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Anne Pickles, Acting Editor, Cumbrian Newspapers, Carlisle.

Career summary: I have been Associate Editor at CN since 2006, responsible principally for content management across our main titles and deputising for the editor. I am also leader writer, feature writer and columnist.

For the past four months I have been Acting Editor, responsible in the main for the daily tabloid News & Star (two editions a day) and The Cumberland News (broadsheet weekly).

Prior to my appointment at Carlisle I was Features Editor and Assistant Editor at the Yorkshire Evening Post, Leeds. Before then, a reporter with the Yorkshire Evening Post. My working life began at the Dewsbury Reporter.

My career in journalism spans 39 years.

2)

By choice I have always been a local and/or regional journalist. My choice is rooted in a belief in press accountability and accessibility and I still believe accountability and open accessibility are the bedrock of local and regional newspapers.

As a consequence of that long experience, I know events which triggered this inquiry to be a world away from anything I, or any of my colleagues, on any of the newspapers for which I have worked, have encountered.

My impressions over many years of dealings with police - both in West Yorkshire and Cumbria - have been of a clearly defined professional working relationship, built on trust and a full understanding of the roles of both police and press.

Relationships between the News & Star/The Cumberland News and Cumbria Police are good, honest, solid and wholly professional. Local media and police together understand we each serve our shared communities and there is a culture of co-operation to that end.

In that respect, I'd describe the relationship as a successful one. The crime reporter and other senior reporters are trusted by the police.

There is daily contact with police officers - and the police press office - for regular updates on local matters of crime and crime prevention, progress of ongoing investigations, arrests and imminent charges.

It's an old fashioned system of communication some larger media groups might find cumbersome. But it is transparent, has integrity. And it works.

In Carlisle and Cumbria - unlike in some major metropolitan areas - there has been little or no experience of blurred lines of responsibility. We at CN are - by comparison with national media and certainly with the News of the World - the minnows of the industry. We live with the people on whose lives we report. The ethos of this independently owned group is that our papers remain at the heart of the communities they serve. Every journalist is keenly aware and regularly reminded of that responsibility; training is geared to it; dealings with police and politicians are centred on it.

3)

At various stages of my career I have had different kinds of contact with police. At the Yorkshire Evening Post, for example, I attended formal press conferences - such as those called in support of police appeals for witnesses or information in investigations into the Yorkshire Ripper murders. In addition there were off-record briefings during those years of enquiry. The local press was regarded by police as an extra resource.

During that time and after Peter Sutcliffe's arrest, when national media rolled into Leeds and Bradford with cheque books to lead the national and international scrum for an exclusive at any price, there was a discernible shift in police-press relations. Police officers became nervous of trusting journalists. Some, it was suspected, may have trusted a touch too easily.

During my time as a journalist there have also been profile interviews with Chief Constables and investigating officers in support of victims of crime or to further investigations into serious crime.

Personal contact with the Chief Constable (Craig Mackey) came firstly with an introductory meeting shortly after my arrival here in 2006 and later when PC Bill Barker died in the floods of 2009, while directing traffic away from a collapsing bridge. The News & Star wanted to sponsor an award for the ultimate police community service in his memory. Craig Mackey and his senior colleagues were helpful in liaison with PC Barker's widow and family. The Chief Constable attended the award ceremony.

When in 2010 Derrick Bird gunned down 12 people in west Cumbria - attracting immense national and international media attention - Cumbria Police approached the then editor Neil Hodgkinson and asked for some off-record advice on how to cope with what was fast becoming an overwhelming presence of national media with insatiable demands. He gave it willingly. Some time later, police reciprocated with an off-record briefing in the editor's office as to what should be expected from complex inquest hearings and how the inquests into the deaths of 13 people would be ordered.

At that meeting it was established that CN's newspapers would report as sensitively as possible, so sparing victims' families and friends in our communities the worst ravages of sensational press reporting of some pretty gruesome evidence. That commitment was carefully monitored by the senior editorial team throughout the proceedings.

4)

As Associate Editor and more recently as Acting Editor, I have had very little personal contact with the press officers at Cumbria Police. It's not something I would expect, if the crime reporting and news reporting team is working as it should.

5)

I have never had the personal telephone number or mobile number of any police officer, save in a couple of instances in Yorkshire when I was friends with the wives of policemen and had their home number.

6/7)

In dealings with Cumbria Police we seek to gain up to date information on local incidences of crime, serious road accidents and police involvement with crime prevention initiatives. We also turn to police sources for data on local and regional crime figures and trends and senior detectives' comments and opinions on the outcomes of some of the higher profile trials.

What the police want from us is help with witness appeals, information appeals, public safety warnings.

We have used police Efits of wanted suspects as our newspaper bills, following serious violent crime, for instance. We have also offered rewards for information leading to conviction.

8/9/10/11)

I have never accepted hospitality from Cumbria Police. Neither have I provided hospitality for Cumbria Police - though I'm sure CN's Chief Executive will have, on occasion over the years, invited chief constables to be among his guests at community lunches hosted for key public figures here at Newspaper House.

12)

I have never attended a formal police press conference in Cumbria. I'm sure crime reporter Nick Griffiths has attended many of them.

13)

The police have given our crime reporter prior notification of arrests, imminent charges, arms and drugs raids - some of which we have been invited to cover, when police have been anxious to put out a cautionary public message.

14)

Off-record briefings have been described above, in relation specifically to the Derrick Bird case. They do occur when it is felt by police we may be in danger of taking a mistaken line - for instance giving the impression of there being a danger to the wider public following a crime or series of crimes, when no such danger exists.

Background information is given on occasion to help inform our reporting, avoid legal problems and prevent unnecessary distress being caused to people associated with offenders or their victims.

15)

Any hospitality - such as it is - is agreed and signed off by the editor. Any hospitality offered by the editor is agreed and signed off by the chief executive. Invitations or offers of hospitality to journalists are reported similarly.

If it were not so worrisome, the mere idea of local media having to justify a cup of coffee bought for a briefing officer in the police station canteen would be laughable. When Carlisle flooded in 2005, our crime reporter had to meet the briefing officer in a cafe. That resulted in the huge expense of a bacon sandwich. It was reported to the editor.

16)

In-house training is given, ethical codes and guidelines updated regularly in the interests of maintaining wholly professional and transparent dealings with police at every level.

17)

Ours is a small and therefore necessarily structured newsroom. News editors and the editor are kept aware of all communications between reporters and the police. This is necessary for obvious reasons of transparency but also because, having a tight team and changing shifts, managers need to be aware of what conversations have taken place when progressing stories. To my knowledge there have been no concerning issues with police-press communications.

18)

A successful working relationship between media and police is essential. It's vital that the relationship should be built on trust and operate within the law for a broadly common purpose of community service. If and when trust is betrayed, abused or exploited, the relationship is broken... and inquiries such as this are called.

Our job is to talk to people and inform with fairness and accuracy. We must not be further restricted when talking to the police. We rely on public trust to do our jobs. The police rely on the same public trust to do theirs. A mutual respect for those roles and willingness to work together with a necessary degree of openness and within acknowledged and accepted codes of practice are all at play in a successful relationship.

19)

No payments are considered legitimate transactions between the police and journalists at Cumbrian Newspapers.

20)

Access to police is via the usual, most often formally agreed channels. Journalists contact the press office, on office telephone numbers - and in some few cases on home numbers - entrusted to the crime reporter and senior journalists by the officers concerned.

21)

The police press office is a useful resource for journalists, when it is staffed by press officers fully conversant with the concept of media deadlines and the needs we have to access information or data quickly. It is also a handy initial port of call should we be considering a specific feature, profile or special report which may need some research within the force to secure the appropriate information and/or interviewee. In that respect we expect to - and do - work together to facilitate all that.

It is though no substitute for direct conversations with police officers, face to face interviews, on and off-record briefings and should not be regarded as such.

22/23)

A review or renewed examination of police and media relations is, by and large, healthy - so long as its objectives are positive, constructive, in the interests of more freedom of information and not an attempt to slam the stable door long after a few rogue horses have bolted.

There will be risks in any relationship so long as people are people. But the events leading to the Without Fear or Favour recommendations and the Leveson Inquiry were in no way typical of the way the majority of police forces and newspapers work together every day.

I would agree that there can be "No geographical variables when it comes to integrity and there should not be local differences in standards."

There is, however a sense that a sledgehammer is being used against the whole of the newspaper industry and onerous restrictions placed on all police forces, when more direct and available legal action could have been better used against those who offended in the phone-hacking scandal.

Honest police officers and ethical journalists in the regions feel they are about to be made to pay for the not inconsiderable sins of a few in London. And that, in the end, will damage the public's right to the fair, accurate and contemporaneous information to which it is entitled

Anne Pickles
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