

Leveson Inquiry
Statement by Terry Hunt
Editor - East Anglian Daily Times

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

My name is Terry Hunt. I am the editor of the East Anglian Daily Times (EADT) newspaper, the regional morning newspaper for Suffolk and north Essex.

I have been employed by Archant (formerly Eastern Counties Newspapers Group) since 1979. I held various editorial posts prior to being appointed editor of the Evening Star in 1993, and then became editor of the EADT in 1996.

2. What have been your Impressions, over the years, about the culture of relations between Suffolk Police and the media? Do you consider the relationship between your newspaper and Suffolk Police to be a successful one? What changes would you like to make to the relationship (if any)?

I believe the relationship between the EADT and Suffolk Police to be generally supportive. We share many aims, including making Suffolk a safer place, and reducing the fear of crime among the public.

The one area of frustration – for as long as I can remember – is Suffolk Police's reluctance, or inability, to release information about crimes or other incidents very quickly, when public awareness can be of maximum benefit. I have spoken to the Chief Constable and other senior officers about this on numerous occasions in recent years, but I don't seem to have made any progress.

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

Early in my career, when I worked as a reporter, I was in daily contact with Suffolk Police at a purely operational level. This would usually be through the Press Office, or occasionally I was given access to a more senior officer to discuss a particular inquiry.

In recent years, my contacts with Suffolk Police have been at chief officer level (see answer to Question 2). There have been a number of meetings held to try to resolve the delays in release of information about operational matters (see answer to Question 2).

I have also supported some Suffolk Police initiatives, including helping to judge the award for the best community officer, and the EADT has also sponsored an award at the annual Suffolk Police awards.

There have also been meetings in which I have been briefed on the plans to achieve budget savings, and how they will impact on the public.

4. Without prejudice to the generality of question 3 above, please set out the contact which you have had with appointed press officers of Suffolk Police, giving, as best you can remember, the dates and summarising the gist of the communications which you had with them. In each case, who initiated the contact, and why?

Since taking over as editor nearly 20 years ago, I can recall very few direct contacts with the press officers at Suffolk Police. Very occasionally, I will become involved if a story is especially difficult or sensitive. The most recent example was at the end of last year when the teenage son of a former world speedway champion was killed in a road accident.

The boy's name was published widely through social media, and I spoke both to a senior Suffolk Police officer and to a Press officer, trying to ascertain whether we could publish his name in the following day's newspaper. After these consultations, I decided to publish his name.

5. Did you ever have the personal mobile telephone number or home telephone number of any of the people listed above?

I have the mobile number for one of the Press officers, and one senior officer, both of which were given to me voluntarily by the individuals concerned. I do not have any home numbers.

6. Describe what you were seeking to gain from Suffolk Police through your personal contacts with Suffolk Police personnel.

I refer to the answer to Question 2. I was asking them to release information on incidents more quickly – to their advantage and ours.

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

They have been looking for support, both in terms of operational coverage and support for and understanding of the changes which have been made necessary due to spending cuts.

8. To what extent do you accept, or have you accepted, hospitality from Suffolk Police?

Cups of tea/coffee at meetings.

9. Insofar as you accept, or have accepted, hospitality from Suffolk Police, what is, or was, the nature of the hospitality that you accept, or have accepted?

See answer to Question 8.

10. To what extent do you, or have you, provided hospitality for Suffolk Police?

Cups of tea/coffee at meetings.

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

See answer to Question 10.

12. Have you ever attended a formal press conference called by Suffolk Police? If so, for what purpose was it called and do you think it was valuable?

I have never attended a formal Press conference called by Suffolk Police.

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

No.

14. Have you ever been offered "off the record" briefings by the police?

Since being in the role of editor, I have only ever been offered an off the record briefing, on the subject of how Suffolk Police proposed to address the challenge of cuts to its budget.

15. 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?

We do not accept or offer hospitality from or to Suffolk Police.

16. 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 and the police on the other?

EADT journalists are aware of the need to conduct themselves professionally, ethically and honestly in their dealings with police officers. They know they must never hinder a police inquiry, commit a crime, or breach the PCC Code of Conduct. They also know that they must never behave in a manner which could compromise them, their employer, or a police officer who is a contact. In addition, we take legal advice from our solicitors, who are specialist advisers to publishers.

My news editors have standing instructions to take legal advice whenever they have any doubts about a story, no matter how small.

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

The EADT's Crime Correspondent is the only person who regularly deals with the Police and the Police's Press office. I ensure that he keeps me or my news editors updated as to the stories he is working on, and tells us the names of the contacts to whom he is talking. He always tells us about his dealings with the police.

Communications between Suffolk Police and our other journalists are restricted to a purely operational level.

18. 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?

Reporters should never hinder a police inquiry, or break the law, or breach the PCC Code of conduct. They should always act in an ethical way. As far as I am aware, all my journalists comply with these stringent standards.

I also insist that my journalists must be very careful to avoid any kind of behaviour which could compromise them, or their employer, or a police officer who is a contact.

19. 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?

There are no financial transactions between Suffolk Police and our journalists.

20. How, in practice, do you get access to the police.

As explained earlier, my contacts with the police are with senior officers through pre-arranged meetings.

21. 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 officers?

I believe it is necessary for police forces to have press offices.

At an operational level, the press office's responsibility is to provide timely, accurate information about crimes, accidents and other incidents.

22. What is your view of the recommendations contained in the HMC's recent report Without Fear or Favour insofar as they concern relations between the media and the police?

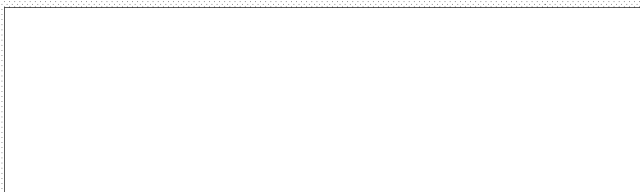
I believe the recommendations are robust and sensible. I believe they ratify the relationship which already exists between Suffolk Police and EADT journalists.

Having said that, I am concerned about the proposal that a system of recording contacts with police officers should be implemented, not only because it may result in many of our contacts being reticent to talk, but also because such a regime hints at state control of the press.

23. 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.

Referring to the relationship between EADT journalists and Suffolk Police, it is appropriate and professional at all times. I do not believe further regulation is required. The problem is not that the current law is insufficient; the issue is that the current law is not enforced fully or consistently.

Signed



Date

February 2012

