

## Introduction

We'll cover...

- why the force should talk to the media
- recognising what makes news
- the basics of what to include in press releases - a look at a basic scenario
- how to *issue* a press release
- some basic legal issues
- NOT about interview skills

Idea is to build your confidence in dealing with the media.

What the media are usually looking for from *you* is a straightforward question and answer session about an operation, an investigation, an incident or a policing initiative - to help them tell the story. Officers below ACPO/Div Command Team level rarely find themselves on the end of a *hostile* media interview.

They're *not* trying to catch you out or make you look foolish - even though, when you're nervous, you might think they are!

## Who are the media?

- newspapers, radio and TV
- local, regional, national and international
- internet - a source of news, and a place to comment/monitor
- magazines, professional/trade, docos, dramas
- social media

## Discussion - why should we talk to the media?

Group's thoughts? Media experiences - any positive ones?

Force: historically reactive, and reserved... more pro-active than ever before, from HQ *and* divisional press officers.

Now: openly encourage all officers to talk to the media (within operational and legal constraints). Trust and confidence – the message and image we portray through the media to our communities is more important than ever before.

Public body, publicly funded.

It's an unavoidable part of the job. 24/7 news coverage. For the vast majority of people who never come into contact with the police, their only source of information about us is the media.

Whatever our personal views of the media, there's no escaping they have a massive influence on how the force is regarded by the public - and so how we work with them is crucial.

There *are* times when reporters ask us for information or interviews when it doesn't seem like there's a great deal for us to gain - eg they might want to 'localise' a national story by getting a quote from a Staffordshire officer – just to get their readers to relate more to the story and their newspaper, radio or TV station.

But there *is* value in that for us: the reporters see the force as one they can work with and generally rely on for a quote... and we build up the goodwill.

We *do* take a lot of that media goodwill and help for granted. Several times a day we ask them to issue appeals to help us get witnesses to RTCs... burglaries... right through to murders.

One of the main reasons we give media interviews/press releases is to get an **appeal** out quickly, so we hopefully get information back that helps us get the offender. The media can help us reach a lot of people in a very short space of time. And save us a lot of time.

They can also help us to **reassure** a lot of people in one hit, with successes, etc.

Appeal for witnesses  
Appeal for information  
ID and arrest offenders  
Warn  
Reassure  
Crime prevention  
Promote our work/involvement

If there's police activity, it will be *seen*, so the media *will* see it themselves or get a tip-off.

**What makes news?**

What does a *reporter* look for in a story?

What gets *us* interested in news?

human interest  
context - something to which we can relate or visualise  
immediacy ('breaking news')  
drama

(Activities police officers, may also be of great interest to the media.)

**What to include in a PR? - whiteboard/discussion**

**\*\* Handout short distraction scenario as basis for discussion \*\*.**

The idea is to look at the scenario, which you may well find yourself dealing with or be asked to talk to media about. Think about the information you would - or would not - release either in a written press release or during a media interview.

Don't write the press release, or script what you'd say during an interview - just sift the information.

Think about the following three questions:

- what the media might ask you, and how you'd answer
- why you'd include some details, and not other
- what *you* want to achieve from the press release or subsequent interview

Filter process...

Who, what, where, how, when, why

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What's the real story here? What's the news angle?

Media follow-ups? (will the victims or their families speak to media?)

Be aware of wider ramifications - eg should local pensioners be afraid?

**How to issue a press release**

HQ press office is open 8-5 Monday to Friday.

Outside of office hours and at weekends, liaise with the Duty Officer in the force control room.

Press releases are generally issued via email or the force Newsline (explain...) or, for more formal announcements, etc, e-mailed out as written releases with quotes, etc.

KIV neighbourhood newsletters and social media as well.

## Naming people

### dead people? (rtc's; sudden but not susp deaths...)

Names, ages and street names can be released provided NOK are aware and formal ID has taken place.

Such details are released to the media *regardless* of whether or not we have family's consent - fatals are subject to an inquest, and we release personal details on the basis that the name will very soon be a matter of public record anyway - Family Liaison Officers need to explain this to family.

### rtc survivors? (just gender, age, town/area they come from, *suspected* injuries)

**crime victims** - don't name unless we have their permission. Businesses (eg Alrewas chicken farm theft)

### When we issue a PR or speak to the media, should we tell them someone's been arrested?

Yes - unless there's a sound operational reason not to.

Why? We're the only source of that info and, without it, they could find themselves in Contempt of Court, or prejudice a case.

How much should we tell them about an arrested person?

gender  
age  
when arrested (PACE clock)  
where detained

then:

if released/bailed/charged/extension to custody granted

Force policy re **naming people charged** and kept in custody, charged and bailed

NEVER name juveniles.

We must also be careful what/how much we say after someone has been arrested/charged - although ultimate responsibility lies with media re what they publish.