

Notices 26/06

Wednesday 5 July 2006

Operational

Policy

A record of Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) policy is available from the Corporate Policy Database.

All police officers and police staff, including Police Community Support Officers and other members of the extended police family, and those working voluntarily or under contract to the Metropolitan Police Authority must be aware of, and are required to comply with, all relevant MPS policy and associated procedures.

4 Media Relations Policy

Administration

4 Media Relations Policy

This policy deals with the communication of information by Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) staff to the media, whether it is in response to enquiries or through proactive publicity. The provision of information to the media must be balanced against protecting the rights of any individual and the reputation of the MPS.

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METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE

MEDIA RELATIONS STANDING OPERATING PROCEDURES

Policy Contact: Chris Webb, extn 62675

Foreword

Policing in general and the MPS in particular, operate under intense media scrutiny and engaging with journalists can be daunting for those unfamiliar with the way the media operates.

I am committed to openness, improving the way in which we communicate - internally and externally - and to ensuring that everyone knows and understands our work, our key messages, aims and achievements.

Whilst we recognise that some people are understandably cautious about dealing with the media, an open approach is more likely to encourage confidence and respect. If we are to continue gaining the goodwill, confidence and support of the communities we serve and succeed in *working together for a safer London*, we need to engage with the media from an early stage. We must seize every opportunity to be proactive, whilst recognising that we also need to react to situations in a measured and balanced way.

This remains a job for everyone, not just the Directorate of Public Affairs (DPA) and must encompass the national, local, minority ethnic and specialist media that service the capital and its communities.

This updated document re-enforces our commitment to building effective dialogue with all sections of the media and takes into account organisational changes as well as feedback, since it was last issued. Interaction with journalists and reporters should be seen as the norm rather than the exception to the rule

Sir Ian Blair

Commissioner

**This document sets out standard operating procedures in support of the
MPS Media Relations Policy**

Talking to the Media

The aim must be for staff to provide the media with factual information about incidents, cases, investigations or issues they are personally involved in, providing that an embargo would not be broken or disclosure would not compromise an investigation, operation or the judicial process.

There will be occasions when it would be inappropriate for officers and police staff to comment, such as with issues of security, terrorism and other critical incidents, where there are procedures in place and/or a dedicated spokesperson appointed (see later section on disclosure of information to journalists). Likewise, the MPS has clear guidelines concerning the identification of individuals who feature in police investigations but who have not been charged with any criminal offence (see the Borough Press Liaison Officers Media and Internal Communications Guide on the DPA Intranet site).

However as a general rule, unless specific instructions exist, the principles are:

Operational information

Inspectors and above are authorised to speak to the media about their own areas of responsibility.

Where appropriate officers below the rank of inspector may speak to the media, but only with the approval of a senior officer of inspector rank or above. An example of this may be when there is a sergeant or constable with a specialist role, responsibilities or knowledge or Safer Neighbourhood teams, where the team Sergeant should be encouraged to build links with local newspapers on a regular basis.

Police staff and general matters

Police staff should only talk about their role in a specific investigation or operation with the agreement of the officer-in-charge. Heads of police staff branches or departments should determine at what level it would be appropriate for their own staff to speak about matters that relate to the unit's responsibilities and functions.

Contractors and Consultants

Consultants or contractors who are approached by the media should initially refer requests to their employing Operational Command Unit (OCU) or Branch. In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for a contractor or consultant to talk to the media about their role, but this must only be

undertaken following permission from the OCU commander or the Head of Branch.

OCU commanders and heads of branches must ensure that all contractors and consultants are aware of this policy.

Policy matters

Any media requests for information or comment regarding Met-wide issues, policy matters or events that could bring the Service into disrepute or dispute, should be referred to the OCU commander, head of branch or department and either the local DPA press office or the 24-hour Press Bureau at New Scotland Yard (NSY).

Responding to Inaccuracies

It can be extremely frustrating when the media publish or broadcast a story that is either inaccurate, misleading or gives an unfair interpretation of the facts. Sometimes a response is needed to clarify the situation or the Met's position.

Officers or members of police staff who wish to respond to an unfair article about a particular OCU or an individual should always seek advice from their relevant DPA press officer. Where it is felt appropriate to submit a letter for publication, the relevant Head of Branch, OCU commander or line manager will be asked to correspond with the news organisation concerned. This approach ensures a co-ordinated corporate response

Individual officers or police staff wishing to write their own letters for publication should seek advice from their OCU commander about whether it is appropriate for them to do so

Disclosure of investigative information to journalists

There will be occasions, for investigative and evidential purposes, when investigating officers will want to withhold putting certain information into the public domain. Whilst the publication or broadcast of this information may not necessarily be in breach of the Contempt of Court Act 1981, it could nevertheless disadvantage the investigation or subsequent prosecution. Where officers or police staff become aware that a media organisation is planning to print or broadcast material that could prejudice an investigation or subsequent prosecution, they should seek urgent advice from DPA.

In high profile investigations, there must be an identified spokesperson and an appointed DPA press officer. It is unlikely in such cases that the senior investigating officer (SIO) would wish any officer or police staff to divulge information without his/her express permission.

SIOs in such cases must make their media handling policy for the investigation clear to their teams through briefings and recording entries in their decision logs. This must include clearly identifying to all staff the appointed DPA press officer/s and any other named officers who are authorised to speak to journalists.

'Off the record'

In order to build better understanding and closer working relationships with journalists, there may be occasions when police officers wish to provide guidance. This is commonly known as speaking 'off the record'¹ - dealing with matters that are not for public disclosure, explaining reasons for maintaining confidentiality and specifying what might be published. When doing so, officers must adhere to the facts of the case and should not speculate or let their own personal views or prejudices influence the discussions.

Misunderstandings can sometimes occur about what 'off the record' means. Some journalists interpret it as being completely non-reportable, whilst others believe that they can report what is said but not attribute it to the individual who said it. It is therefore advisable that before giving guidance of this sort, the officer/police staff member clarifies the basis on which it is being provided.

It will be for OCU commanders and heads of branches to decide at what levels within their own areas of responsibility such discretion may be exercised. If there is any doubt about offering *off the record* guidance, advice should be sought from the DPA or enquiries referred direct to them.

Promoting our Work

Liaison with the local press

Many borough OCUs have their own dedicated press liaison officers (BPLOs) whose role it is to brief local newspaper about local issues and events. Officers who have dealt with cases or issues that would benefit from local media coverage should make sure that they inform their BPLO.

Taking the media on police operations

Taking the media on police operations gives a good insight into policing and how we are tackling crime. Officers planning such operations should always consider the media as part of their overall strategy. The ultimate decision to take them will rest with the OCU commander, but it is important that the DPA is consulted, the guidelines followed and the appropriate *indemnity agreement* and *note to media representatives* (attached at Annex A and Annex B) are completed, signed and retained. In addition, DPA press officers and journalists must be included in any health and safety risk assessment.

When the media contact police officers directly for access to police operations, the caller should be referred to the local DPA press office or the Press Bureau at NSY who will co-ordinate such requests and ensure that appropriate guidelines are followed.

If it is not possible to allow the media access on a police operation, a clear and straightforward explanation should be given as to why access is being refused or restricted.

Television documentaries and dramas

The MPS receives numerous approaches and requests from television

production companies for co-operation with the making of television documentaries and dramas. While many of these provide opportunities to promote the work and achievements of the MPS and possibly generate income, they can be time-consuming and require considerable resources to enable them to proceed. There can also be occasions when the proposals may be in conflict with one another.

All approaches from television documentary or drama programmes should be filtered through the DPA, who will consult with the relevant units and officers to decide whether to pursue the proposal. Where there is a potential for income generation, negotiations with the television production company will be conducted through the Events and Income Development Unit in the Resources Directorate.

The 'Your News Box'

Despite the considerable amount of proactive work undertaken by the DPA and the MPS generally, there are still many items of good news that are not reaching colleagues within the Service or - through the media - the wider public.

To enhance the gathering of positive news, for both an internal and external audience, an e-mail account with the internal address YourNews@NSY has been set up. All MPS staff are encouraged to e-mail details of good news that they consider warrants publicity. DPA will assess this information and place details on the MPS Intranet site as well as passing it on to The Job magazine.

The Your News Box is designed to capture positive news and stories that may otherwise go unreported. Most boroughs and MPS departments already liaise with their relevant press office or DPA unit and pass on positive results. The Your News Box is designed to be an additional line of communication, not a replacement.

Public Scrutiny

Internal Investigations and Discipline

The DPA follows a clear and consistent approach to communicating information about professional standard issues. A potentially high profile internal investigation or discipline case should be brought to the attention of the DPA at the earliest opportunity.

A clear media policy already exists for handling these cases and this has recently been refined in light of the Morris Inquiry findings.

Following notification of a potentially high profile case the DPA will prepare a media statement in consultation with the senior investigating officer (SIO) from DPS. The individual under investigation or facing discipline (and any victim) will be provided with a copy of the media statement by either the SIO handling the investigation or other appropriate officer and informed when it is likely to be released to the media.

Advice and support on how to deal with intrusive media attention as a result of publicity surrounding the case will be provided to the individual under investigation by the Human Resources press office.

Whilst we believe that it is in the public interest to release information about how we are tackling corruption and wrongdoing amongst officers and staff, the rights and needs of those under investigation or facing discipline, must always be taken into consideration.

We should not disclose any information that could prejudice the outcome of any proceedings or comment on an individual's guilt or innocence before the appropriate body has made its decision.

Employment Tribunals

High profile employment tribunals (ETs) should be brought to the attention of the DPA at the earliest opportunity. Although it is unusual for the MPS to comment on ETs until they have been heard, in circumstances where the person bringing the ET publicly criticises the MPS, then the Service may need to respond.

In such cases the individual bringing the action will be provided with a copy of the statement released through their line manager or the MPS ET unit.

The MPS would not disclose any information that could prejudice the outcome of any proceedings.

Criminal Cases

The criteria used in relation to information released to the media about police officers or police staff charged with a criminal offence is the same as for other members of the public.

Details released will include name, age, rank, occupation and the nature of the charge. A home address will not be given but the location of where the individual is based will be.

The individual charged (and any victim) should be provided with a copy of the statement by either the SIO handling the investigation or other appropriate officer and informed when it is likely to be released to the media.

Advice and support on how to deal with intrusive media attention as a result of publicity surrounding the case will be provided by the Human Resources press office.

We should not disclose any information that could prejudice the outcome of any proceedings or comment on an individual's guilt or innocence before it has been established by the appropriate, decision-making body.

Pre-Trial and Pre-Verdict Press Briefings

The DPA adheres to the guidelines laid down by the Association of Chief

Police Officers (ACPO) when deciding whether or not to hold a pre-trial or pre-verdict briefing. The decision to hold a briefing rests with the DPA and the SIO (in consultation with the CPS) who will consider whether or not the case meets the relevant criteria.

The over-riding principle when considering a briefing is that nothing should be done to prejudice a forthcoming or on-going trial. For instance, there should be no discussion with the media pre-verdict of the relative weight or value of elements of the prosecution case or comment on an individual's guilt or innocence.

Freedom of Information Act

The Act provides a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities including the MPS (subject to conditions and exemptions).

If a reporter asks how to apply to the MPS for information under the Act, they should forward their request to PublicAccessOffice@met-police.uk and every effort should be made to release the information as soon as possible.

There will be occasions when a journalist's request can be dealt with as a legitimate media enquiry rather than an FOI request. This should be the preferred and encouraged option.

Working Together

Supplying Information to DPA press officers

Those officers who have direct dealings with a reporter over a news story, should always tell the DPA - either the 24-hour Press Bureau at NSY, or their local or specialist DPA press office. There are likely to be follow-up calls from other media organisations following publication or broadcast. Making DPA aware will allow for appropriate statements to be prepared in advance to deal with subsequent enquiries.

Media advice and database of lines to take

The DPA has an established set of instructions for its staff that provide advice on what can and cannot be said to journalists on a wide range of subjects and issues. These, together with the latest Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) media guidelines and a database of 'the official line' to take on current topics can be found on the DPA Intranet site.

Electronic media

An increasing number of people regularly access our Internet website (including the media) and use it to obtain news and research material. The MPS Intranet is also a valuable source of news and information for MPS employees. All OCUs must therefore ensure that information on their sites is accurate, current and regularly updated. Advice on this can be obtained from the Directorate of Information e.comms Team in Room 1317 at NSY on extn 63537.

Press Identification Cards

The bona fide media should carry a 'UK Press Card'¹ that contains the individual's photograph. This card is recognised by ACPO. The card does not carry an automatic right of access to the scene of an incident or authority to pass police lines. However, officers are expected to be helpful to cardholders and where possible try to accommodate their needs. UK Press Cards can be authenticated by calling 0870 8376477.

Foreign journalists based in London may not hold the ACPO recognised card. Where possible co-operation should be extended to them on production of appropriate/current ID (e.g. a passport and a letter from the news organisation they represent) and, if necessary, following consultation with DPA.

Media Access

Members of the media have a right to report and photograph public events and film on the public highway, unless they are causing a serious obstruction or genuine operational concern. In such cases, officers should seek to accommodate their presence at an alternative location near-by e.g. a Media RVP. It is not the role of police officers or police staff to censor what photographs or film the media can take. This includes putting yourself or your hand in front of a camera lens.

When press photographers and film crews arrive at the scene of an incident or a crime scene, officers should politely direct them to an appropriate vantage point and seek advice from DPA. Being unhelpful or telling them to go away does not foster positive police/press relations.

Guidelines on dealing with media reporters, press photographers and television crews at the scene of incidents have recently been published and are available on the MPS Intranet site on from your local or unit press office.

Training

This media policy should be reinforced at every level. Basic training should touch on the general concept of the media policy, while intermediate and higher training should stress the advantages to be derived from the avoidance of unnecessary secrecy and the achievement of mutual trust between the Service and the media.

DPA press officers can provide basic media awareness and broadcast training to those officers and police staff who have to give media interviews as part of their normal duties. Any officer or member of police staff who feels that they would benefit from such training should contact their DPA press office for further information. External media specialists are contracted to provide training for OCU commanders and ACPO officers.

Further details of media training opportunities can be obtained from your appropriate DPA press office or from the Chief Press Officer at NSY.

Making Progress

Interactions and relations between the police and the media are inevitably complex and at times difficult. An approach that seeks to be as open and helpful as constraints allow, will inevitably involve risks and sometimes disappointment.

To minimise this, ACPO rank officers, chief superintendents and detective chief superintendents in charge of OCUs and heads of branches and departments must ensure that officers under their command are fully briefed about the extent to which factual information may be supplied and by whom.

It is accepted that if these measures are to succeed, some mistakes may be made in the process. The MPS will not however, tolerate any police officer or police staff who improperly discloses information (either deliberately or recklessly) to the media (for example, for personal gain or contrary to the media handling policy set out by an SIO). The unofficial disclosure of information could not only have an impact on an investigation it could also damage the credibility and reputation of the MPS and its staff.

The success of this policy depends on everyone being open and flexible with the media. Nevertheless, MPS staff must always be mindful of the effect that disclosure of information could have on an investigation or subsequent prosecution.

Whilst at times this approach will be challenging, it will ultimately be of benefit to us as individuals, to our OCUs, our departments and the MPS as a whole.

Associated Documents

Media Relations policy

Accessible Formats Guidance

Corporate Identity Guidelines

Directorate of Public Affairs

Enquiries

Further enquiries should be made to **Chris Webb**, Deputy Direct of Public Affairs, on extn. **62675** or **Bob Cox** on extn **62475**