



POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

MEDIA GUIDE

The Police Service of Northern Ireland's policy is to be open and accountable. All staff, whatever rank or position, can respond to media enquiries as long as it is appropriate for you to do so, you have the approval of the Police Service's Media and PR Department, you are in possession of all the relevant facts and are not giving out information which should be withheld for essential legal, operational or disciplinary reasons or at the request of a victim or victim's family.

This booklet has been produced to help reduce any uncertainty or misunderstanding about how to work with the media on a day-to-day basis, but staff should seek advice from the Police Service Press Desk before commenting on any policy issues. We all have an important role to play in promoting the positive image of the Police Service by developing a constructive, professional working relationship with the media.

Matt Baggott
CHIEF CONSTABLE

At a Chief Constable's Operational Meeting the following Media Policy was approved to come into force with effect from 25 November 2002.

The Code of Ethics, introduced in 2003, includes a requirement that police officers deal with the press within the guidelines of the Chief Constable's Media Strategy.

This document sets out those guidelines. Police officers and civilian staff have two balancing duties – to be open with the public and media as part of their responsibility to be transparent and accountable and to protect confidential information relating to individuals or information about police operations.

The Media and Public Relations Department provides a specialist and professional link between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the media. The department helps police officers and support staff gain recognition for their success and helps explain the Police Service's point of view on sensitive issues.

With increased devolution, DCU Commanders and their staff, and other Heads of Departments/Branches, are encouraged to work positively with the media in their areas and proactively deal with them on local issues. They must keep the Press Office informed about local stories that can very quickly attract wider interest. Individual officers or staff of all ranks should not brief the media without clearance. Approval should be sought from the Media and Public Relations Department who will consider and advise on the wider implications of commenting or making a statement. The Department will provide lines to be taken on corporate issues.

Media Policy

Where possible it is sensible to involve the Department at an early stage in the planning of an operation or initiative that is likely to attract significant public interest.

Officers intending to brief the media at the scene of an operation or incident should always ensure the Press Office is informed prior to the briefing. The Department will make every effort to provide a Press Officer to manage the media at the scene.

All contacts with the media concerning any policy, whether operational or management, the administration of justice, issues of a controversial nature and intelligence matters must be co-ordinated through the Press Office.

In all cases where comments are made about serious crime investigations, these comments must be cleared by the Senior Investigating Officer. At the start of all major investigations, in line with national standards, SIO's or Gold Commanders should set a clear media strategy.

Police officers or support staff intending to write letters and articles should seek approval from their Head of Department and the Media and Public Relations Department. Press Officers can advise on style, tone and timing and help ensure that letters are published.

If contacted by media, every member of staff should decline to comment until they refer the matter to their Line Manager or the Media and Public Relations Department. All such contact must be reported to the Department for logging centrally.

Failure to comply will be a serious matter and will be seen as a crucial issue of professional integrity and may be a breach of the Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics.

Always expect media interest in any police activity, don't let it take you by surprise. Try to be prepared for this whenever possible and contact the Press Desk if you are working on a case which seems likely to attract media attention.

Avoid jargon or police-speak when talking to the media. If you are approached by a journalist who is working on a specific story line, this should not be disclosed to other reporters unless they particularly ask about the same subject.

If you intend to release information which will create a lot of media interest, or which may have wider implications for the police service as a whole, please ensure the Press Desk is aware of the story so that they can be ready for follow-up enquiries.

Remember that not every journalist is aware of police procedures and reporting restrictions, so when you are unable to give out information always explain why.

Living victims of crime or road collisions must give their consent before you can release their details to the media (please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS in the Media A - Z).

Don't be drawn into giving your opinion or commenting on matters you don't know about - stick to the facts. Don't allow yourself to be talked into a comment that fits a journalist's story. Never say 'no comment'. It sounds defensive and as though we have something to hide. If you are not sure how to respond to a media enquiry, make a note of the details and say you will get back to the journalist with an answer. Contact the Press Desk for advice.

Do not be drawn into 'off the record' or unattributable comments. Never give out information which could compromise judicial proceedings, either relating to criminal or disciplinary matters.

General Advice

Media Checklist

A reporter will usually ask for the following details:

- The basic outline of an incident. Avoid releasing detailed information which may be vital to any investigation.
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- Where it happened and, if it's relevant, what type of property was involved - pub, community centre, church building, etc.
- When it happened - the time, day and date.
- Who was involved - the gender, ages, and occupations of the people involved and the area where they live. House numbers should never be released to the press. Names should only be released if permission has been given (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS in the Media A - Z).
- Details of any injuries, which hospitals people were taken to – if this is deemed permissible by the investigating officer - and their condition.
- Information about stolen property (Please also see AMOUNTS OF CASH in the Media A - Z).
- Descriptions of offenders/any vehicles used by offenders if appealing for witnesses/information.
- Gender, age and occupation of anyone who has been arrested, full details of any charges, whether they are in custody or have been bailed, at which court they will be appearing and when (Please also see ARRESTS & CHARGES in the Media A - Z).
- Police contact numbers for people to call if they are witnesses or have information which could help the investigation.
- If the incident involves a missing person or someone who has died, the press will ask for a photograph. This should only be released with the permission of the next of kin and the senior investigating officer (Please also see PHOTOGRAPHS in the Media A - Z).

General Advice

Talking to Newspaper Reporters

Newspaper reporters often make telephone 'check calls' to police stations, asking about incidents or operations in their circulation area. These calls can be a good opportunity to issue an appeal or offer advice to the public.

- Make sure you know the name of the reporter and the name of the newspaper he/she is working for.
 - If reporters call when it is not convenient, or you aren't sure how you should respond to their questions, take down details of their enquiry and tell them you will call them back. This allows you time to check facts and decide exactly what you want to say. If you want something to appear in the media, bear in mind the reporter's deadlines and call him/her back as soon as possible.
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- Don't waste a media opportunity - give journalists good news!
- Stick to what you know, steer clear of policy issues and investigations or operations which you haven't been involved in.
- Don't use police jargon.
- Never forget who you are talking to. Flippant remarks, throw-away comments and humorous asides may become headlines.
- Ignoring a press call won't make it go away. If you don't want to deal with a call from the media, refer the journalist to the HQ Press Desk.

Television and Radio Interviews

A television or radio interview gives you the chance to speak to thousands of people who may be able to help with your investigation. By taking a few minutes to prepare for the interview you will feel far more confident, calm and in control.

The basics

- Be clear in your own mind about the message you want to get across.
- Have the facts at your fingertips, including special telephone numbers which you want the public to ring.
- Aim for positive presentation - sound confident.
- Establish your media contact.
- Check the interviewer's name, which organisation he/she works for, and on which programme the interview will appear.
- Is the interview live or pre-recorded?
- How long will it last?
- Which subjects will be covered in the interview?
- Ask what the likely questions will be and whether the interviewer is taking any specific angle
- Check who else will be taking part.
- Ask what the interviewer's first question will be.
- Be clear about your media motive!

Are you:

- Appealing for help?
- Asking for public support?
- Promoting the work of the police service?
- Answering criticism or allegations?
- Giving the public advice and reassurance?

General Advice

Practical preparation

- Make a note of your three 'must' points, the three most important points which you must get into the interview.
- Consider any likely questions and your response to them.
- Decide how the facts support your message. Use examples to illustrate your point.
- Don't expect the interviewer to ask questions which will help you, it's up to you to get your message across.
- Make sure you are aware of the Police Service's stance on any issue you are discussing.

And remember...

- Always assume a microphone or camera is switched on.
 - Look at the interviewer, not at the camera.
 - If you are being filmed in your office, tidy up and remove any confidential material from the walls.
 - Check your appearance.
 - Divert telephone calls, and switch off your mobile and/or pager.
 - Don't be frightened to use your hands to express yourself.
 - Avoid police jargon - keep it simple.
 - If you have nothing to say, DON'T agree to be interviewed. Dour stone-walling in front of a microphone or a camera does not promote a positive image of the police service.
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Media A-Z

A

Abduction/kidnapping
Accidents
Amounts of cash stolen
Animal Rights activists
Appeals for relatives
Arrests and charges
Arsons and fires
Assaults
Assaults on police officers

B

Blackmail
Bogus officials
Bomb alerts/hoaxes
Bravery
Breath tests
Burglaries

C

Cautioning
Charges
Complaints against police
Condition checks
Consultation with other agencies
Contamination of food/products
Counterfeit money
Crime prevention
Crimestoppers
Criminal damage
Criminal records

D

Descriptions
Disciplinary matters/suspensions
Distraction burglaries
Documentary filming requests
Drugs and poisons – loss or theft
Drugs seizures

E

Equality
Escaped prisoners
Explosions
Explosives/arms finds

F

Fire
Firearms
Found property
Fraud

I

Identification parades
Indemnity agreements
Intelligence
Internet
Interviews

J

Journalists accompanying officers
on searches/operations/patrol
Joyriders
Juveniles

K

Kidnapping/Abduction

L

Leaks to the media

M

Major incidents
Media requests
Missing people
Murder/suspicious deaths

N

Naming of victims
New legislation

O

Off the record

P

Paramilitary murders
Paramilitary attacks
Photographs
Policing Board issues
Policy
Positive publicity
Press conferences
Press photographers
Press releases
Pre-trial briefings
Public disorder
Pursuits

R

Rape/sex offences/indecenty
Release of police held videos
Reports for process
Rescues/attempted rescues
Rewards
Road collisions
Robberies

S

Sex offenders
Sieges
Special Branch
Statements after court cases
Sub-judice
Suicide/sudden deaths

T

Terrorist incidents
Theft/Criminal Damage

V

Victims of Crime
VIPs

W

Witnesses

Y

Young offenders
Young people

A

ABDUCTION (see KIDNAPPING)

ACCIDENTS (see ROAD COLLISIONS)

It is Police Service policy not to use the word 'accidents' – they are either 'collisions' or 'crashes'. Basic details can be confirmed but never give opinions about the cause of a collision. The details of people killed in collisions should not be released to the media until the coroner is satisfied that formal identification has taken place and the next of kin have been informed. (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS and ROAD ACCIDENTS).

AMOUNTS OF CASH STOLEN

Specific details of cash or securities stolen in raids on banks, building societies and post offices should not normally be given out to the media unless permission has been given by the senior investigating officer and the head office of the company involved. This guideline is to ensure small financial premises do not feel vulnerable to future attacks. General details about an incident can be publicised, but questions about security should be referred to the company concerned. Quantities of cash should only be described as small/large, or simply 'a quantity of cash'.

ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Individuals and groups will often contact the media themselves to try and gain publicity about their actions. If this happens an incident can be confirmed to the media if appropriate, however as a general rule we do not pro-actively publicise the activities of animal rights activists. If the incident involves public safety, for example contamination of foods or products, HQ Press Desk should be informed immediately. (Please also see CONTAMINATION OF FOODS/PRODUCTS).

APPEALS FOR RELATIVES

Appeals for relatives can be made through HQ Press Desk, but radio SOS appeals to trace relatives will only be used by the BBC if someone is dangerously ill. No broadcast will be made for relatives of someone who has died. Broadcasts can be made through BBC local radio stations and BBC Radio 4 nationally.

ARRESTS AND CHARGES

Under the Contempt of Court Act, a case becomes active upon an arrest or the issue of a warrant or summons. There is then a legal responsibility on journalists not to publish or broadcast any details which may prejudice a fair trial. It is therefore extremely important that the media are informed as soon as proceedings are considered to be active if the crime has been publicised. Officers should specify whether a person has been arrested or has attended a police station voluntarily.

When a case is active nothing should be released which would create a substantial risk of serious prejudice to a court case, and nothing should be released which identifies a suspect. But do not use the sub-judice rule as an excuse to release nothing - the main facts of the matter can still be given:

"A 21-year-old man from Belfast has been arrested by police officers in connection with and will be interviewed later today."

Once a suspect is detained press conferences and media interviews should be refused, other than to confirm a statement similar to the example above.

Also under the Contempt of Court Act, we have a duty to tell the media when a suspect has been charged.

When a person has been charged and has appeared at court, their age, gender, occupation, the area where they live and full details of the charges can be released.

ARSONS AND FIRES

Full details about fires can be released to the press, but this should follow liaison with the fire service. Make it clear if arson is suspected after taking advice from the officer in charge of the investigation, and use the opportunity to appeal for help/witnesses. No information should be released about the cause of the fire until this has been firmly established. Details of people who have been injured or killed in a fire can only be given to the press once formal identification has taken place and relatives have been informed. (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS and CONSULTATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES).

ASSAULTS

We do not release details of every single assault which takes place in Northern Ireland as this can increase fear of crime. The decision to publicise offences depends upon the nature and severity of the incident or whether the case has any unusual aspects. It is our policy not to identify or issue photographs of victims of assaults without their permission and that of the investigating officer. A victim's address should not be released. (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS and PHOTOGRAPHS).

ASSAULTS ON POLICE OFFICERS

We do not notify the media of every assault on a police officer, but if an officer is seriously injured on duty, their name, rank and station can be released, **BUT ONLY IF THEY GIVE THEIR PERMISSION** and after weighing up the potential risk to the officer generated by such a move.

B

BLACKMAIL

In cases of blackmail officers must inform HQ Press Desk before releasing any information to the media.

BOGUS OFFICIALS

Media reports about bogus officials and distraction burglaries can alert people to be on their guard, and can be used to appeal for information. Where possible give details of the road where the incident happened to raise awareness and pinpoint appeals for witnesses. If the road name would identify a vulnerable victim, use the name of the nearest main road instead. Always use the opportunity to pass on crime prevention advice to the public. Liaison with the appropriate utilities should be considered.

BOMB ALERTS/HOAXES AND SUSPECT PACKAGES

Details of bomb scares/hoaxes and suspect packages can be confirmed, including details of the time, place, whether a bomb disposal team was called and if there was disruption to local people or traffic. If a genuine device is discovered HQ Press Desk must be informed. No details of any code word should be released, except to say something along the lines of "a recognised code word was received". (Please also see EXPLOSIVES and TERRORIST INCIDENTS).

BRAVERY

The media are always interested in a story of bravery. If police officers or a member of the public have been involved in an act of bravery, HQ Press Desk or your regional press office should be contacted so a press release can be distributed to the local media, unless of course an individual's circumstances mean this could pose a security risk.

BREATH TESTS

The Police Service does not issue details about any individuals who have been breathalysed. If a reporter is aware from other sources that a person has been breathalysed, we will not confirm or deny the identity of the motorist. But if a motorist has been charged with an offence following a breath test, certain details can be confirmed. (Please also see ARRESTS & CHARGES).

BURGLARIES

Releasing general details about a burglary can help recover stolen property. If the victim asks for their details not to be released to the media, his/her wishes should be respected, but details of the incident itself can still be released - the general location (but never give out details of house numbers/names), details of what happened and what was stolen, as long as it does not lead to the identification of the victim. Do not go into details about the precise method of entry (please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS).

C

CAUTIONING

Do not release the identity of anyone cautioned for an offence. If asked about a specific case, refer to the fact that a man or a woman was cautioned.

CHARGES (see ARRESTS & CHARGES)

COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE

Enquiries about complaints against the police should be referred to the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland's (PONI) office.

CONDITION CHECKS

We do not automatically release the names of people involved in accidents/incidents, making it difficult for journalists to do condition checks. Where possible HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices will endeavour to carry out checks on behalf of the media.

CONSULTATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In many cases, police officers are called to incidents involving the other emergency services, or other agencies. In most routine cases, each organisation has its own role to play and each can respond to media enquiries without hindering the work of the others. However if it is felt that a joint press release or comment is required, remember too much consultation is better than not enough! Do not comment on other agencies' actions or roles unless they have been consulted. Always avoid being drawn into criticising other agencies.

CONTAMINATION OF FOOD/PRODUCTS

Please inform HQ Press Desk about any threats of/actual incidents of contaminated food or products as there are special procedures regarding release of information about this type of incident. No details will be given to the media unless agreed by the senior investigating officer. Releasing incorrect information to the media could cause unnecessary panic. The decision to publicise this type of incident balances this with the need to warn the public about any possible contamination.

COUNTERFEIT MONEY

At the request of the Bank of England the only information to be released about counterfeit money should follow the guidelines in recognising a forgery i.e. quality of paper, colour of ink, water marks and the silver strip. Details of the amount thought to be in circulation should not be released. Advice should be sought from HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices before releasing any details to the media.

CRIME PREVENTION

Crime prevention messages should be promoted at every possible opportunity. Reassuring the public by putting the fear of crime into perspective, whilst at the same time giving practical crime prevention advice through the media, is the responsibility of every member of staff.

CRIMESTOPPERS

The Police Service fully supports the Crimestoppers scheme which gives the public a chance to speak to the police anonymously by telephoning the freephone number 0800 555 111. Every opportunity should be used to publicise this number when appeals for witnesses are made in the media, stressing that callers do not have to give their name.

CRIMINAL DAMAGE (see THEFT)

CRIMINAL RECORDS

Criminal records are confidential and under no circumstances should there be any discussion with the media as to whether or not a person has previous convictions.

D

DESCRIPTIONS

When releasing descriptions of offenders refer to gender, age, height, build, hair colour and style and clothing. If there are any other special characteristics such as a scar, a tattoo or birthmark, these can also be included. Only mention someone's race if it is strictly relevant, and avoid using words which could be considered offensive eg half-cast or coloured. Instead use white, black, Asian, mixed race etc. Descriptions of offenders come under the disclosure rules and any information released to the media should therefore be carefully recorded as the defence could request this information.

DISCIPLINARY MATTERS/SUSPENSIONS

Any media enquiries about police officers who are the subject of criminal proceedings or internal disciplinary action should be referred to HQ Press Desk who will consult the Internal Investigations Branch and/or the Police Ombudsman's office before releasing any statement to the press. The identity of the member of staff involved should not be given or confirmed. (Please also see COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE).

DISTRACTION BURGLARIES (see BOGUS OFFICIALS)

DOCUMENTARY FILMING REQUESTS

Requests from TV stations and independent production companies, asking for Police Service staff to take part in documentary programmes should always be referred to HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices. All requests for our co-operation/participation in programmes or documentaries should be submitted via a written brief which outlines what the programmers want from us, what angle they are pursuing, how many other people will be taking part in the programme and who they are. We will then respond, also in writing, telling them whether or not we wish to take part in the programme and what exactly we will provide in terms of interviews, briefings and filming opportunities. (Please also see JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING POLICE OFFICERS ON SEARCHES/OPERATIONS/ PATROL and RELEASING POLICE HELD VIDEO FOOTAGE TO FILM MAKERS).

DRUGS & POISONS - LOSS OR THEFT

If poisons or prescription drugs are lost or stolen, a press release can be helpful to warn the public about the possible danger. Name the drug or poisons, explain its possible effects and stress the need for urgent medical attention should the drugs have been taken. Always check that the information you release has been confirmed by an expert e.g. a pharmacist or doctor. Do not release information which could encourage repeat offences. Inform the media if the drugs are recovered and thank them for their help in publicising the case.

DRUGS SEIZURES

When releasing details of drug seizures, say what a substance is thought to be. This cannot be confirmed until the drug has been tested. Be circumspect about releasing street values. For advice on drugs analysis and street values contact the Police Service Drugs Squad.

E

EQUALITY

Police Service staff should never use any language which could be considered sectarian, racist, sexist, homophobic or in any other way discriminatory. When describing a person (e.g. a missing person, crime victim or suspect) no reference should be made to a person's religion, colour, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation unless it is strictly relevant. Beware of being too specific about colour and/or race when giving a suspect's details in a witness appeal. It would be wrong to say someone is African-Caribbean unless a witness knows for certain that he/she is. It is better to say black, white, Asian, etc. The words coloured and half-caste should not be used as they are considered derogatory. Use the description mixed race instead. (Please also see DESCRIPTIONS).

ESCAPED PRISONERS

FROM POLICE CUSTODY

Basic circumstances of the escape, such as where and when it happened, can be confirmed if asked. Details of the person who escaped should not normally be given out unless the escape happened after a court appearance or if the escapee is considered to be dangerous and the public need to be warned. Media enquiries should be referred to HQ Press Desk or the regional offices, and information will only be released to the media after consultation with the senior investigating officer.

FROM PRISON

HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices should be informed immediately if there has been a prison escape. They will then consult with the SIO, the prison authorities and/or the Northern Ireland Office regarding release of information about the circumstances of the escape, and deal with all media enquiries.

EXPLOSIONS

NON CRIMINAL

Information about non-criminal explosions can be released as soon as the senior investigating officer has confirmed basic facts. Details of damage, the number of casualties, helpline/Casualty Bureau numbers, traffic diversions and emergency services at the scene can be released, but only after clearance from the SIO. Do not comment on the cause of the explosion. The media should also be referred to other appropriate organisations.

CRIMINAL/TERRORIST

Media enquiries about explosions involving possible criminal/terrorist offences should be referred to HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices immediately. It is not Police Service policy to disclose to the media how, or why, a device failed to detonate. Nor does the Police Service disclose to the media to which organisation or individual a telephone bomb warning is made.

EXPLOSIVES/ARMS FINDS

The Police Service is committed to projecting the success of arms and explosives finds and seizures made by police and military by offering media facilities, but taking care not to compromise other agencies such as SOCO, ATO or Forensic Scientists. Each incident should, however, be decided on an individual basis, with liaison between the HQ Press Desk and the senior investigating officer.

F

FIRE (see ARSONS)

FIREARMS

HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices should be informed of all firearms incidents. The number of armed officers deployed to an incident should not be given out. Nothing should be released about tactics, methods of entry or specialist equipment and skills.

BALLISTICS TESTS

It is not Police Service policy to release details of ballistic test results, or histories of any particular weapon or weapons, as legal implications may arise in subsequent court proceedings.

SHOTS FIRED/WARNINGS ISSUED

It is not Police Service policy to refer to the absence, presence, nature or timing of any warnings given or otherwise in shooting incidents involving police or military. All media queries about shooting incidents should be referred to the Police Ombudsman's office.

FOUND PROPERTY

HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices can help arrange publicity for found property to try and re-unite it with its owner. The media are particularly interested in high value or unusual property. Always withhold one identifying feature of the property to ensure it is claimed by its rightful owner.

FRAUD

Information about frauds can alert the public and put them on their guard. But do not divulge exact details of the fraud which may encourage copy cat crimes. Enquiries about major fraud cases should be referred to HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices. In cases of serious fraud investigations involving several Police Services, the Serious Fraud Squad (SFO) should be contacted by the HQ Press Desk before any press release is issued.

In response to media enquiries regarding finances or personalities of particular businesses which the journalist believes are under investigation, Police Service staff should decline to comment and ensure that no inference is drawn from such a refusal.

I

IDENTIFICATION PARADES

The fact that an identification parade is being, or has been held, is not to be offered to the media. Any information about an ID parade, especially the results, should not be released to the media.

INDEMNITY AGREEMENTS

Indemnity agreements have been drawn up to protect the Police Service against claims for personal injury, trespass or damage when the media accompanies police officers to any incident. For copies of the agreements and further advice contact HQ Press Desk or the Media and PR Department's Administration Office. (Please also see JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING OFFICERS ON SEARCHES/OPERATIONS/PATROL).

INTELLIGENCE

The Police Service issues the following statement in response to queries about our use of informers and surveillance equipment:

"The Police Service has always made it clear that in combating serious crime in all its many forms, the police rely heavily on intelligence gathering by all lawful means, including the use of informants. Intelligence is absolutely crucial to the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland, as is the case elsewhere.

"Over the years, intelligence has proved to be the most significant factor in saving life and preventing crime. The Police Service will therefore seek by every lawful means to enhance its intelligence gathering capability because it is the duty of a Police Service to protect the community to the utmost of its professional ability."

INTERNET

The vast majority of Police Service press releases appear on the Police Service of Northern Ireland web site. Officers can use the site to publicise other relevant material by contacting the Police Service Webmaster, located in the Department of Information Management at Lisnasharragh.

INTERVIEWS

Please contact HQ Press Desk or your regional press office if you receive any media requests for interviews.

J

JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING OFFICERS ON SEARCHES/OPERATIONS/PATROL

Media representatives will only be allowed to accompany officers if there are specific reasons why the Police Service would benefit from their attendance. A signed indemnity should always be obtained from the company concerned, together with an editorial rights approval by the Police Service's legal adviser.

Media representatives will not be briefed about major crime operations prior to their implementation unless there are sound operational reasons for doing so. This policy is not aimed at preventing media representatives from attending police operations or filming officers, but at ensuring the Police Service complies with the law and protects officers and the rights of victims, witnesses, suspects and innocent members of the public. Please refer all media requests to accompany officers to HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices.

JOYRIDERS

The term joyriders has been extensively used by the media to describe those involved in car crime. The Police Service does not use this term to describe those involved in car theft, and actively discourages the media from doing so.

JUVENILES (see YOUNG OFFENDERS and YOUNG PEOPLE)

K

KIDNAPPING/ABDUCTION

In cases of kidnapping or abduction where a life is genuinely thought to be at risk, the media can be asked to impose a news blackout. This can only be endorsed by the Chief Constable (or his deputy). The Media and PR Department has contingency plans to co-ordinate a news blackout and should be informed of incidents immediately.

L

LEAKS TO THE MEDIA

Information which is leaked to the media can damage the reputation of the Police Service and cause confusion and misunderstanding amongst colleagues and the public. Staff should be aware of the harm which can be caused by mischievous leaking or unguarded/unofficial comments. They should also be aware that this is a disciplinary offence.

M

MAJOR INCIDENTS

Reporters are often only minutes behind police officers arriving at the scene of a major incident, and need to be managed. Officers at the scene should request a press officer at the earliest opportunity by contacting HQ Press Desk which is open 24 hours a day throughout the year so that a 'media liaison point' can be established where information can be relayed and the media can see what is happening from a safe distance. The Press Desk will endeavour to ensure a press officer is always available to attend major incidents to support the senior investigating officer in dealing with the media.

MEDIA REQUESTS

Newspaper, television and radio reporters sometimes contact officers directly, seeking help in making programmes/writing detailed articles. It would be helpful if officers could inform HQ Press Desk or their regional press offices about these requests, as experience has shown they may already have been approached by the programme-makers and have more information about the project. This also helps avoid duplication of effort.

MISSING PEOPLE

Publicity can often play an important role in helping to trace missing people, and officers should view it as a valuable tool in their investigation. This is especially true if the missing person is vulnerable - either very old or very young - or is in danger. HQ Press Desk or the relevant regional press office should be told immediately about a missing child.

A recent photograph of the missing person will increase the chances of media coverage. Identities, descriptions and photographs should only be released if permission has been given by the missing person's next of kin. If the case involves a young person we must have the consent of their parent or guardian before their details are released. If a missing child has been placed in the care of the local authority or is a Ward of Court, special approval must be given by the court or social services before details of the child are released to the press.

Let HQ Press Desk or the relevant regional press office know when a missing person has returned or is found, so the media can be told and thanked for their help.

MURDER/SUSPICIOUS DEATHS

Murders always attract a great deal of press interest so it is vital for officers to contact HQ Press Desk or the relevant regional press office about the incident as quickly as possible - a holding statement can then be prepared. The initial press statement will only be released after consultation with the senior investigating officer, and the death will be referred to as 'suspicious' until the cause of death has been established and a murder enquiry is confirmed by the SIO. The victim's identity should never be released until relatives have been informed and there has been formal identification of the body.

The SIO must approve all press releases about a murder. Only the SIO or an officially nominated police/press officer should talk to the media about a murder. Press officers can be contacted 24 hours a day via the HQ Press Desk. Unless there are exceptional circumstances why this cannot occur, a press officer will attend any briefings given to the media by the senior investigating officer.

N

NAMING OF VICTIMS

The Police Service has developed a policy regarding the naming of victims involved in crime, road collisions and other accidents, which aims to balance the needs of victims and the needs of the media. This policy reflects the latest guidance from the ACPO Media Advisory Group which takes into account the most recent data protection and Human Rights legislation.

The main points are:

- Every effort must be made to establish the wishes of victims, regarding the release of their information to the media.
- Police Service staff should always ask a balanced question when trying to ascertain the wishes of the victims. It would not be appropriate to ask 'You don't want your name in the press do you?' Responses should be recorded by the officers on the relevant forms.
- If a victim does not want his/her personal details given to the media this request must be honoured unless the investigating officer decide there is an operational reason why this information should be released. However, details of an actual incident can still be released as long as this would not allow a journalist to 'piece together' the victim's identity, e.g. saying an attack took place outside the victim's home in Road when this is the only property in a named road in a small village.
- If it has not been possible to establish whether a victim wants their details given to the press (e.g. because they are too severely injured) we should not name the victim unless the investigating officer, in liaison with the victim's family, decides there is an operational reason to do so.
- If an officer knows or suspects a victim may be vulnerable to a repeat crime if his/her identity is released (e.g. an elderly person living alone), the officer may advise the victim that releasing their details would be inappropriate.
- Under no circumstances should the media be given the name of someone who has died until their next of kin have been informed and the investigating officer has authorised release of the information. The deceased's family should be made aware of potential press interest and the fact that the victim's details will be a matter of public record following an inquest opening. If, despite this, the family are adamant that their relative should not be named by the police and if refusing to release the name will not impact in a negative way on the police investigation (i.e. by making the media refuse to run witness appeals) then consideration may be given to withholding the name. However, it should be made clear to the media that the name is being withheld at the request of the family and no such decision should be taken without having first consulted the investigating officer.

- Any active or imminently active legal proceedings should be taken into consideration before releasing details of injured people (e.g. someone who has been injured whilst in a suspected stolen car). If an early arrest is likely the identity of the victim should be withheld until he or she is charged, even if consent has been given.
- Journalists can discover the names of victims from numerous sources other than the police. They then often ask the Police Service for confirmation of these details. Each of these cases should be judged on an individual basis. Consideration should be given as to whether confirming details would help accurate reporting of the facts and so be of direct benefit to the individual involved or the Police Service (e.g. because there would be serious consequences if the wrong person was named).

Contact HQ Press Desk or your regional press officer for advice or information about the Police Service of Northern Ireland policy on naming victimswitnesses. (Please also see ROAD COLLISIONS and YOUNG OFFENDERS).

NEW LEGISLATION

Journalists asking for a Police Service response to new legislation or recommendations and/or findings of official committees should be referred to HQ Press Desk.

O

OFF THE RECORD

If a story is good enough, there is no such thing as 'off the record' to a journalist. Officially, 'off the record' means giving a journalist background information or guidance which is definitely not to be printed or quoted. But no matter how good a relationship you may have built up with a journalist, if you speak 'off the record' and a story seems too good to miss, the temptation may prove too much and it could appear in the newspapers/on the radio/television.

Great care should be taken before talking 'off the record'.

P

PARAMILITARY MURDERS - CLAIMS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The Police Service has the following policy statement on such claims:

"The starting point in this matter is that there is no justification for murder – none whatsoever. Whatever the motive and whoever the victim, murder is unlawful and reprehensible. Added to the awfulness of the crime is the further distress and grief caused to the bereaved families through the practice of paramilitary organisations stigmatising the victim with frequently false allegations in an attempt to justify their crime. It is a question for serious consideration whether such claims should be published at all. It is not the policy of the Police Service to aid and abet terrorist propaganda by being drawn into public comment on such claims made by these organisations."

PARAMILITARY ATTACKS/SHOOTINGS

The Police Service has the following policy statement on such incidents:

"These are not punishment beatings or attacks. These are organised paramilitary mutilations of victims, serious criminal offences which must be rejected outright by every right-thinking person. We appeal for full public co-operation to bring these activities to an end."

The Police Service does not refer to punishment beatings and tries to dissuade the media from doing so. They should be referred to as paramilitary attacks/shootings.

PHOTOGRAPHS

CONVICTED OFFENCERS

Following the conviction of an offender at court, official police photographs can only be released to the media on the authority of the senior investigating officer/senior area detective. In the case of terrorist trials, we do not release photographs. The policy is really based on the likely abuse of pictures by terrorist groups on the 'other side of the fence'. Even if the terrorist is in prison, we would not normally issue formal photos. The legal justification is based on Article 2 of the Human Rights Convention, which imposes on public bodies the duty to protect life. Knowing that groups on both sides would use photos to target the opposition, the police could not justify routine disclosure of photos.

Police photographs of non-terrorist defendants may be issued if they involve either significant public interest, or a serious arrestable offence. Serious arrestable offences include:

- Murder, manslaughter, rape, kidnapping, certain other sexual offences.

- Any other arrestable offence if its commission has led to, or is intended, or likely to lead to certain serious consequences. These are serious harm to the security of the state or public order; serious interference with the administration of justice or the investigation of offences, the death of any person, serious injury to any person, substantial financial gain to any person or serious financial loss to any person.

Photographs will only be issued through HQ Press Desk. Any photographs released must be produced without prisoner reference numbers. It is advisable to check with Legal Services before releasing photographs to the media.

INCIDENT PHOTOGRAPHS

It is not Police Service policy for police photographs taken at the scene of incidents/operations to be routinely issued to the media, especially if those photographs are to be used as evidence in court. If a specific request is made, a photograph can only be released with the consent of the investigating officer in the case.

POLICE OFFICERS/POLICE STAFF

It is normal for the media to request pictures of police officers/staff who have been involved in an act of bravery, or if they have been assaulted and seriously injured. Pictures of police staff will only be released with the permission of the officer/member of staff or his/her relatives and after serious consideration of the potential risk to that officer or member of staff's security.

SUSPECTS

Photographs of suspects are issued only in extreme circumstances and there are very strict guidelines governing their release. The photograph of a suspect can only be given to the media on the authority of the senior investigating officer, in consultation with an ACPO rank officer and the Public Prosecution Service, bearing in mind the Contempt of Court Act.

Photographs should always be released via HQ Press Desk. In relation to the releasing of images of persons under 18 years of age please see young persons/young offenders section.

VICTIMS

Victims' photographs should not be released without the permission of the victim or their relatives. It is worth considering that pictures of assault victims are very powerful images and can encourage responses for help, information and witnesses. HQ Press Desk and the regional press offices can help distribute these pictures to the media.

POLICING BOARD ISSUES

Staff should not comment on committee papers either prior to the meeting taking place or afterwards, without first discussing the matter with HQ Press Desk. Usually only Policing Board members and officers of ACPO rank comment on Policing Board matters.

POLICY

As a general rule, when an officer/member of staff is talking to the media about an incident, they should confine themselves to the facts - what, when, where, who, why and how. Do not be tempted to give personal opinions. Any media enquires relating to Police Service policy should be referred to HQ Press Desk or to your regional press office.

POSITIVE PUBLICITY

Although the media has a natural and understandable interest in serious crime, a great deal of police work is non-crime related, working with our communities to improve safety, solve problems and improve quality of life. It is important that we try to balance press coverage by actively promoting all the positive work by Police Service staff. Journalists do want to hear about unusual, imaginative and pioneering projects and we should take every opportunity to let them know what we are doing. Contact HQ Press Desk or your regional press office for help in preparing a press release.

PRESS CONFERENCES

Press conferences are an effective way of dealing with significant media interest in a serious crime or major incident. By holding a press conference many media enquiries can be dealt with in a relatively short period of time, which is preferable to an SIO receiving a relentless stream of calls and requests from journalists over several days.

Press conferences should always be arranged through HQ Press Desk, the Police Service Facilities Manager who works in the Media and PR Department at HQ, or your regional press office, who will notify all the relevant media. Corporate display boards and audio/video recording equipment can be organised and a press officer will usually attend to coordinate the conference and brief the senior investigating officer on questions the media are likely to ask.

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS

Press photographers and TV camera crews will always want to get as close as possible to the scene of an incident. They will not go away until they get the pictures they want. In many cases it is sensible to create a 'media liaison point' which allows photographers and TV crews a view of the action without interfering with the work of the emergency services, rather than refusing them access and leaving them to take matters into their own hands

Once the incident is under control a senior officer can consider giving the press greater access to the scene. Police officers cannot be held responsible for the taste and decency of pictures taken by photographers and film crews – that is a matter for editors.

PRESS RELEASES

Press releases are official Police Service documents, issued on corporate headed paper, and written in a consistent corporate style. Anyone who wants to issue a press release promoting the positive work of the Police Service should contact HQ Press Desk or their regional press office for advice on how to gain maximum coverage and help with content and distribution.

PRE-TRIAL BRIEFINGS

Pre-trial briefings should not be held without prior consent of an officer of ACPO rank in consultation with the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the HQ Press Desk. The strict rules of disclosure mean that such briefings should be the exception rather than the rule.

ACPO guidelines say these rare cases should:

- Be an example of exceptional police work.
- Demonstrate the use of innovative or unusual detection techniques.
- Be of exceptional public interest.
- Be where media interest is so great, a controlled briefing is the only way to ensure accurate reporting and minimise distress for victims/relatives.

If you are approached by a reporter to provide background information on a case before it is heard at court, contact HQ Press Desk or your regional press office for advice. Consideration may be given to HQ Press Desk or your regional press office preparing a background briefing pack about the case for distribution on the day the trial ends, taking into consideration any appeals that may be lodged.

PUBLIC DISORDER

Public disorder incidents can be released to the press. Details can include how many people were involved, injuries and any damage. Any statement to the media should also contain the number of people arrested, details of the people charged, bail details and court dates. (Please also see ARRESTS & CHARGES and NAMING OF VICTIMS). Avoid criticising or making any comments about other organisations which may be involved in the incident.

PURSUITS

Details of all police pursuits are not routinely released to the media unless they result in a serious/fatal accident. However, if the media are aware of an incident, brief details can be given, confirming that a vehicle was being followed by a police car, the time and location of the pursuit, how it began, brief details of the vehicle which was being followed and any injuries.

Do not give specific details about how any resulting accident happened, but confirm there will be a full and thorough investigation. If the pursuit was abandoned for safety reasons, say so and explain why. Confirm if officers used any devices such as Stinger to stop a vehicle. HQ Press Desk should be informed immediately if a pursuit results in serious injury or death.

R

RAPE/SEXUAL OFFENCES/INDECENCY

Nothing should be released to the media which identifies the victim of a sexual offence - no name should be offered or confirmed. Personal details such as age, gender, marital status and whether a woman has children should only be released with authorisation from the senior investigating officer, and as long as this does not help journalists piece together an identity.

Basic details of the attack can be given out to warn others and/or for witness appeals but do not release explicit details of the offence. A victim or a victim's family may suffer added trauma if they read these details. Officers should only refer to incidents as 'a rape', 'an indecent assault' or 'a serious sexual assault'. Sometimes reporters will ask to interview a victim about their experiences, but will give assurances that the victim will not be identified.

Any such requests must be referred to the senior investigating officer, HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices.

RELEASE OF POLICE HELD VIDEO FOOTAGE

Footage should only be released to the media to fulfil a policing purpose. At least one of the following criteria should be satisfied:

- An appeal for witnesses or an attempt to identify suspects.
- Where police believe that the footage is likely to offer road safety and/or general crime prevention advice.
- Where police believe the material is likely to provide reassurance to the public (eg police action taken against criminals, motorists etc).
- When access to the material may dispel rumour or speculation which is threatening public disorder.
- An illustration of good police work which may have resulted in the arrest of suspects and the detection of crime.
- To demonstrate accountability within policing.

Care should be taken to ensure that any footage released to the media does not jeopardise existing or future legal proceedings and video material should only be released on the authority of an officer of ACPO rank or by an officer acting under his/her delegated authority.

All releases of material should be carried out in consultation with the Police Service Media and Public Relations department. Licence agreements which cover the use of any material released to the media and detail terms and conditions of use, rules on copying and archiving clips, etc. should

be issued for every release. These can be obtained from the Administration Office in the Media and Public Relations department and a signed copy should be returned there for filing.

The Police Service has a Media Monitoring service. All television and radio news bulletins and current affairs/documentary programmes are recorded. However, it must be stressed that the Police Service does not hold copyright for the use of these tapes for evidential purposes. Consent is required from the originator for its evidential use and it needs to be formally proved by the camera user.

REPORTS FOR PROCESS

The fact that a person has been reported for process should not be routinely offered to the media. However, if a journalist has this information from another source, it can be confirmed that 'reports have been submitted to consider the question of prosecution'. The identity of the person involved should not be released or confirmed. If a file has been sent to the DPP for a decision, this can be released, although there should be no speculation about the possible outcome.

RESCUES/ATTEMPTED RESCUES

The media is interested in acts of bravery involving police officers and members of the public. Do not give out the names of victims in cases involving attempted suicide, and be very careful about describing such incidents - use 'fell' not 'jumped' and 'taken ill' not 'suffering from a drugs overdose.' Details of victims involved in other incidents can be released only with their permission. (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS).

REWARDS

Details of rewards offered in connection with crimes should only be released to the media with the authority of the senior investigating officer. HQ Press Desk or the relevant regional press office must be told about any reward on offer.

ROAD COLLISIONS

The Police Service usually only release details of serious injury or fatal road collisions, because of the sheer number of accidents in the Province. However, information about unusual non-injury road collisions will also be released, e.g. if they resulted in severe traffic congestion, multiple vehicles were involved, or emergency vehicles were involved. Media statements about road collisions should include the date, time and place of the incident, the make and model of vehicles involved, any disruption to traffic, details of any diversions, and most importantly witness appeals and police officers' contact telephone numbers. Never speculate about the cause of a road collision or attribute blame, instead use phrases such as "two cars collided", or 'a lorry was involved in a collision with a van'.

Identities of people involved in road deaths should not be released until they have been formally identified and relatives have been informed. (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS).

Press photographers and camera crews will want to take pictures of the scene of a major road collision. Try and find them a vantage point such as a bridge, to view the recovery. The officer in charge can authorise the media visiting the scene, under supervision, once casualties have been removed. Contact HQ Press Desk if you need a press officer to attend the scene, or if an urgent broadcast is needed about traffic problems/diversions.

ROBBERIES

Press statements asking for witnesses to a robbery, describing offenders and any vehicles they may have used can be issued extremely quickly by HQ Press Desk and the regional press offices. The identity of any victim or staff who are threatened should not be released to the media. (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS). Most companies, banks and building societies have a policy regarding the release of photographs/stills taken by surveillance cameras. Checks should always be made with the companies before releasing CCTV/surveillance material.

S

SEX OFFENDERS

In accordance with ACPO guidelines the Police Service does not discuss the cases of registered sex offenders in the media, their whereabouts and movements. Media enquiries about sex offenders should be referred to HQ Press Desk or the relevant regional press office.

SIEGES

HQ Press Desk or the relevant regional press office should be informed as soon as possible about a siege, and if appropriate, a press officer will be sent to the scene to set up a media reception point. If possible, and in consultation with the senior officer at the scene, the press officer will organise a vantage point where the media can watch from a safe distance.

This should discourage reporters attempting to break through police cordons and interfering with the operation. Media statements will only be released with the authorisation of the officer in charge of the incident.

SPECIAL BRANCH

It is not Police Service policy to discuss in detail any aspect of the work undertaken by Special Branch officers. Police and civilian staff working in C3 and C4 branches will not give any interview or briefing to the press, whether television, radio, newspaper or other, without the prior agreement of the Head of Branch. The Head of Branch will seek advice and guidance from ACC Crime Department and the Director of Media and PR. No officer shall allow members of the press to have access to contact details. Should an approach be made to an officer by any member of the media for information, the officer should politely decline and inform his or her supervising officer as soon as reasonably practicable. All media enquiries should be referred to HQ Press Desk.

STATEMENTS MADE AFTER A COURT CASE

Journalists often approach officers immediately following a court case asking for a police comment. This is particularly the case following a trial which has ended in acquittal. Officers should avoid saying that no-one else is being sought in connection with the case or that the case is not being reopened.

Both of these statements could be regarded as defamatory as they imply the acquitted person remains the only suspect. If approached by a journalist outside the court, officers should make a short holding statement.

A suggested example is: 'We will be reviewing the case following the court's decision and a more detailed statement will follow later.' The officer should then contact HQ Press Desk or the relevant regional press office and prepare an agreed statement. Never make a comment which implies disagreement with a court's verdict.

SUB-JUDICE (See ARRESTS AND CHARGES)

SUICIDE/ATTEMPTED SUICIDE/SUDDEN DEATHS

Only a coroner's court can decide that a death was suicide and the word should not be used before an inquest has made that decision. Phrases such as 'at this stage there do not appear to be any suspicious circumstances and we are not looking for anyone else in connection with the incident' can be used. Details of when and where a body was found can be given to the press. The identity of a dead person should not be released until the next of kin have been informed and the coroner is satisfied that a formal identification has been made. Officers should warn the family that such cases are likely to attract media attention and that detailed information will be made public at an inquest.

Attempted suicides are not normally released to the media, but general details can be confirmed if reporters are aware from another source. (Please also see RESCUES/ATTEMPTED RESCUES).

T

TERRORIST INCIDENTS (See also EXPLOSIONS)

HQ Press Desk should be informed immediately about any suspected terrorist incidents, and all media enquiries should be referred to HQ Press Desk. Any press statement must be cleared by the officer in charge of the incident.

THEFT/CRIMINAL DAMAGE etc.

Details of these types of incidents can be released to the media, but the identity of the victim of the crime can only be released with his/her consent.

Publicity might cause unnecessary embarrassment to a victim of crime and/or compromise the security of individuals or premises. An investigating officer can authorise releasing details of the victim to the media if he/she believes it would be of significant benefit to the investigation. (Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS/WITNESSES).

V

VICTIMS OF CRIME (See NAMING OF VICTIMS)

VIPs

In general, media enquiries regarding VIPs will be treated in the same way as media enquiries about other members of the public.

W

WITNESSES

Nothing will be released to the media which is likely to identify any witnesses to a crime without the consent of the senior investigating officer and the witness themselves.

Y

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Nothing should be released to the media which is likely to identify a juvenile offender i.e. anyone who is aged under 18 years. If a juvenile is charged, only his/her age and a general area of residence will be given out to reporters e.g. a 16-year old youth from Portadown, rather than a 16-year-old youth from Park Road, Portadown. Do not release details of where a juvenile goes to school.

YOUNG PERSONS (Under 18 years)

Always consult parents or guardians before any personal details and/or photographs are released about children and young people. In those cases whereby a child/young person is suspected of an offence and **all** lines of inquiry cannot identify the individual a number of points will be considered;

- Outline what steps have been taken to identify the individual?
- Is the offence of such a serious nature to justify disclosure?
- Would disclosure impact on the rights of the offender/suspect?
- Are police aware of any potential risk to the individual?
- Is the risk likely to be heightened by disclosure?
- Have you sought legal advice, including on human rights issues?
- Have you recorded specific information in relation to each exposure?

The presumption in relation to persons under 18 years should be **against** disclosure.