provided with the same on occasion.

Have you ever attended a formal press conference called by the MPS? If so, for what purpose was it called and do you think that it was valuable?

17. I have attended formal press conferences called by the MPS. To give one example, I attended the conference which followed the death of Amy Winehouse. It was fairly helpful as some facts about what had happened emerged. But in terms of exclusive information, which is essential for Sunday newspapers, there was nothing. Unless they concern important news stories breaking on Friday or Saturday, press conferences are not particularly useful for Sunday papers as the information they provide will have been covered by the daily titles during the week.

Relations with Other Police Forces

What have been your impressions, over the years, about the culture of relations between police forces other than the MPS and the media?

18. I have got good relations with other forces, in particular Greater Manchester Police. They certainly recognize the importance of the media in helping solve crimes. Again, like the MPS, there are those who will happily mix with the media and those who are more apprehensive for whatever reason. But I would see the culture of hospitality as more prevalent higher up in Scotland Yard than it is at forces like Merseyside or GMP.
19. If ever I have been asked not to put certain information in the piece as it would hinder their investigation, I have always obliged. For me it is about building bridges, not breaking them. I did once run a story after being asked not to, and the detective who had provided the information subsequently refused to speak to me again.

Have you had personal contact at Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable, or Assistant Chief Constable level? If so, as best you can remember, please state the dates and summarise the gist of such communications.

20. I have personally met GMP Assistant Chief Constable at force HQ over a paedophile story we were running. The meeting was conducted formally with a press officer present. He did not want the story to be published amid concerns it would have resulted in the sex offender, who was being monitored by a specialist police task force, to go to ground and disappear off their radar. There was also a public interest argument for us but after a lengthy discussion I decided not to run the story. I think that move certainly did no harm to my relations with the force and I have had a few exclusive stories put my way since. He told me that if ever I came to GMP with information, they would always tell me if it was true or not, and I appreciated that.

Describe the personal contact which you had with other police forces at the various stages of your career. The Inquiry would like an overall picture of the type, frequency, duration and content of your contact with other police forces.

21. In terms of personal contact, I have met up with PCs, detectives and detective sergeants from both Merseyside Police and GMP – both on a formal and

informal level. Most of my encounters happened during normal working hours. The only one that was not was with a GMP detective I met for a meal – but he was a childhood friend.

22. I also have other contacts at GMP. A lot of the contact is telephone-based but I have met a senior detective for a coffee on a couple of occasions. We talked about how I could help bring the good work the force was doing against criminal activity to a national audience. We talked about some of the big jobs and at the end of the hour-long meeting, I had a few good stories which I ran exclusively quoting a senior police source. The same story was rerun a few days later in a different newspaper from an official source. But I got the exclusive. I broke the story and that's what I'm there to do as a Sunday newspaper journalist.
23. In Merseyside, I dealt with senior officers and detectives investigating the Rhys Jones murder. All contact was formal but helpful. There were also quite a few off-the-record briefings which were very useful for backgrounders after the killer's trial.
24. I have had meetings with press offices for Cheshire, Merseyside, Yorkshire and GMP forces. I think it is important to have that face-to-face contact. They know who I am and what I'm about and vice versa. Again, it is all about building trust.

Describe what you were seeking to gain from these contacts with other police forces.

25. As for what I wanted out of these meetings, the answer is the same as it was for the MPS – contacts and stories. Through my contacts I have also had tips confirmed or denied off the record, either over the phone or via text, and that proved incredibly helpful in compiling accurate stories.

Describe in general terms and using illustrative examples what you consider that other police forces have been seeking from you in personal dealings with them during your career.

26. I believe that the other police forces have been looking for a journalist who they could trust to help give national coverage for the good work they were doing.

To what extent do you accept, and have accepted, hospitality from other police forces?

Insofar as you accept, or have accepted, hospitality from the other police forces, what is, or was, the nature of the hospitality that you accept, or have accepted?

27. I will answer the two questions above together. In terms of hospitality received from other police forces, the most I have received is a drink and a meal, most often at a pub.

To what extent do you, or have you, provided hospitality for other police forces or any of their personnel?

Insofar as you provide, or have provided hospitality to other police forces, or any of their personnel, what is, or was, the nature of the hospitality that you provide, or have provided?

28. I will answer the two questions above together. As above, I have never gone further than providing police with a drink or a meal.

General Matters

Have the police either formally or informally ever given you prior notification about proposed arrests, raids or other action? If so, please elaborate.

29. I have received notification about proposed arrests, raids and action – both formally and informally. I went out on a series of raids with GMP and I was told the location of the houses they were targeting and the nature of the raid, which on this occasion was drugs and credit card fraud. I have been told informally about action planned by police investigating a murder, but it was confidential and not for publication. I have also been told off the record about plans to drop charges on a controversial case.

Have you ever been offered "off the record" briefings by the police? If so, please elaborate.

30. I have attended several off-the-record briefings. I went to three or four such meetings during the Rhys Jones murder probe. During the briefing, investigators aired some grievances about media intrusion and how it could

hinder the murder hunt. We were also given key information on the investigation such as details of the murder weapon and the suspected killer, none of which was on the record.

31. I also attended one on the Sian O'Callaghan murder last year. The senior detective investigating the case was eager to reveal details about the murder and the event leading up to it. I was told that I was attending an off the record briefing, but in fact by the end of the conference he conceded that most of what he had told us could be published. We did not run everything that was said, and held back some details where publication could have put me at risk of a charge of contempt of court. The News Of the World however made the story its front page.
32. Further, I attended an off the record briefing in Manchester on the Boxing Day gun murder of an Indian student in Salford. The detective leading the hunt chose the occasion to vent her anger over reports of media interference with witnesses. She later gave an on-the-record appeal and offered a reward.

What mechanisms, if any, are in place in your workplace to monitor and record hospitality as between the police on the one hand and you, or your fellow journalists on the other?

33. There are no mechanisms in place to monitor and record hospitality between myself, our journalists and police, but the editorial staff trust all of us to conduct our business professionally.

What training, guidance, policies, and/or practices are in place in your workplace governing contact between you and your fellow journalists on the one hand the police on the other?

34. There is no specific training on press-police relations at the Daily Star Sunday. Everyone has a copy of the PCC code of practice at their desk.

What editorial or management oversight, or control, if any, is there over communications between journalists and police at your media outlet?

35. As for control, they know if I have a problem I can go to management and I will be advised accordingly. As Crime Editor I am trusted to be professional and represent the paper in the right way.

What ethical issues do you consider arise, or need to be held in mind, by a journalist communicating in the course of his or her employment with the police, or anyone serving with, or employed, by a police force?

36. I think there are ethical issues that need to be considered in press-police dealings. The main one is payments. It is common practice for a red top journalist to pay sources for important information/stories. But that has to be within the law. I would never and have never paid the police for information, nor have I ever needed to. I have good relations with the police, and therefore do not need to break the law to be provided with stories.

37. On the issue of inappropriate behaviour, there is clearly a line that must not be overstepped with regard to relationships between the press and the police. But I certainly do not see anything wrong with enjoying drinks in a bar with officers. It is at the discretion of the police whether or not they wish to provide journalists with information.

What payments (if any) are considered to be legitimate financial transactions between persons serving with or employed by a police force and journalists at your media outlet? Please explain.

38. I don't think there can be any legitimate financial transactions between police and our paper. If a journalist pays a policeman, it is a bribe.

What role do you consider that the Metropolitan Police Service Directorate of Public Affairs (especially its Press Bureau) and corresponding parts of other police forces fulfill? What, in practice, do they do?

39. Press offices – Met and otherwise – have a very important role to play. It is essential that the police make appeals to the public to help solve crimes and that can only happen effectively through the media. They need the media to act as their mouthpiece. But they also need a go between who is trained in dealing with the press and in journalism and able to get their message across succinctly and clearly. It would be a terrible waste of police time if senior

police were required to spend significant time on the phone to journalists or writing out logs of incidents for the media, when their experience and expertise can be put to better use elsewhere.

How, in practice, do you get access to the police?

40. I generally get access to the police through my contacts or the press office.

Does the Head of Public Affairs at the Metropolitan Police Service and/or corresponding persons in other police forces act, or seek to act as gatekeepers controlling access by the media to other police personnel?

41. I would agree that the Head of Public Affairs at the Metropolitan Police Service acts as a gatekeeper controlling media access to certain police personnel.

If so, what is your attitude to this state of affairs?

42. All senior police personnel should be accountable to and available to the press. If they use the press to publicise their good work, then they must be available at all times – particularly when under fire – and not hide behind Public Affairs.

To what extent, in your opinion, does the MPS' Press Bureau, and corresponding parts of other police forces, exist to manage the relevant police force's corporate image in the media?

43. MPS press bureau and other regional press offices have a vital role in helping to maintain a corporate image. Police must be seen to be catching criminals, preventing crime and easing community concerns. It would be difficult to do that without a link between themselves and the media.

Is it necessary for police forces to have a press office, and what is your view as to the utility and role of police press offices?

44. Journalists absolutely need police press offices. If I require a police line on a story, or official quote to stand it up, I will go through the press office. We also need a constant feed of crimes and breaking news. And we need it swiftly and

written with the main points at the top. Only trained journalists – skilled in writing news stories and knowledgeable on the value of news-- can properly do that. We also need a round-the-clock contact, someone who can put our requests to the person in question and come back with a response.

45. One complaint I would raise however is that police are still falling short in dealing adequately with press requests on Saturdays, which is a live news day for Sunday newspapers. There is either no one there or the press officer is replaced by a stand-in force incident manager with little or no media training. That said, the MPS is usually quite efficient and helpful on Saturday calls.

Is it common for persons working for police press offices to have a background in the media?

46. As far as I am aware it is common for police press officers to be media trained.

What proportion of personnel working in police press offices do you estimate have a media background?

47. I would say most press office personnel have a media background. I'd certainly like to think so. They need to know how to write press releases and news stories. They need to know what is newsworthy and what is not – and they need to know the law, in particular contempt of court, defamation and guidelines governing the identification of minors.

Is any particular form of media background predominantly found amongst police press officers (e.g. tabloid, broadsheet, television)?

48. I could not comment on the backgrounds of press officers as I don't know, but I would say that most have worked in PR or at a regional and possibly national newspaper.

To the best of your knowledge is there any discernible pattern in the movement of personnel from the media into police press offices and vice versa?

49. I am not aware of any discernible pattern but I do know of newspaper journalists moving into police PR.

About HMIC

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).

50. Looking at HMIC's recommendations, if there is genuine police concern that damaging information is being leaked to the press, then I would expect new guidelines to be put in place. As for hospitality and gratuity, I oppose the measures being proposed. I think it should be at police's discretion as to whether they feel it necessary to buy a journalist a drink. We have to work together and common sense must prevail. Gifts however, are not necessary. I think it is right to say there should be no geographical variables when it comes to integrity.

Do you consider that there are further or different steps which could and/or should be taken to ensure that relationships between the police and the media are and remain appropriate? Please explain when answering this question what you consider to be appropriate contact between the police and journalists in a democratic society.

51. What's important here, is that police and the press need each other. Stopping informal contact would sever ties and damage good working relations. For me, contact should take place through face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations. But there needs to be that element of exclusivity on which national newspapers journalists thrive.
52. Journalists should be treated with the importance and respect their job as a messenger for the police merits. I agree that corruption should be weeded out both in the media and the police and measures should be taken to ensure that happens. But care must also be taken not to irreparably rupture a very important relationship.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

[Redacted Signature]

SCOTT HESKETH

Dated: [6th] February 2012