

AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY



*Corporate Communications Department*

**Press Office**

**HANDBOOK**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This handbook is designed as a guide for staff of Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Press Office, covering main roles and responsibilities, duties and a guide to working practices to ensure that the office delivers a professional, consistent, quality service.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Press Office is one of four units within the Corporate Communications Department, the others being the Internet & Multi-media Unit, Public Relations & Internal Communications, and Graphic Design.

- 2.2 The core functions of the Press Office are as follows:

2.2.1 To assist operational police officers by publicising appeals for witnesses and crime information and to provide Press Office support to SIO's in major crimes/incidents.

2.2.2 To provide a reactive call-handling service, responding to media calls and requests.

2.2.3 To provide a media monitoring service; compiling, filing and, where necessary, distributing, relevant newspaper, magazine, TV and radio coverage of force-related items.

2.2.4 To co-ordinate a range of media awareness training courses for the benefit of force staff.

2.2.5 To publicise the work of the cold case review team.

2.2.6 To research and identify opportunities for the pro-active promotion of positive policing stories – successful arrests, forthcoming court cases etc.

2.2.7 To be actively engaged in major emergency planning, through strategies and exercises.

2.2.8 To assist with other departments within the Corporate Communications Department to publicise proactive and positive policing projects.

2.2.9 To lead on the organising of media breakfasts, a regular meeting of the Deputy Chief Constable with senior media representatives.

2.2.10 To lead on preparing for Royal and VIP visits to the Avon and Somerset force area.

2.2.11 To act as a first filter for TV and documentary filming requests.

2.2.12 All Press Office staff will also be expected to contribute to Newsbeat, the force magazine.

2.2.13 To regularly review and update the Outlook contacts lists and email distribution lists for media, multi-agencies and PA members.

- 2.3 The core roles and responsibilities of the Press Office are designed to reinforce the constabulary's mission and vision, which is to make the communities of the Avon and Somerset force area feel safe and be safe.
- 2.4 The Press Office is headed by the Media Relations Manager. As well as ensuring the delivery of the core functions as highlighted in 2.2 above, and providing line-management and PDR function for the staff, the Media Relations Manager also sits on the Security Panel, chairs the communications sub-group of MAPPA and is responsible for looking at FOI requests which may need a media response.
- 2.5 The office is staffed by a team of Media Relations Officers (MROs) plus a Press and PR Assistant. Where resilience issues occur and operational demands dictate, staff from the PR/Internal Comms teams can be tasked to reinforce Press Office staff.
- 2.6 The Press Office operates in accordance with the force communications strategy, which is available on the Intranet. This is based predominantly on ACPO MAG guidelines. The Press Office also works towards the aims and objectives of the Corporate Communications Departmental Plan.
- 2.7 The Press Office uses a number of tools to help achieve its aims and objectives. The office uses both a voicebank system and the website/direct emailing, to pro-actively provide information to the media.

### **3.0 WORKING HOURS**

- 3.1 The Press Office is staffed between 07.30hrs and 18.00hrs, Monday-to-Friday.
- 3.2 Outside of these hours, one MRO is always available on-call. An MRO is on-call for one week at a time (Friday-Thursday) on a rota-basis. They are available to be called by a Force Incident Manager (FIM) or senior police officers. They are NOT directly available to the media.
- 3.3 Two telephone lines are available for incoming media calls; one is a Portishead-based line, used for media calls for B, D and E districts. The other, a Taunton number, is for calls relating to F, G and J districts. These phone lines operate between 07.30hrs and 17.30hrs.
- 3.4 Two MRO's staff the phones on 'Early' shifts (one on the Portishead number and one on the Taunton number). Their working hours, when on an Early shift, will be 07.30hrs – 15.30hrs. They will be required to staff the phones between 07.30hrs and 13.00hrs.
- 3.5 One MRO will be on duty on a Late shift. Their working hours will be 10.00hrs until 18.00hrs. They will staff the phones (having BOTH the Portishead and Taunton phone line) between 13.00hrs and 17.30hrs.
- 3.6 There may be occasions, where resilience allows, when a Press Office MRO will have a day on which they will not be required to do either an Early or a Late shift. Such days are referred to as Mids, and working hours tend to be 08.00/08.30hrs – 16.00/16.30hrs. These days will be used for pro-active and portfolio work.

**Call-handling notes**

- 3.7 When answering the phone, Press Office staff should say "Press Office", and then clearly identify themselves. The Press and PR Assistant should answer using "Corporate Communications" as this post-holder works for the whole department.
- 3.8 When answering the phone, to external or internal callers, a note should be taken of the time the call was received and the name/position/organisation of the caller. This is for audit purposes, should there be any issues/disputes. When dealing with media calls, the time a call was received or made to a media representative should be recorded on the Prolog system. See 5.0.

**Press Officer Tasking**

- 3.9 MRO's often receive requests for attendance at meetings and for Corp Comms support directly, rather than these requests going through any central hub. To ensure that the demands for Press Office services are appropriately prioritised, and that staff are deployed as efficiently as possible, all such requests for attendance/support should be verified with the Media Relations Manager – (also for roster resilience reasons too) – before any commitment is made to the requesting officer.
- 3.10 Although the bulk of the work conducted by the Press Office is reactive and responsive, Press Office staff should not be task driven; ie they should not wait to be assigned tasks during any downtime they might have. Press Office staff should not wait for calls from the media or requests from staff for media appeals to be issued. Press Office staff are expected to chase pro-active stories/updates, work on Upbeat features, Newsbeat features etc and, where appropriate, assist the Press and PR Assistant with regularly revising and updating contact lists, email addresses etc. See par 11.0.

**4.0 REGULAR TASKS****Early Shift MRO's**

- 4.1 Regular tasks to be performed by MRO's on early shifts are as follows:
- Visit comms to liaise with the Force Incident Manager (FIM) re any issues from overnight, and to collect the Press File.
  - Put morning messages on both voicebanks, involving a greeting and highlighting any urgent issues requiring media attention or reminding the media of any planned photo-calls/media conferences/anticipated media releases for that day.
  - Save incident reports to the appropriate folder on Outlook system.
  - Ensure there is a Prolog record of items put on vb/web overnight by FIM's.
  - Check the answering machine messages.
  - Check Webstorm for Press Tag logs.
  - Check Prolog for flagged logs.
  - Assist with the identification/compilation of media cuttings.
  - Brief Media Relations Manager of any particularly noteworthy items.
  - If appropriate, and in conjunction with Press and PR Assistant, prepare copies of any relevant videos for proactive distribution to COG.

- Where appropriate, relevant reputation/budget issues should also be brought to the attention of the Police Authority.
- MRO's should regularly review the Ops Forum on the Intranet.
- MRO's should get access to and review the FIM's Daily Report, which is produced for COG, and take appropriate action or bring to the attention of colleagues any relevant issues.
- Where appropriate, log and act upon any FIB bulletins. It is NOT appropriate to simply log an item and expect colleagues to pick it up.
- MRO's should also regularly review content of You-Tube and other such sites for potential reputational issues.

### Late Shift MRO's

- 4.2 The late duty MRO will be expected to complete the following tasks:
- Take the Press File to comms, ensuring it is updated with relevant statements etc to allow the FIM to be briefed with any on-going issues.
  - Record end of day voicebank messages, reminding media that the office is now closed, and how to ring the FIM out of hours.
  - Brief the on-call MRO, if necessary, on any relevant issues.
  - Ensure video recorder timers are set for the main evening news programmes – particularly if other people have been using the video recorders during the day.

### All MRO's

- 4.3 When not on Early or Late call shifts, all MROs will be expected to fulfil the following tasks:
- Assist with reactive call-handling if necessary, even when not rostered for a call-handling shift.
  - Update Press Office whiteboard with bullet points of major incidents/updates, or inform the Press and PR Assistant to update the whiteboard. Any senior officer/staff office member visiting Corp Comms should be able to glance at the whiteboard for an at-a-glance, up-to-date guide to main incidents/issues.
  - Provide Media Relations Manager with monthly update of proactive work being conducted and fill in the pro-active form on the G-drive.
  - Inform Media Relations Manager of any additional requests for Press Office services/support, to allow Media Relations Manager to delegate tasks as appropriate, depending upon office resilience and current workload.
  - Refer to Media Relations Manager, in first instance, all TV documentary/filming requests.
  - All MRO's are expected to fill in the electronic forward planning calendar, via the Corporate Communications mailbox on the Outlook system, as and when appropriate.
  - Proactively inform COG of any appropriate major/reputational issues as they arise.

### Time Sheets and Time Off

- 4.4 All staff are expected to maintain their own time sheets. Annual leave and time owed requests are granted by the management team based on the resilience of the department as a whole to provide its core business. For the

department as a whole (not just the press office team) the following bullet points apply. See also Appendix One.

- All MROs are required to fill out their electronic timesheets. Once a four-week sheet has been completed, a hard copy must be provided to the Media Relations Manager. Failure to regularly do this will result in time-owed requests being rejected.
- Once any annual leave/time owed requests are granted, the Media Relations Manager will update the electronic/hard copy time sheets.
- It is the responsibility of the MRO to add these details to the wall planner at the back of the office.
- It is the responsibility of ALL MROs to periodically check the electronic rosters for any changes to shifts brought about by annual leave/operational/training requirements.

### Press and PR Assistant

4.5 The Press and PR Assistant is expected to regularly perform the following tasks. When the Press and PR Assistant is absent, MRO's will share out these duties:

- Compile video tape of previous evening's regional TV broadcasts.
- Compiling, copying and distributing newspapers cuttings. This should be completed by 09.00hrs each weekday unless exceptional circumstances prevail.
- Copies of selected cuttings to be put on the revolving display in main reception, together with copies of suitable features and media releases.
- Regularly update noticeboards in Corp Comms corridor with new cuttings – at least one per fortnight – plus feedback letters.
- At 13.00hrs every week day, monitor the main BBC Radio Bristol lunchtime broadcast for relevant news items, which should be brought to the attention of the Media Relations Manager or duty MROs.
- Once a week, review and edit the voicebank system, deleting any irrelevant, old messages.

## **5.0 PROLOG**

5.1 This is the logging system used by the Press Office for recording information given to the media, and for logging details of incoming calls from journalists. Prolog records may be disclosable so it is important that the information recorded is accurate and up-to-date.

### Contact Details

5.2 When details of calls are logged, the Prolog entry should contain the name, organisation and telephone number of the caller. If the call has come from an internal source, their name (with rank if appropriate) and internal extension number. Even if it is a number regularly known to yourself, please log it as it may not be recalled instantly by a colleague. Having to trawl through log after log to find someone's telephone number can be extremely frustrating and unnecessarily time-consuming. The extra couple of seconds required to type in these details outweigh the inconvenience of not being able to find that phone number as quickly as you would like. Internal phone numbers should be written as "x66155".

- 5.3 The names of newspapers should usually be written out in full, with the exception of the two key dailies, which can be referred to as "EP" for Evening Post, and "WDP" for Western Daily Press and "SCG" for Somerset County Gazette. ALL other media (including TV) to be written out in full. Eg "BBC Points West", "ITV West", "Radio Bristol". By everyone adopting the same approach, there will be some consistency, which will then make the search facility more efficient.

#### Location Details

- 5.4 Again, for reasons of consistency but also to make the search facility more practical and efficient, place names put within the location section should be spelled out in full – eg Weston-super-Mare, Burnham-on-Sea. Locations should always be based on place names rather than sector codes.

#### Times Of Calls

- 5.5 Although Prolog records the time that each Log entry is made, the nature of the shifts on the calls can sometimes mean that logs are updated some time after calls are actually handled. Therefore MRO's are requested to ensure that they log, in their notepads, times of calls made and received, and transfer this information onto Prolog when they are able to. Logging times of calls could be important in matters of any dispute with members of the media.

#### Flagging Incidents

- 5.6 Incidents should be flagged for follow-up if there is an arrest and someone is bailed pending further enquiries for example. It is important that these flagged logs are followed up so that, if appropriate, details of charges/court cases can be publicised. Clearly, immediate operational activities have priority over flagged logs, but it is important that flagged logs are not forgotten about. If an MRO on media calls is swamped with calls/dealing with a major incident, then he or she should ask a colleague to help with the flagged calls.

#### Prolog Details

- 5.7 Log entries should be concise, containing all relevant facts and data. "Non disclosable" items include names and address of victims of crime. The details of any log should be such that any colleague taking over on call duties should easily be able to see what progress has been made with any particular query and what, if any, further follow-ups are needed; the times that messages have been left for people, and all relevant contact details.

#### 5.8 Timely Appeals

As a general rule, requests for media appeals concerning incidents which are more than two weeks old will not be considered, unless there are particular circumstances to mitigate for the delay (which holds no credibility in terms of public reassurance and in terms of conveying a message that we are treating a crime seriously and are determined to catch the offender). Such circumstances can include, for example, a named suspect early on where publicity may have jeopardised a police operation or instances where the offence itself happened weeks ago, but the victim only came forward and made a formal complaint within the two week period. Reasons such as

"buried under paperwork and five rest days" will not usually be sufficient to explain a delay.

## **6.0 COMPLAINTS/CONTENTIOUS ISSUES**

- 6.1 From time to time there is cause for complaint concerning the nature and tone of media coverage, misquoting, interviews being conducted other than in accordance with agreed parameters. In all such cases the Media Relations Manager should be informed at an early opportunity. Incidents of this kind also reinforce the importance of keeping accurate Prolog entries, including times of calls made and received. See Appendix Two for more details.

## **7.0 MEDIA MONITORING**

- 7.1 The Press and PR Assistant has main responsibility for media monitoring, although when absent/on leave, all MROs have a duty to ensure that the tasks usually performed by the Press and PR Assistant are fulfilled.
- 7.2 During the course of media monitoring, MROs may come across a newsworthy item which may impact on the reputation of the force and which the force is not yet aware of. MROs should bring such issues to the attention of the Media Relations Manager as soon as possible. In the absence of the Media Relations Manager or any other member of the Corporate Communications Department management team, the matter can be brought directly to the attention of a COG member. ALL MROs are expected to be pro-active when media monitoring and when alerting the Media Relations Manager and/or COG of relevant media coverage.
- 7.3 If cases where there is some particularly positive media coverage, MROs involved in media monitoring should not wait for someone from COG or the staff office to request copies of such coverage but should pro-actively offer it (which could mean providing an additional video copy etc).
- 7.4 It is the responsibility of the MRO who is on lates to ensure that the video recorders in the Corp Comms office are set on timer to recorded the main local evening news broadcasts. Any MRO who has cause to use the video recorders during the day should ensure that the recorders are returned to timer status when they have finished using them, to ensure that the main local evening news broadcasts are captured.
- 7.5 Media monitoring should include regularly reviewing letters pages of newspapers, certainly the local papers (Evening Post, Western Daily Press). Relevant letters/comments should be brought to the attention of the Media Relations Manager who will decide if the letter requires a response/further research/action.

## **8.0 PHOTOGRAPHS**

- 8.1 The general rule with regards to issuing photos to the media, particularly in terms of convicted defendants etc, is that unless there are particular circumstances precluding such a release, then all releases will be granted in cases where custodial sentences are given. Clearly, non-custodial sentences mean that the persons concerned are at large and therefore the media can take pictures of their own.



- 8.2 Whenever a photograph is issued to the media, it should always be accompanied by the pre-prepared disclaimer notice.

## **9.0 UPBEAT**

- 9.1 Upbeat is a section on the force website designed to promote some proactive, positive policing stories, and also look at behind-the-scenes features. All MRO's will be expected to contribute towards Upbeat and to provide photos/video images in support of articles they write.

## **10.0 TRAINING**

- 10.1 Media awareness training is an increasingly important function of the Corporate Communications Department, particularly with the introduction of Neighbourhood Policing. Powerpoint training presentations are available on the G-drive and are also contained in the black training folder on the desk of the Media Relations Manager. All the presentations come with speakers notes. All MRO's are expected to participate in the delivery of these training courses, to HQ and district-based audiences, as appropriate.

## **11.0 PRO-ACTIVE WORK**

- 11.1 There is an increasing demand for the Press Office to actively promote positive policing stories as well as simply provide a reactive, responsive, service to both internal and external customers. The launch of the Upbeat section on the website reinforces this approach.
- 11.2 In the event of any "downtime" while on call shifts, the duty MRO's should fill their time by ensuring all flagged logs are dealt with. They should then scan logs for any incidents which require updates (such as assaults/robberies where persons have been released on bail pending further enquiries. Checks should be made to see if any charges have resulted, in which case this information should be passed on to the media, and put onto the website, so that the public can be informed that, as well as police appealing for witnesses to crimes, offenders are actually being caught and are being put before the courts.
- 11.3 It is not appropriate, even with higher-profile, more major crimes, for Press Office staff to assume that a police officer/SIO will automatically provide updates. Therefore it IS appropriate, and expected, for Press Officers to proactively chase updates.
- 11.4 There will be times when Press Office staff are not involved in on-going operational issues/major incidents; there can be mid-shifts and also the time after an early shift and before a late shift. On these occasions, priority should be given to assisting colleagues who ARE on the calls, if necessary. When not required, there are a number of pro-active roles members of the Press Office should look at, including:
- Proactive calls, at least once a month, to the Cold Case team, to check on any emerging issues/cases.
  - Proactive calls, at least once a month, to Atrium. We should be in a position to contact local journalists and tell them "go to XXXX Street in an hour's time, as we are going to raid a house and it will make some good pix/footage" – ie, drawing the media's attention to positive policing stories in advance, rather than issue a good news story after the event. Media

are more likely to give good coverage if they can capture an event actually happening rather than be told about it afterwards (and quite often by a member of the public who spots it happening and calls them rather than by us being proactive).

- Chasing flagged logs for updates/arrests.
- Visiting districts – particularly CID offices, and Crime Management Offices, to raise awareness of work of the Press Office, to generate familiarity with Press Office staff and to communicate the need for positive policing stories to be communicated to the Press Office in addition to the witness appeals.
- Assisting with the updating of distribution lists/contacts lists, so the most up-to-date and relevant details are available.
- Working with SIO's and senior officers to proactively prepare packages for the media for successful court prosecutions.
- Ensuring that the Corporate Communications Department's electronic Forward Planning Calendar is kept up-to-date with relevant items, and that it is periodically checked so that, if necessary, strategies can be prepared, lines to take drafted and approved, and opportunities sought for further media coverage (in the event of anniversaries of murders etc).
- Working, as requested by the Media Relations Manager, on TV filming/documentary requests.
- Working on Newsbeat articles.
- Delivering Media Awareness Training presentations.
- Creating, updating and then reviewing, as appropriate, and responding to, a database of unsolved major crimes so that we can proactively generate stories/fresh appeals around key anniversaries/milestones.
- Recording video clips of officers giving interviews about crime appeals/pro-active stories, so that these appeals can be included on the force website.
- Check with Ops Planning about forthcoming VIP visits.
- Using digital cameras to support pro-active publicity stories with any relevant images.
- Awards. Proactively publicise bravery and good work awards.
- Diversity issues. Assist with compilation of, and maintenance of, contact lists for publications/media outlets which serve black and minority ethnic communities.

#### Other Press Office portfolios

- 11.5 A number of other portfolios sit within the Press Office including:
- Organising Media Breakfasts
  - FoI requests
  - MAPPA
  - Security Panel (Media Relations Manager)
  - Major emergency planning
  - IPCC cases
  - PSD cases
  - Meet the Chief events (esp Christmas)
- 11.6 Because of the largely reactive/responsive nature of the work of the Press Office, individuals will not generally become specific portfolio holders. It is the responsibility of the Press Office team as a whole to talk to each other to ensure that regular pro-active tasks (monthly calls to cold case team, atrium

etc) are conducted. This is because if one staff member was, for example, "Mr or Miss Atrium" and then he or she ended up being totally pre-occupied with a major murder enquiry etc, some of the Atrium work could go unrecognised and unpublicised if the "dedicated" MRO is tied up with a higher priority job. By having a collective responsibility, any member of the team can take a pro-active approach and make a regular check. It is important when visiting other departments/districts that emphasis is put on a Press Office collective approach rather than one dedicate SPOC. This will enable every member of the team, in theory, to have an overview and awareness of many issues rather than be a specific expert in one or two. This will also aid the consistency of the service supplied by the office should a staff member be absent for a length of time. For this reason, the communal corp comms email box and the x66350 number should generally be the one given. (Again, if an officer decides to email a specific press officer with details of a job, and that officer could be out of the office dealing with another major incident, it could be some time before the email is addressed – and this could mean that opportunities to publicise a forthcoming court case, for example, are missed. The use of the communal mailbox will address this. MRO's need simply to communicate with each other to ensure that mail to the communal box is dealt with. It is still appropriate for the text of the email to include the name of the lead MRO – then colleagues will immediately recognise whether that MRO is available to respond to the email or tied up on other duties, so that they can step in and deal with it.

- 11.7 Bearing in mind the points raised in 11.6, a monthly chart will be created in the "Press Team" folder on the G-drive. This chart will contain details of calls/visits that should be made on a monthly basis. When an MRO completes one of those tasks, he or she should include their initials and date on the chart. At the end of each month the Media Relations Manager will check the chart to see that all the monthly pro-active calls/visits are being made. It is the responsibility of ALL MRO's, particularly when not on a calls shift, to check the chart to see if some of the regular checks/calls have been made, and to take it upon themselves to make those calls.

## **12.0 OUT-OF-HOURS ON-CALL**

- 12.1 On-call MROs are not expected to put their lives on hold during evenings and weekends, but are expected to be available and contactable in the event of an emergency and to be in a position to respond to such an incident as quickly as possible. That means you should be within a reasonable reach of the force area and be fit to drive. If, for example, an MRO is in the cinema and receives a call, it is clearly not appropriate to wait until the end of the movie before responding to that call.
- 12.2 On-call MROs should be equipped with an Airwave handset. They should also ensure that they have to hand their force fleeces and reflective clothing (where issued) and their force-issued digital camera with suitably charged batteries. Those who have lap top computers with remote access should also have those machines with them when on-call out of hours.
- 12.3 On-call MROs should endeavour to keep Prolog updated with relevant issues during the course of the weekend so that colleagues on call-handling duties the next week can easily pick up and run with any given incident – particularly relevant if the person who has been on-call during a weekend is not on earlies on a Monday.

- 12.4 It is expected that on-call MROs should update logs at the weekend (especially if remote access allows) and NOT wait until the Monday morning, because they could arrive at work on a Monday and get deployed to deal with another major incident before being able to complete the log on the first incident, making it very difficult for colleagues dealing with follow-up enquires about the first incident. At the very least, MRO's should prepare an update as a word document and email it to the communal Corporate Communications inbox.
- 12.5 Where there is advance information to suggest a story may be published in a particular weekend newspaper, or where a matter arises at the weekend that may generate significant coverage, the on-call MRO should buy the relevant newspaper and take any appropriate action in response to the coverage, rather than wait until the Monday morning media monitoring.
- 12.6 The on-call MRO should contact the Gold MRO if requested by COG or a senior officer, or if the on-call MRO needs guidance from the Gold MRO to make a strategic decision on any given matter. Also, if the on-call MRO becomes swamped with work (ie if there were two murders at once) the Gold MRO should be contacted, and they would then make a decision about resilience and resources. If a matter arises where there needs to be consultation/communication with other forces/agencies, for example a silver or gold meeting/webchat/conference call, the gold on-call person should be contacted first in order to determine the appropriate level of attendance/participation/response – ie should it be the gold on-call who takes part in the meeting/call or the duty MRO.
- 12.7 In line with the overarching aim of being more pro-active when bringing matters to the attention of COG, MRO's should use their own discretion and decision-making skills when it comes to directly informing COG. Should an MRO decide that they WILL proactively inform COG of any given subject, a courtesy call to that effect should be made to the Gold MRO.
- 12.8 When not on-call, MRO's should have their force mobile phones either switched off, or should refrain from answering them. This will alleviate the problem of journalists sometimes contacting MRO's who are not on duty/on call with queries.

### **13.0 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS**

- 13.1 It is far too easy to dismiss some media queries and suggest that the journalist in question make their enquiry the subject of a request under the Freedom of Information Act.
- 13.2 It is the desire of the Chief Constable that the Press Office desists from easily referring such queries, but that staff do explain to the media that the query – particularly a statistical one, for example, will not be the top priority to deal with (operational matters clearly take precedence) and that it could take a few days before a response is available. However, this should be preferable to the media than the 20 days it can take for an Fol response to be provided.
- 13.3 The Media Relations Manager may require the assistance of an MRO to conduct some research and prepare lines to take in anticipation of media coverage generated by the answer to an Fol enquiry.

**14.0 OFF THE RECORD**

- 14.1 The general rule is that you should not say anything to a journalist you are not prepared to see broadcast, published or printed.
- 14.2 'Off record' briefings/information, however, has proved useful from time to time, and has influenced either the tone of media reporting and, in some cases, has even prevented stories from being pursued. The golden rule is that if an MRO is providing a journalist with some background info, it should be stressed "this information is for your guidance only and is not for publication or broadcast" rather than "this is off the record" as some journalists define "off the record" simply as meaning "usable but not attributable." All such conversations with journalists should be accurately recorded on Prolog.

**15.0 MAJOR INCIDENTS**

- 15.1 When an MRO becomes aware of a major incident (murder etc), the Media Relations Manager should be informed at the earliest opportunity. In most cases, the MRO who first raises the incident will be designated as the lead MRO to take ownership of it, which could involve attending briefings, travelling to the crime scene, facilitating media interviews etc.
- 15.2 In such cases, the MRO should take with them a digital camera to take images of the cordon, the SIO giving media interviews, and any other relevant issues. Where possible, arrangements should be made for video recordings of the SIO conducting an interview to be made for the force website.
- 15.3 The MRO should also be equipped with an Airwave terminal, particularly in cases of an on-going major incident (armed suspect on the run etc).
- 15.4 The duty MRO should maintain regular contact with the Media Relations Manager and, if appropriate, the on-call MRO, to provide updates and discuss any issues.
- 15.5 The Press and PR Assistant and, if that person is not available, another MRO, may be called upon to help provide specific media monitoring concerning a major incident.

**16.0 TEMPLATES**

- 16.1 Corporate Communications staff commonly talk about the importance of consistency in terms of statements issued and approaches taken etc, because consistency shows "joined-up thinking" and thus breeds confidence. To that end, it is important that the department practices what it preaches. Therefore templates have been produced for media and communications strategies, reports and protocols. These templates should be used for all such documents, to ensure a consistent, professional, approach. These templates can be found in a folder within "Strategies and Statements" within "Corporate Communications" on the G-drive.

**DMB/August 2007**

**APPENDIX ONE**

## AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY

*Corporate Communications Department***TIME OFF PROTOCOL****INTRODUCTION**

This protocol contains guidelines concerning annual leave/time owed requests by members of the press office and PR/internal comms team, to ensure that the dept has sufficient resilience to provide an effective service at all times.

**DETAILS**

- All annual leave and time owed requests to be made AT LEAST two weeks in advance of the days requested, to allow for planning to take place to ensure resilience.
- In exceptional circumstances the two week rule can be exempt, but this will have to be done in discussion with the relevant line manager.
- When an annual leave/time owed request is granted, this should be put upon the office wall planner, and also put onto the paper rosters on the media manager's desk. The media manager should be informed so that the electronic rosters on the G-drive can be updated accordingly.

**Restrictions**

- No restrictions are placed on staff taking time owed (ie they can leave the force area, travel abroad and drink).
- However, when Time Owed is taken, then in the case of an emergency or very urgent enquiry, this person should be contactable by phone.
- In extreme cases, people on time owed could be required to return to the work place (if someone has gone abroad while on time owed, the costs of the return journey would have to be met at their own expense).
- Time owed is granted at the discretion of CCD managers, with due consideration given to the resilience of the office.
- In order to monitor hours being worked, it is important that staff maintain their electronic time sheets, and that line managers are regularly supplied with hard copies of those time sheets.
- Time owed requests will NOT be considered if MRO's have not supplied their line managers with updated time sheets.

**APPENDIX TWO****AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY*****Corporate Communications Department*****COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE PROTOCOL****INTRODUCTION**

This protocol underlines some of the key issues and the process that needs to be considered when making a complaint to a media organisation, individual journalist or body such as the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), Press Complaints Commission (PCC).

In order for our complaint to be taken seriously and for a speedy resolution it is essential that the issue is taken up with the relevant body on the day of publication or broadcast and ACPO officers/Legal services are kept updated on its progress.

**IDENTIFYING AN ISSUE**

- A Media Relations Officer (MRO) will identify an issue which may give cause for complaint, and will raise this with the Media Manager (MM).

**SEEKING A RESOLUTION**

- The MM or MRO will consult an ACPO member and identify what it is we are seeking to redress the situation such as a printed correction, printed apology, personal apology, or damages.

**MAKING A COMPLAINT**

- The MM will promptly ring the journalist/editor concerned.
- The MM will point out the areas of inaccuracy/concern, supported by either a breach in the PCC codes of practice or contravention of media law. (An up to date copy of McNae's Essential law for journalists is available in the main press office.)
- Either the MM or an MRO acting on their behalf will immediately support the verbal contact with an email/letter reiterating our complaint.

**CONTEMPORANEOUS RESPONSE**

- There should be an agreed timescale established for response by the media outlet. This should be pro-actively conveyed to the relevant ACPO officer and legal services.
- The MRO/MM should ensure that consistent pressure is placed upon the media/organisation concerned to ensure a contemporaneous response and to prevent further secondary publication of inaccurate, misleading or damaging information.
- Should the media outlet fail to respond within a satisfactory timescale a further complaint regarding failure to respond within an acceptable and agreed time limit should be made.

**UNSATISFACTORY RESPONSE**

- Should we not be satisfied with the response from the media outlet or it is felt that the issue is not being taken seriously; steps should be taken to highlight

the issue with the PCC. Their helpline number is 0845 600 2757. Further details can be obtained from their website at: [www.pcc.org.uk](http://www.pcc.org.uk)

- If the issue is a point of law, representations discussions should take place with legal service to assess the options available on the basis of the case details.
- All contemporaneous notes and details should be fully logged on 'prolog' and copies of the article(s) placed on file.
- Full copies also provided to legal services.

#### **LEGAL ACTION**

- Should legal action be the chosen recourse following failure to come to a satisfactory resolution all personal notes and details of conversations etc should be maintained for evidential purposes.
- Discussions should be held with the Head of Corporate Communications Department to assess what alternative course of action should be taken in the interim period. I.E Refusal to co-operate with media organisation/journalist. Suspend journalist/organisation from attending police PR events/press appeals and suspension of making FOI applications etc
- These guidance notes will be reviewed by the Media Manager on an annual basis.



**APPENDIX THREE****AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY****Corporate Communications Department****USING THE VOICEBANK**

- 1 Dial the confidential office number –
- 2 Enter account details when prompted:
  - Service Account:
  - User ID ()
  - Password
- 3 Press the appropriate number, as prompted, depending on what you want to do:
  - Record introduction/menu messages:           press
  - Record a voicebank message into a box       press
  - To delete a message                               press
  - To change the password                         press
- 4 Recording a message:
 

After pressing  to choose the "Record a voicebank message" option, you will be asked to choose which box to record into:

  - Bristol/BANES/South Glos                       press
  - Somerset East/Somerset West/North Somerset   press

At the end of the message, press any key. You then have options to say you are happy with the recording (1), to listen to the recording (2) or to re-record it (3). When happy, hang up.
- 5 To delete a message, first press  to select "delete a message" option, and again select the appropriate message box () It will then play the messages in that box.
  - To save a message and move on, press
  - To delete a message and move on, press
- 6 To change the introduction message, after pressing  you need to enter the system prompt number,  and then you will have three options, 1 – play current message, 2 – re-record message, 3 – cancel.
- 7 The number for the media to call the voicebank is **0870 345 1555**
- 8 The out-of-hours media line number is **01275 816763**