

# Police and the media

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## Framework for engaging with the media

Chief constables should promote a successful working relationship between the media and their organisation. A successful working relationship can:

- help solve crimes
- bring offenders to justice
- keep communities safe
- provide insight that promotes policing legitimacy
- prevent the public from being misled by speculation

Media engagement should not be restricted to senior positions or corporate communications departments (CCDs).

Engagement between police and the media is encouraged for officers and staff of all ranks and roles, providing the person is responsible for communicating about the issue at hand and there is a clear policing purpose in doing so.

Regular, meaningful interaction and engagement is encouraged between the police and media, particularly between press offices and key journalists and/or media outlets.

The context in which the media and police engage with each other continues to evolve and regularly involves decisions that can be subject to challenge and scrutiny. This highlights the value of guidance to assist decision-making.

The foundation for all conversations between journalists and police, including communications officers, should be mutual respect, professional courtesy and cooperation.

## Defining the media

The guidance applies to accredited members of the media who hold a valid press card issued by the [UK Press Card Authority](#) (UKPCA). It does not apply to citizen journalists, social media content gatherers or auditors who do not hold a valid press card.

The UK Press Card is formally recognised by all broadcasting and written news media, by policing and the Ministry of Justice.

Police officers and communications officers may request to see a valid press card before providing information or material, or prior to allowing media into an area reserved for the media or a media briefing.

Journalists are expected to show their press card for access if requested to do so. Any UKPCA card can be verified using its hotline (01430 456543).

Where a card is unavailable, a letter from the editor of an organisation covered by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) or Ofcom can be provided. Police officers can contact their CCDs to assist in timely verification.

Requests from, or engagement with, non-accredited individuals may be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking a risk-based approach. It is important to consider:

- the credentials of the person or organisation making the request
- whether they are bound by clear codes of practice or have access to legal advice on how they should cover criminal cases

## Defining speaking terms

All parties should understand in advance the terms on which a briefing or conversation with the media is taking place.

Avoid the term 'off the record' as the basis for a conversation, as it can create ambiguity over how information is to be used. It can also risk the perception of inappropriate or confidential information disclosure.

The four defined categories of basis of conversation are reportable, non-reportable, under embargo and for use but non-attributable.

## Reportable

All reportable information may be reported, quoted and attributed, at the media's discretion. All communications should generally be on this basis. A quote in a media release should be attributed to a named spokesperson where appropriate and possible.

## Non-reportable

Non-reportable information is provided to the media on the basis (by prior agreement) that it is for guidance only and not for publication or broadcast.

It can be used to provide further context around a statement. This enables the police to have a dialogue with the media about serious or sensitive policing issues without generating publicity about them.

Where non-reportable information is shared, it is good practice, where appropriate, for police to work with the media to find a way to allow it to be reported in the future.

The officer or a communications officer should record the subject or subjects discussed. This record should include a note of why it is non-reportable.

Experienced and senior communications officers should be empowered to make reasoned judgements on the issuing of non-reportable information – for example, to inform timely editorial decisions and to ensure accuracy. However, it should be made clear to the media where the decision to release information is not the responsibility of the press office and requires approval – for example, from the senior investigating officer (SIO).

In particular, in high-profile or sensitive investigations or operations, or during major incidents, the press office should work with communications leadership and senior operational leads, usually the gold commander or SIO, to determine what can be released.

## Embargoed

Embargoed information is shared on the understanding that it is not to be published or broadcast until after a specified event or time. A decision to set an embargo should be recorded by the communications lead.

## Non-attributable

Information that is for use but non-attributable may be published but cannot be attributed to the source.

Always assume that a conversation is reportable and attributable unless expressly agreed otherwise in advance.

## Attendance at media interviews

While CCDs will not be involved in all media interaction, it may support engagement if a communications officer is present for media interviews where the subject:

- could have an impact on, or cause, community tensions
- is high-profile with significant media interest
- addresses national issues
- could damage confidence in policing
- is likely to generate interest from other media
- is considered contentious or highly politicised

## Pre-agreed communications plans

In some situations (such as high-profile or sensitive investigations or operations), CCDs will develop an agreed communications plan in liaison with the SIO, gold or other senior operational officer. Officers or staff should always check with CCDs whether a communications plan exists before sharing information.

## Recording contact with the media

Chief officers should record all their contact with the media where policing matters are discussed. This record should be publicly available. A brief record that the conversation has taken place and of its subject matter is sufficient. Informal or chance meetings where work-related issues are not discussed do not need to be recorded.

A similar (unpublished) record of contact should be recorded when another officer or member of staff, for a matter for which they are responsible:

- meets with a media representative
- takes part in an interview
- provides information verbally or in writing

## Taking the media on police operations

The following non-exhaustive list provides points to consider before agreeing media access to operations.

- Will it help prevent or detect crime?
- Would it address matters that are in the public interest?
- Is it likely to inform or reassure the public?
- Could it potentially prejudice a trial?
- Could it jeopardise future police operations or reveal covert police tactics?
- Could it interfere with an individual's right to a fair trial and their right to respect for private and family life?
- Could it cause unnecessary distress or harassment to victims, those being investigated, their family or innocent members of the community?

Where agreed, taking the media on police operations should be done in a fair and equitable manner. On occasion, it may be appropriate for police to work with a particular media organisation (for example, a news outlet campaigning against a particular crime type). However, other media organisations should have equal opportunity to request similar access to operations.

When appropriate, pooled media facilities may be arranged in circumstances where there are limitations on access or space. In these circumstances, it is at the force's discretion which media organisation attends, and this should be decided with fairness and impartiality. As a rule, a pooled facility should ensure that all types of media material – words, pictures, audio and film – are catered for.

Notice and invites to media should be through the CCD.

The media should sign an indemnity agreement. It is the responsibility of the media to ensure that they do not identify the individual in the operation, or to identify any victims or witnesses without their consent.

A health and safety risk assessment for media attendance should be completed prior to the event. Alternatively, the force should review the media outlet's independent risk assessment.

Police officers and staff must not disclose information, on-duty or off-duty, to unauthorised recipients. They must not provide informal tip-offs about operations.

Forces should take reasonable measures to ensure that any published materials do not lead to a suspect being identified. An example of this would be the release of a photograph after a warrant that identifies the house number in a street, which could lead to the identity of the suspect becoming known.

Media access to private property is at the discretion of the owner, legitimate occupier or some other person who can legally authorise access. The police do not have authority in the matter, and it is up to the media to negotiate their own access.

Safeguards should be implemented to reduce the risk of compromise to operational security through the disclosure of sensitive tactics, which can help bring offenders to justice, through the media. This can include, but is not limited to, the use and location of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras, covert surveillance methods and tactics to identify and locate offenders.

## Reporting from a scene

Reporting or filming from the scene of an incident is part of the media's role. They should not be prevented from doing so from a public place.

Police have no power to stop the filming or photographing of incidents or police personnel. It is for the media to determine what is published or broadcast, not the police. Once an image has been recorded, the police have no power to seize equipment, or to delete or confiscate images or footage, without a court order.

Where police have designated a cordoned area, the media have no access unless a media facility has been set up within the cordon.

The best possible vantage point for media access should be considered, providing it does not compromise operational needs.

## Exclusives

Media organisations should be treated in a fair and impartial manner. Where a media organisation generates an exclusive, their right to share information in confidence with the police should be respected. This means that where an enquiry is put to police by a journalist, the information being sought will not be proactively issued to other media outlets, except for operational reasons or unless it was already planned for release into the public domain. Once in the public domain, information released by the police should be available to all.

Where a media exclusive is already planned for release by the police, press offices should seek to liaise with the media outlet prior to publication to agree publication timings.

## Managing inaccurate or misleading media coverage

Inaccurate or misleading media coverage can be extremely damaging to an organisation or an individual. CCDs should promptly address inaccuracies or misleading coverage by:

- seeking a resolution with the journalist or media outlet concerned in the first instance
- proactively publishing a correction – for example, through a force's own social media channels
- liaison through a regulatory body, such as [Ofcom](#) (for broadcast media) or the [Independent Press Standards Organisation](#) (for newspapers, magazine and digital news)

As well as outlining the complaint and desired resolution, it can be useful to reference these against the relevant clauses of the codes of practice for the industry. Some media organisations, such as the BBC, produce their own editorial guidelines.

Following the guidance outlined and working with the media to be open and transparent in communications will help reduce inaccuracies in reporting.

## Journalist safety

Every police force has a designated journalist safety liaison officer (JSLO), as set out in the [National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists](#). The National Action Plan is jointly co-chaired by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office. The JSLO is the go-to person for issues relating to the safety of journalists, whether in person or online.

# Tags

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