

**The Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press**

Witness statement of **Oliver Cattermole**

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

- 1.1 I am Director of Communications at the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). I make this statement in response to a request made of me under Section 21 (2) of the Inquiries Act 2005 by Lord Justice Leveson, as Chairman of the Inquiry. In making this statement I have reviewed policies, guidance and other documents, including statements provided by ACPO members.
- 1.2 I began my career in magazine publishing as a news reporter for The Grocer in 1997, and then worked as a sub-editor for Hello! magazine and as deputy editor on a magazine called Food Manufacture. In 2000 I joined the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as a press officer, where I was part of the team leading the Government's communications response to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak.
- 1.3 Within the newly formed Department of Environment and Rural Affairs, I remained as a press officer, dealing with food and farming policies and taking on speech writing duties for ministers. I was the press officer with responsibility for media handling during the passage of the Hunting Bill, before joining the Home Office as a senior press officer in 2004.
- 1.4 At the Home Office I worked in the press office under four Home Secretaries and led communications teams on faith and race policies, identity cards, justice and home affairs within the EU and immigration. During the UK's Presidency of the EU I led for the Home Office on media handling and, following the 7/7 bombings, I led on communications with faith and race communities. I was promoted to Assistant Director in 2007 where I established a team of regional press officers for the UK Borders Agency, before joining the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) as Director of Communications in November 2007.
- 1.5 I hold a BA (Hons) from the University of Durham.

**2 Please describe your role and responsibilities within ACPO. To whom do you report?**

- 2.1 My role within ACPO is to support and provide professional communications advice to the ACPO President and to the 340 chief officers who comprise ACPO across the police service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in relation to their national policing roles. In this role I lead the small ACPO Communications Team within the ACPO Secretariat, and liaise with those working in communications roles across police forces, as well as with chief officers.
- 2.2 I also work with Chief Constable Andy Trotter, who is elected by members as professional lead for media relations and chairs ACPO's Communications Advisory Group. I report to the Chief of Staff to the ACPO President.

**3 Please describe the role and remit of your office/department within ACPO?**

- 3.1 At a national level, one of the core functions carried out by ACPO is to explain, inform and, when appropriate, defend the operational work of the police service to cut crime and protect life. My office within ACPO has a remit to support this function and enable those who lead the police service across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to provide the public with a legitimate and authoritative national voice for operational policing.
- 3.2 Within ACPO there are 14 Business Areas, 340 chief officers and staff covering 336 separate police functions or types of crime ('portfolios') that are nationally led and coordinated by a Chief Officer, ranging from police use of firearms to metal theft. These roles are supported in communications inside and outside the police service by my office, the ACPO Communications Team.
- 3.3 While each police force operates independently of one another and manages communications in respect of its local policing, my office responds to media demand concerning national policing and crime reduction. In the context of a recent example, my team supported the Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary, who acts as the national lead on rape, in communicating the police service response to a report on rape investigation and prosecution from Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Constabulary and the Crown Prosecution Service. On police service-wide stories such as this, the ACPO Communications Team can communicate an expert professional view to the

media from a chief police officer who leads for the whole service, including drafting and issuing statements, arranging media interviews and so on.

3.4 Policing and crime generate significant volumes of media interest, often focussed on issues of controversy or where things have gone wrong. The ACPO press office aims to provide timely and accurate information that ensures the public and media have access to a balanced and accurate picture of policing.

3.5 The office also supports internal communication across the service on behalf of Chief Constables. It maintains the ACPO website, publishes corporate publications or responses to consultations, supports Freedom of Information, contributes to the management of events, and supports the police service's communication with external bodies such as the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), and the Home Affairs Select Committee.

**4 Does the ACPO press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling the flow of information to the media?**

4.1 Within the ACPO Communications Team the small ACPO press office provides a necessary and efficient route for the media to access information. It can draw on experts across all 44 police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to supply the media with authoritative professional perspectives on any aspect of policing. Likewise it is an efficient means of delivering professional communications support for the national work carried out by chief officers rather than recreating that capability and capacity in each police force.

4.2 However it is not the sole route open to the media seeking to access information about policing. Police forces are responsible for the policing they deliver locally and chief officers will routinely speak to the media in the context of the police forces they run. I would not describe the ACPO press office as having a gatekeeper function because it would be unrealistic to expect to centrally control the flow of information to the media.

**5 Does the ACPO press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling access to ACPO personnel and/or to ACPO members?**

5.1 The ACPO press office frequently arranges access to ACPO members as part of its role, which ensures that leaders within policing are made available to communicate on national policing issues. We can identify the chief officer best placed to assist the media and ensure that officer is briefed and supported to provide the media with the information they require. Again, the ACPO press office is not the sole means of access to ACPO members and so I would not describe this as a gatekeeper function.

5.2 The ACPO press office would also support ACPO personnel in the same manner, but ACPO is a membership association and its personnel are not typically in roles which would make them representative of policing.

**6 What is your impression of the culture within ACPO in relation to its dealings with the media (the media in all its forms)?**

6.1 My impression of the culture within ACPO in relation to dealings with the media is generally a positive one. The leadership within an organisation tends to set the tone for the way in which it deals with the media; in police forces this flows from the Chief Constable down. Across 44 different organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the tone of those relationships and dealings with the media will vary. Overall, my impression is that chief officers of ACPO rank regard accountability to the public as a vital part of policing, and recognise that the media (in all its forms) play an important role in delivering that accountability, engaging the public in fighting crime and providing them with information about the business of policing.

**7 Describe your impression of the culture of dealings between the ACPO press office and the media (the media in all its forms)? Do you consider the relationship between the ACPO press office and the media to be a successful one? What changes would you like to make to the relationship (if any?)**

7.1 My impression of the culture of dealings between the ACPO press office and the media is that they are professional and generally positive and open. In the routine, I consider that the relationship between the ACPO press office and the media is a successful one, which supports the media in accessing information they seek about policing from an authoritative and trusted source, and supports the police service in engaging and informing the public, through the media, about policing.

7.2 Outside the routine, I consider that the portrayal of ACPO in the media has on some occasions lacked accuracy and balance. In part this has reflected criticisms made of the Association's governance. As an example, ACPO has been criticised in the media as unaccountable, in part because it was not, until relatively recently, designated an organisation subject to the Freedom of Information Act. ACPO itself requested inclusion under the Act through a consultation process and was brought under the Act in November 2011.

7.3 Media organisations operate in a commercial environment where they compete for stories. Therefore they have differing priorities to those of the police service, which start with keeping the public safe. My view is that those differing priorities will inevitably bring the media and police into conflicting positions at times. I would like to ensure that relationships between media and the ACPO press office remain professional and they continue to develop to ensure the police service is able to respond appropriately to the changing media environment.

**8 Set out your understanding of the type of contact which staff working in the ACPO press office have with the local and national media covering nature, extent, frequency and (in general terms) topics/content.**

8.1 Staff working in the ACPO press office will be in contact with local and national media on a daily basis, in the main through telephone and email, and less regularly meeting in person. The nature, extent, frequency and topics of that contact will largely depend upon the particular events taking place on any given day which the media consider to be newsworthy.

8.2 A day might include all kinds of contact: a call to the press officer on duty, before office hours begin, from a morning national news programme, requesting access to a senior police officer who can comment on the way in which the police generally respond to firearms incidents, following one such incident in a local force. A morning might involve an international organisation publishing a report on drug use in the UK which prompts numerous telephone calls to the ACPO press office. In an afternoon, a press officer might accompany a senior police officer to nearby studios to record an interview for a radio programme which is examining police use of CCTV. After office hours, on a rota basis, a press officer will be on duty overnight. From time to time we

will also arrange regular briefings with crime and home affairs correspondents so that chief police officers can brief them on specific areas of policing.

- 8.3 News stories dealing with crime and policing are continually in the media, and chief police officers through ACPO cover every aspect of policing at the national level, supported by staff working in the ACPO press office. The nature of contact with the media therefore varies widely, but its frequency is consistently high.

**9 Are contacts with the media restricted to certain staff or are all personnel within ACPO able to deal with the media?**

- 9.1 As described, ACPO is a membership organisation within which chief police officers lead on each aspect of national policing. A part of these roles is to act as spokesperson for the police service nationally in the area of policing where a chief police officer takes the lead, and the ACPO press office supports them in this respect. Beyond those working in the press office, staff or personnel within ACPO are not in roles which would generally put them in contact with the media. While contact with the media is not restricted, I would expect any other personnel to draw upon the professional resource available to them in the press office.

**10 Does the ACPO press office prioritise some sections of the media over others? For instance, does it prioritise communications and relations with the national media over those with the local media? If so, please give details and explain why?**

- 10.1 As a public service entrusted with considerable powers to intrude on the lives of private individuals in order to keep them safe, the police service has an obligation to be accountable for the way in which those powers are exercised and therefore to communicate its work. In my view this obligation is a general one which does not distinguish between local or national media.
- 10.2 While all sections of the media have the same right to information I consider it is appropriate and necessary to prioritise between sections of the media on the basis of available resources. For example I would support the ACPO press office providing information to a news report carried on the national evening news over a local newspaper, if both were on deadline, given that the national evening news is likely to have the wider audience and consequent impact on the public. If other resources

were available, I would expect the ACPO press office to provide the same attention to the local newspaper. The volumes of 24/7 media demand, particularly following a major incident, means that a degree of prioritisation is inevitable, even in a team with far more capacity than the ACPO press office. A relationship of trust with media helps in establishing deadlines and ensuring the press office is able to meet demand.

10.3 In my experience the ACPO press office deals more regularly with national media than local media, as a consequence of the fact that a significant proportion of local media reporting concerns the local police force, rather than national policing generally, and therefore is not handled by ACPO.

**11 Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that information is disseminated widely to the media rather than only to select journalists or titles? If so, please specify. If not, do you consider that there should be?**

11.1 Information provided to the media may either be in response to a general news story or provided in response to a specific inquiry from an individual journalist or title. In the former case, information published by ACPO is made available through the website. Information disseminated in response to general news stories will also be sent to a list of journalists and titles maintained by the ACPO press office and open to all. The list includes the Press Association, which is available in most newsrooms across the country. The aim is to be fair to all media.

11.2 In the latter case, we would respect the right of the media to pursue a story in confidence and information would be disseminated proactively only to the select journalist or title requesting it. In many cases it might be of specific interest only to that particular journalist or title. Once disseminated to any journalist or title, however, it would be available for release to any subsequent journalist or title who requested it.

**12 What is the media's attitude to the ACPO press office? In particular, are they satisfied by the provision of information and the routing of communications through the press office or do they prefer direct contact with individual personnel within ACPO?**

12.1 In the main the media have a positive attitude to the ACPO press office, which I believe rests on it being a professional and reliable unit which understands their

requirements and is effective and efficient in providing them with access to the information which they require. Journalists who regularly report on crime and policing tend to have built good professional relationships with the office.

12.2 There are occasions where journalists are unsatisfied with the provision of information through the press office, which I see as a consequence of differing roles and perspectives. The media want news stories and information and the press office is not always in a position to provide it. For example, there may be no chief police officer available to appear on a TV or radio programme when the media require one, or the ACPO press office may decline to offer a comment on a political story because to do so might undermine the impartiality of the police service. If the facts of a news story directly concern a policing operation being delivered by a police force, the ACPO press office would advise the media that they should seek information from that force.

12.3 The starting point with the media is one of openness and transparency, but we may withhold information where we believe that there are compelling reasons to do so, namely its release could compromise delivery of effective policing to the public. For example, we do not release full details of national police practice developed on some types of investigations, such as gun crime, because to do so could assist criminals in frustrating future investigations and escaping justice. Where we do withhold information we would try and explain the rationale for doing so.

12.4 In some circumstances journalists will prefer direct contact with individual chief officers, in most cases where they have established a prior relationship. There is nothing unusual in my view about contact of that kind but I would expect chief officers to let the ACPO press office know if such contact has occurred and if they expect it to lead to a news story relating to national policing.

**13 Do you or staff working for the ACPO press office ever give “off-the-record” briefings or have “off-the-record” conversations with the media (both local and national)? If so, please give full details and illustrative examples. Please also explain why they take place and what you consider to be the benefits of such communications.**

13.1 I and staff working for the ACPO press office will regularly have conversations with the media to provide them with background information, as part of our responsibility to engage with the media and inform them of the business of policing. Some or parts of



those conversations take place with agreement that a journalist will not quote our words, even on an unattributable basis.

- 13.2 Communication on these terms can benefit both parties in that it can allow for a fuller exchange of information which provides the media with deeper understanding of a policing issue. For example, an ACPO press officer might spend considerable time explaining, from the professional perspective of the police, why a crime type such as rape can be particularly difficult to investigate and prosecute, and what the police service is doing to improve its performance. This is a complex subject and could lead to a detailed conversation. The range and breadth of 24/7 media and general trend away from specialist reporters who build up expert knowledge has meant there is a continual demand for information on these terms.
- 13.3 To have a conversation such as this on background terms allows a press officer to provide full information about such a subject without the concern that a part of that conversation might be reported out of its proper context. If a journalist has left room for a brief on-the-record police comment within a much larger story, it enables the press officer to have a broader conversation to fully inform the journalist, then provide an on-the-record statement that very specifically addresses the core issue and supports the police service's objectives on rape. That is a statement that sets out the commitment of the police service to improve its response to rape and encourages victims to report crime.
- 14 Insofar as applicable, what records are kept of information shared on an "off-the-record basis? Are records kept of all "off-the-record briefings and the information provided at them?**
- 14.1 Background and off-the-record are terms often used interchangeably which might benefit from commonly understood definitions. Members of staff working in the ACPO press office are required to keep a record of any conversations with the media, either through logging it on a database maintained by the press office, or in notebooks.
- 15 Describe in general terms and with illustrative examples, the personal contact which you have with the local and national media. The Inquiry would like an overall picture of the type, frequency, duration and content of your contact with the media.**

- 15.1 In general terms I have a wide range of contact with local and national media as part of my role as Director of Communications for ACPO. This includes regular contact by telephone with journalists and, less frequently, meetings in person during the course of my work. My contact with the media also includes responses to requests for information from journalists, or arranging access to senior police officers, and meetings where I might accompany senior police officers at a public event, or to a media interview.
- 15.2 I tend to be more involved in direct contact with the media when there is a particularly significant news story to manage. In a period such as followed the 2011 riots, for example, I would speak daily to a range of journalists over the phone and meet media representatives regularly when accompanying chief officers to media appearances. At other times when such a large and developing news story was not running, I might not have any contact with the media over the course of a week.
- 16 Describe what you are seeking to gain for ACPO through your personal contact with the media.**
- 16.1 I am seeking to explain and communicate the work of the police service, and of the leadership of the police service through ACPO, to the public through the media. To support that aim I am seeking a professional relationship which helps me to understand the media's perspectives and priorities.
- 17 Describe in general terms and using illustrative examples what you consider the local and national media have been seeking from you in your personal dealings with them?**
- 17.1 In general terms the local and national media seek information, access to chief police officers and a better understanding of policing. Journalists who regularly report on crime and policing issues seek a professional relationship upon which they can rely for accurate information to inform their reporting.
- 17.2 On Monday 5 March, for example, the ACPO press office dealt with a range of requests including: local and national media seeking interviews with the national police lead on domestic violence, local and national media seeking information about

the extent of the role of private sector organisations in delivering policing, local and national media seeking information about police monitoring of sex offenders, an international radio station seeking information on the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales, a specialist law publication asking about police use of interpreters in the criminal justice system, a TV programme asking for an interview with a chief police officer about dangerous dogs, and a regional radio programme requesting an interview on alcohol licensing.

**18 To what extent have you accepted hospitality from the media whilst working in your current position?**

18.1 In my current position I have very occasionally accepted a meal or coffee from a journalist in the context of a meeting to discuss work. In most cases this would occur when I have accompanied the President of ACPO to a meeting over a working lunch. Such meetings are recorded in my work diary and/or under the ACPO hospitality register.

**19 Insofar as you have accepted hospitality from the media, what has been the nature of the hospitality that you have accepted?**

19.1 As above. Besides the occasional lunch meeting, over the course of my current employment I have accepted an invitation to attend an award ceremony for police officers, organised by Police Review magazine, and attended annual Christmas receptions organised by crime reporters.

**20 To what extent have you provided hospitality for the media?**

20.1 On behalf of ACPO I have contributed to organisation of an annual reception for chief police officers and media representatives as part of the ACPO annual conference, funded by local bodies at no cost to ACPO. Again in a professional capacity, I have also occasionally ensured that sandwiches and drink have been provided in the ACPO office when meetings with the media took place over a working lunch.

**21 Insofar as you have provided hospitality to the media, what has been the nature of that hospitality?**

21.1 As described above.

**22 Have you ever accepted gifts from the media? If so, please give full details (including who gave you the gift, when, what the gift was, and why you believe they gave you the gift).**

22.1 I have never accepted gifts from the media.

**23 Have you ever discussed the media, or media coverage, with politicians? If so, how important is such communication and why?**

23.1 In my current role I do not recall discussing media or media coverage directly with politicians. I do have such discussions from time to time with those working in government communication departments. Such communication can take place across a wide range of subjects where government and the work of the police service intersect. It can be particularly important where there is a particular requirement for communication as part of community reassurance, for example, during the 2011 riots, where it was important both police leaders and government ministers spoke to the media.

23.2 Previous roles I have held within the Government Communication Network routinely involved discussing the media and media coverage with politicians.

**24 What do you know about the level of hospitality accepted by ACPO personnel? Do you consider the level to be appropriate now and to have been appropriate in the past? In addressing this issue please give your reasons and set out what you consider to be an appropriate level of hospitality for ACPO personnel to accept from the media (if any).**

24.1 Where hospitality is accepted by the chief police officers across England, Wales and Northern Ireland who comprise ACPO, it would be recorded under policies applied by their local force. Similarly, a hospitality policy applies to staff working in the ACPO secretariat. My view is that acceptance of hospitality should be guided by the requirement placed upon all those working for the police to act with honesty and integrity and do nothing to compromise their position.

24.2 Police leaders are significant figures within the communities they serve and some of the engagement with other individuals and bodies that they should rightly have relationships with can only take place through accepting hospitality. The police service is one of the most scrutinised and accountable of public bodies. Based upon that level of public scrutiny being very likely to draw inappropriate acceptance of hospitality to my attention through the media, my impression after several years in my current position is that hospitality accepted is and has been generally appropriate.

**25 Do you consider that you have been adequately trained and/or given sufficient guidance on the appropriate handling of the media?**

25.1 Yes. I have received training and guidance at different stages of my career and been fortunate to work with and learn from a range of people with great experience and expertise in appropriate handling of the media, both in government and in policing.

**26 Do you consider that you have been adequately trained and/or given sufficient guidance to enable you to give sound advice and/or leadership on handling the media to your staff?**

26.1 Yes.

**27 Do you provide training or guidance to your staff on i) conducting and maintaining appropriate relationships with the media; ii) accepting/offering hospitality; iii) bribery and iv) requests for “off-the-record” comments? If so, please specify. Does that training/guidance reflect/follow ACPO’s guidance to police forces?**

27.1 The ACPO communications office is a small team of currently 6 staff. Training and guidance is provided and constantly available to that staff to support them in their roles. These are specialist roles and I would expect those in them to be capable of conducting and maintaining appropriate relationships with the media, including handling requests for “off-the-record” briefings and requesting guidance if in any doubt. Any training and guidance provided would be consistent with ACPO’s guidance to police forces.

27.2 Guidance on accepting hospitality is provided to ACPO staff through a staff handbook. Bribery is a criminal offence and I would expect any person employed in the police service to be aware of that. I have never come across any instance of it.

**28 Do you consider that your staff feel confident that they understand what is, and what is not, appropriate contact with the media? When answering this question, please explain what you consider to be “appropriate contact” with the media.**

28.1 I consider appropriate contact with the media to be that which is consistent with a professional relationship, supporting the legitimate objectives of the police to keep people safe, investigate and prevent crime; helping inform the public of the work of the police service and holding the police service to account. I consider that my staff are confident that they understand what appropriate contact with the media is.

**29 Do you consider that your staff generally feel comfortable briefing the media and responding to media requests?**

29.1 Staff employed in communications roles carry out a specialist function within policing and in my experience are recruited into these roles because of their expertise and competence. Part of their role is briefing the media and responding to media requests. The relationship between the police service and the media should be open and facilitate the flow of information where possible but there are limits which apply where that flow of information would conflict with the legitimate aims of the police. Under circumstances such as this I consider that it is normal that briefing the media and responding to media requests may not be comfortable for my staff. That is in part why it is important in my view to have people with expertise and competence in these roles.

**30 Do incidents that attract national media interest present particular challenges? If so, what are those challenges and do you consider that your office is adequately equipped to respond effectively and appropriately to such media interest?**

30.1 The majority of incidents that my office deals with are ones which attract national media interest, because of the national nature of ACPO's role. Incidents range from those which are in the routine of media reporting to those that create enormous

demand from the media. These sorts of incident do present particular challenges, such as:

- a) the volumes of news demand from 24/7 media
- b) the impact on community confidence of inaccurate or poorly informed reporting
- c) operational or legal restrictions which may prevent the police service from disclosing information
- d) challenges of coordinating, when required, a coherent police service response across 44 different organisations.

30.2 An example of an incident which created challenges including all of these is the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station protest cases which generated huge media interest in undercover police officers. For the police service as a whole, the ACPO press office was positioned to coordinate between different police forces involved and provide a national professional expert view to communicate and explain the critical importance of undercover police officers as a tactic to protect the public. This was an authoritative and legitimate view, because through ACPO, it came from the chief officer who is endorsed to lead on that area of policing nationally by colleagues across the service.

30.3 I consider that my office is equipped to respond effectively and appropriately to such media interest, within the bounds of reasonable resources. During an incident which creates sustained high volumes of media interest we would draw on our relationships with police forces to share press officer resources if necessary to ensure resilience. In the same way, we would support police forces in similar circumstances.

**31 What improvements, if any, do you think could or should be made to the systems, policies and/or training in the ACPO press office to ensure ACPO press office staff conduct and maintain appropriate relationships with the media?**

31.1 The ACPO Communications Advisory Group chaired by Chief Constable Andy Trotter is currently producing revised guidance for the police service on media relationships. That guidance will consider the need for additional media training, formalising 'mutual aid' agreements between forces to support each other with press officers in response to a crisis, a protocol between police and media clarifying what each should expect of the other, and clarity over speaking terminology such as off-the-record and

background briefing. When concluded, the ACPO press office will support and reflect this guidance.

- 32 Are you and/or your staff members of the Association of Police Communicators? From your perspective, what are the benefits of membership of this Association? Could the Association assist or assist further in ensuring that relations between police personnel and the media are appropriate? If so, how?**

32.1 My staff are members of the Association of Police Communicators. The benefits of membership from our perspective include the opportunity to meet and network with others working in communications roles across the police service, to explain to them the role of ACPO, to share learning and best practice in communications across the police service, and to draw on expertise in communications from across policing. The Association could assist in championing and disseminating advice which supports appropriate relations between police personnel and the media.

- 33 Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from the ACPO press office to the media and/or private detectives a problem?**

33.1 I do not consider that leaks from the ACPO press office to the media or to private detectives are a problem, because in my experience they have not taken place. I have not come across any example of leaks from the ACPO press office, or accusation of them having occurred.

33.2 In my experience, legitimate disclosure of information can occasionally be termed a leak without justifiable cause. For example in February 2008 a chief police officer presented an ACPO police strategy on preventing extremism to an open conference. Some of the subsequent news reporting referred to this as a leak, although media had been legitimately in the room when the strategy was unveiled.

- 34 What systems and procedures do you have in place in the ACPO press office, if any, to identify, respond to and detect the source of leaks? Do you consider that they are effective? What changes, if any, do you consider should be made?**

34.1 If I had reason to act in response to a leak I would consider appropriate action in response, up to referring the matter to a police force for investigation. I have not had



reason to make use of such systems and procedures because in my experience there have not been any such leaks.

**35 In the last 5 years, how many investigations have been conducted into actual or suspected leaks from the ACPO press office and how many have led to the successful identification of the source of the leak? What was the outcome of the other investigations?**

35.1 I am not aware of any investigations conducted into actual or suspected leaks from the ACPO press office.

**36 In the last 5 years has disciplinary action been taken against any member of staff working in the ACPO press office for leaking information to the media and/or private detectives? If so, please identify the number of cases and their outcome. There is no need to identify the person or persons the subject of the disciplinary process.**

36.1 As above, I am not aware of any leaks from the ACPO press office.

**37 Insofar as you are able to say, in general, to what extent are leaks from ACPO personnel to the media and/or private detectives a problem for ACPO?**

37.1 Information circulated between the ACPO membership is distributed across the police service, among 44 forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and additionally to some seconded to roles in bodies such as the Home Office or National Policing Improvement Agency. Senior police officers dealing with national policing regularly brief stakeholder organisations in the course of their work and are held to account for it by police authorities (to be replaced by Police and Crime Commissioners from November 2012). There have been occasions when information concerning ACPO work has been given to the media but because of the nature of a membership distributed in this way, it is very difficult to say with any confidence how that took place, or often whether it can be considered an inappropriate disclosure or not.

37.2 Where leaks occur, actual or perceived, I believe they are a problem for ACPO primarily because they can undermine trust between organisations, in particular between the police service and the government, which in turn damages the role

operational police leaders have in supporting and informing government on law and order policy.

**38 Insofar as applicable, what do you consider are the driving forces behind, or the main causes of, leaks from i) the ACPO press office and ii) the Police Service in general?**

38.1 As above, I am not aware of any leaks from the ACPO press office. Generally I think there are several reasons why people might leak information, including whistle blowing, carelessness; a belief that they can legitimately disclose information or to support a personal agenda. It can be very difficult to substantiate the source or cause of a leak and my experience of working within the police service is that the overwhelming majority of colleagues would never improperly leak information and would condemn those who do.

**39 To what extent do you believe bribery of ACPO personnel by the media to be a current problem for ACPO (if at all)?**

39.1 Bribery of ACPO personnel by the media is not something I have ever encountered or have any knowledge of being a problem.

**40 Describe the culture of relations between the ACPO press office on the one hand and other ACPO personnel on the other. Do you consider that there is a relationship of trust and confidence? What changes, if any, would you wish to make to the working relationship and why?**

40.1 I consider that the culture or relations between the ACPO press office and other ACPO personnel is a good and positive one, with a relationship of trust and confidence. In practice the ACPO press office is primarily organised to support chief police officers in national policing roles and ACPO personnel represent only a small part of the office's business.

**41 Describe the culture of relations between the ACPO press office on the one hand and ACPO members across the police service on the other. Do you consider that there is a relationship of trust and confidence? What changes, if any, would you wish to make to the working relationship and why?**

41.1 I believe that the culture of relations between the ACPO press office and ACPO members across the police service, as well as those working in other ranks and positions in the police service in support of them, is for the most part a very positive one. Within a membership body distributed across 44 different organisations, building and maintaining relationships with so many key individuals is a significant challenge for a small team of people based in London. Individual chief police officers tend to build strong working relationships with the ACPO press office as a consequence of taking national roles in areas of national policing which have a high media profile. If I were to make changes to the working relationship they would be to invest more time in supporting chief police officers across all areas of national policing and be more proactive in communicating their work, in order to better describe and explain the work of the police service and ACPO.

**42 What limitations, if any, do you consider there should be on police officers and police staff leaving the police service to work for the media and vice versa?**

42.1 I would like to see media organisations exercise more judgment about the way in which they employ police officers and staff who have left the service. The reality is that 24/7 media and rolling news has created a demand for commentary, which in the case of police news stories is often serviced by a range of former police officers and staff. In my view this has the potential to broaden public understanding of policing providing that those people genuinely have some insight to offer. There is a risk in the trend for ex-police officers and staff to be employed by the media as commentators that those who have left the service are persuaded to comment on any policing story, far beyond the reasonable extent of their expert knowledge. Policing changes extremely rapidly and this means those who have left the service can quickly become out of touch with developments.

42.2 If appropriate limitations could be applied to police officers and staff who have left the police service in these circumstances, without unduly restraining their employment rights, then I think they should be considered.

42.3 In terms of those who leave the media to work for the police service, within communications departments across any sector there are likely to be people with experience or expertise gained working in the media. This specialist expertise is

frequently what makes them well qualified for such roles. Any person working within the police service should be aware of the requirements and responsibilities of that employment.

**43 What is your view of the practice of police officers and police staff having “off-the-record” communications with the media?**

43.1 My view of police officers and police staff having “off-the-record” communications with the media, in the sense that “off-the-record” here means unauthorised, is that with exception of genuine whistle blowing, they should not happen. I consider that communications with the media which take place to inform them on a background basis, but of which a record is kept, do have a place, as I have outlined in my answer to question 13.

43.2 I think it is important to emphasise that frank and professional communication between police officers and staff at every level and the media should be supported, both as an important aspect of the police service’s accountability to the public and because officers and staff in the full range of varied roles across the police service have experience and perspectives to contribute which collectively, are critical to providing the media and public with an accurate and complete picture of the business of policing. The British model of policing is based on consent, and communication is vital to maintaining and preserving that model. In my experience police force communications departments support this.

**44 In relation to dealing with the media in general, do you consider that there is a basis for applying different standards and rules to police staff from those that apply to police officers (the latter having the powers of the office of constable). If so, i) do you consider that different standards and rules should apply and ii) please specify what you consider the differences should be.**

44.1 I consider that the same high standards of integrity should apply to all who work in policing, in both officer and staff roles.

**45 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).**

- 45.1 An ACPO response to the recommendations contained within “Without Fear of Favour” is being developed through Chief Constable Mike Cunningham as national lead on professional standards and insofar as they concern relations between the media and the police, by Chief Constable Andy Trotter as a lead on media relations. The report asks for detailed proposals by April 2012.
- 45.2 My view is that the HMIC report is right to identify the importance of leadership in setting standards. The police service I have encountered is one in which the importance of integrity is widely understood, but in the wake of scrutiny of the police following the phone hacking affair, it is right to look at ways of strengthening that understanding and reassuring the public.
- 45.3 There is an emphasis on clear national standards and boundaries in the recommendations which I consider is a logical response to public expectation. Implementation needs to be realistic and recognise that a background of 44 different police organisations means it is inevitable there will be some differences in emphasis and approach across policing.
- 45.4 I think the report is right to identify a need for guidance to support police officers and staff in use of social media. Police forces are already making widespread use of social media and have demonstrated its utility and value in communicating with the public both in response to specific events, such as public order situations, and in building public networks over time which help communicate the business of policing. In many ways the police service is considerably ahead of other sectors in the way in which it has embraced these opportunities. Guidance should support police officers and staff without being bureaucratic or restrictive.
- 46 What is your view of the recommendations contained in Elizabeth Filkin’s report “the Ethical Issues Arising from the Relationship between Police and Media?” (If you have not seen it, the report is available online).**
- 46.1 Elizabeth Filkin’s report was directed specifically to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), though many of its recommendations could be applied more generally. I consider that her report was right to emphasise that the MPS should be as open and transparent as it can be and the important role the media play in holding the MPS to

account. While there are concerns among the media about the police service reducing its communication as a response to phone hacking, it is essential that attention be given to these recommendations, which should support increased flow of appropriate information between police and media. If this degree of openness and transparency is not achieved then the incentives for improper contact between police and media are increased.

46.2 The approach Elizabeth Filkin sets out of providing a set of core principles to guide judgments, rather than attempting to control every contact with the media, is in my view entirely the right one. The ACPO guidance on media relationships being developed by Chief Constable Andy Trotter will take account of the report's recommendations.

**47 Do you consider that there are different or further steps which could and/or should be taken to ensure that relationships between police personnel and the media are and remain appropriate?**

47.1 Further to the answer I have provided to question 46, I consider that a professional and adequately resourced press office remains a key element in ensuring that relationships between police personnel and the media are and remain appropriate. As police forces make efficiency cuts, media departments are reducing in numbers and efficient collaborative relationships between local police force media departments and ACPO, as the national source of operational policing information, become more important to ensure the availability and flow of information to the public through the media. The role of the press office in a police organisation is not to establish itself as a monopoly supplier of information, or to control the flow of information, but to support the police in meeting its obligations to be held to account, to explain and engage with the public.

Oliver Cattermole

**Director of Communications, Association of Chief Police Officers**

**5 March 2012**