

AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY

Corporate Communications Unit

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A guide to media matters

Contents:

Introduction
Force Policy
Corporate Communications Unit (CCU)
Training
Do's and Don'ts
Media Releases
Interviews
- Types of Interview
- Preparation
- Hints and tips
- Pity, praise, promise
Media Conferences
A-Z Guide to Media Matters

Introduction

The mission statement of Avon and Somerset Constabulary is "to make the communities of Avon and Somerset feel safe and be safe."

The force vision statement is that "the communities of Avon and Somerset will have the highest levels of confidence in our delivery of policing services."

Communication is a vital ingredient to help achieve these aims.

Communicating to the communities we serve provides public reassurance by informing and engaging those communities. It can also help combat the fear of crime, either by providing details of good police work and results achieved, or by passing on crime reduction advice.

Without doubt one of the most effective ways of communicating with the public is through the media. While many people remain sceptical and nervous about dealing with journalists, there is no doubt that the media is an extremely powerful tool in the battle to win hearts and minds, and to achieve the force's mission and vision.

This booklet is a handy, quick-reference guide to media matters. It should help ensure that the whole force speaks with one, consistent voice which, in itself, helps generate confidence and reassurance.

The key word is communicate; with each other, the media and the communities we serve.

Force Policy

The force's full Media and Public Relations Policy is available for all to read on the intranet.

In summary, the philosophy underpinning that policy is to be open, honest, fair and accountable with the media and, through the media, with the communities we serve.

Every member of staff is an ambassador for the Force and, as such, could find themselves speaking to the media.

If you are informed about your subject, and it is relevant, you can speak to the media. What you should not do is attempt to tackle sensitive and speculative issues without seeking advice and guidance.

Saying 'no comment' in response to a media query is not an option.

If you have any queries, difficulties, doubts or concerns, do not hesitate to contact the Corporate Communications Unit.

Corporate Communications Unit

The Corporate Communications Unit is a team of media and public relations professionals available to advise and assist on media matters.

Based at Police Headquarters, the Unit is staffed between 07.30hrs and 18.00hrs, Monday to Friday. Outside these hours, the Force Incident Manager (FIM) handles routine media matters. However, a Media Relations Officer (MRO) is on-call and available, 24-hours a day, seven days a week, via the FIM, to deal with emergency, major and non-routine media matters.

The CCU provides the force with a comprehensive reactive and proactive, internal and external, corporate communications service. It deals with incoming calls and queries from the media, assists officers with appeals for information and seeks to promote good news stories and positive work.

The CCU staff are only as good as the information they receive which is why good internal communications are essential. You tell us and we can help tell the appropriate audience.

The CCU has two dedicated telephone lines to deal reactively with media queries each day. MRO's staffing these lines will also be responsible for issuing appeals for witnesses and dealing with incidents as they arise. Additionally, each MRO has

responsibility for one of the force's districts. They will usually spend at least one day per week on their district, identifying positive stories which can be issued pro-actively to the media and assisting with other areas of communication.

If you have any queries concerning media relations matters, please contact the Corporate Communications Unit on 01275 816350.

Media Training

The CCU helps provide media awareness training and also practical skills-based training on media handling and interview techniques to staff. Contact the CCU for details.

Media Matters – Do's and Don'ts

DO

- Contact CCU if you are planning to issue a media release
- Make yourself available for possible media interviews or research to see if a colleague or someone else involved in the matter can be available
- Consider the possibility of photo/filming opportunities to illustrate your appeal or release
- Consider your audience
- Be aware of media deadlines
- Think about what you are going to wear if you are doing a television interview
- Prepare before speaking to the media. Know your subject
- Speak to CCU staff if you have any doubts/queries/concerns

DON'T

- Say anything to a journalist you would not be prepared to see printed or hear broadcast
- Assume that the CCU already knows about an incident or matter. The CCU is only as good as the information it receives
- Think that the media will go away if you ignore them
- Be drawn into speaking to the media about a subject which is outside your field of knowledge
- Disappear when a spokesperson is needed
- Proactively give details of a crime exclusively to one media outlet
- Ruin a journalist's own exclusive story
- Put off returning that call to the CCU

Media Releases

Media releases can be issued by the Corporate Communications Unit and will be posted on the force website and emailed directly to the relevant media. Releases can also include invitations to the media for photo/filming/interview opportunities. For advice and assistance in preparing a written release, contact the CCU.

Interviews

Types of interview

There are a number of different types of broadcast interviews:

- LIVE:** TV and radio like live interviews, especially when it is from the scene of a crime. Radio stations are happy for live interviews to be conducted over a telephone line
- AS LIVE:** The same as above, but not transmitted until a later time (usually happens where the interviewee is not available for live interview at the time of transmission)
- PRE-RECORDED:** Radio stations in particular will record an interview from which extracts may be used regularly through the day during news bulletins and programmes
- DOWN-THE-LINE:** Involves interviewee staring straight into a camera lens and communicating live with a studio-based TV presenter or interviewer.

Preparation

The golden rule for any media interview, be they with broadcast or print media, live or pre-recorded, is to ensure you prepare. You should run through the following checklist:

- What is in it for the force? Is this an interview we want to take part in?
- Are you the right person for the interview?
- Who is it you will be speaking to?
- What do they want? Is the interview news-related, investigative or for a special interest programme?
- Will the interview be live or pre-recorded?
- How long will the interview last (especially relevant in the live format)? The shorter the interview, the less time you have to speak beyond key points – or be led astray
- Is anyone else taking part in the interview/ piece? Occasionally broadcast media may have a third party, in studio or on the telephone, who may have a contradictory stance to yours
- What is it you want to say? Before engaging in any interview, establish in your mind the two or three key points you want to get across more than anything else – and stick to them
- What do they want to ask you first? If you don't like the sound of the first question, negotiate that they ask a different one.
- Is there a particular point you want to make? If, for example, you want to end the interview by giving a telephone number (the incident room, Crimestoppers, for example) inform the interviewer beforehand. That way, you know where the interview is going to end up

- When preparing for broadcast interviews, consider your surroundings. Try to find a room where you and the interviewer are the only occupants, divert phones, switch off mobiles and put a note on the door advising that an interview is taking place
- With radio interviews, you can have your main messages with you on a piece of paper – but try to ensure you do not rustle the paper too much
- If you are doing a TV interview outside, consider your position. You don't want to be standing facing the sun and squinting as this provides the viewers with the perception that you are uneasy. Negotiate a position with the cameraman

Hints and tips

Having prepared for your interview using the checklist above, the following may help you during the interview:

- With TV interviews, do not fidget or dance around on your feet too much
- Try to vary the tone of your voice and express feeling. This will enable you to more effectively win the hearts and minds of the viewers and listeners
- Stick to your two or three key points or messages
- Do not try to answer a question that you do not know the answer to. For example, "what was the motive for the assault?" You say "We don't know. What we do know is this man was brutally attacked..." or "we don't know at present, that is why we need the help of the public..." Don't talk about what you DON'T know, but refer back to what you DO know
- Do not be drawn into political debate, opinion or speculation
- Avoid jargon, use simple, normal speech and don't try to sound too formal
- Use short, impact, statements of about 30-40 seconds long each. Interviews are often edited and small "soundbites" are taken out and re-used
- Avoid throwaway comments which could be taken out of context if broadcast or published
- Never say 'No Comment'
- Be firm with interruptions and don't be sidetracked. A pushy journalist will lose face in an interview if he tries to interrupt you and, with a firm hand gesture, you say "If I can be allowed to finish..."
- Don't wait for an interviewer to ask questions. If they are hesitating, keep talking and reiterating your key messages
- Always seek an opportunity to add crime reduction/prevention/reassurance messages into an interview

Pity, Praise, Promise

A good tip for a 'reaction' interview to a serious incident where someone has been attacked, injured or killed is to use the Pity, Praise, Promise approach:

PITY	You acknowledge that the victim has suffered a traumatic ordeal. In the case of a death, your "hearts and thoughts are with the family of the deceased at this tragic time...". You can acknowledge that a serious road collision is causing disruption to other road users.
PRAISE	Highly-trained, dedicated staff are pulling out all the stops in a bid to rescue casualties/catch the offender/minimise disruption. Thank the relevant local community for their co-operation.
PROMISE:	Steps will be taken to try to prevent a similar incident from happening again / every effort is being made to re-open the road as soon as possible / we will do everything we can to bring the offender to justice

Media Conferences

Media conferences can be used for a variety of reasons; as part of an on-going murder or major enquiry, or in cases of vulnerable missing people. They should not be used too-often, as they lose their impact. Again, the golden rule is preparation. Elements which should be carefully considered include:

THE VENUE

- Is the room of a suitable size for the number of people expected?
- Consider what backdrop you will have behind the panel of speakers
- Have two entrances, one for the panel and one for the media. This ensures the panel does not have to walk directly in and out past the media, and also allows a quick exit if someone becomes too distressed
- Have nameplates, water and glasses available for the panel
- Tape record and, if appropriate, video-tape the conference

THE PANEL

- Consider who is going to speak. Do not have too many speakers
- Talk about the conference with the panel in advance. Establish who is going to say what, who will sit where, etc.
- Establish whether there will be "one-on-one" interview opportunities with individual journalists after the conference
- Establish your main messages
- Establish a hand-signal with key/vulnerable panel members so that if they become too distressed and uncomfortable they can give you the signal and you can draw the conference to a close and get them out of a nearby exit

THE CONFERENCE

- Set out ground rules with the media present before the conference starts. Ask for all mobile phones to be switched off
- Declare whether there will be one-on-one interviews afterwards
- Tell the media who is going to speak, and what they are going to speak about.
- Set the ground rules for questions after any formal statements; journalists should raise their hands and the chair of the panel will indicate who is to speak. The speaker should then state their name and organisation. Anyone who tries to interrupt should be ignored, otherwise you will lose control of the conference
- Thank everyone for their attendance at the end and do not be drawn into any further questions

A-Z Guide to Media Matters

A

Abandoned Babies and Children

Generating publicity about an abandoned child can help trace its mother, who may need medical help, counselling and other services. Media appeals should be made through the CCU staff, who will liaise with social services, health and other relevant agencies.

Absconders

See 'Escaped Prisoners'

Activist Groups – Animal Rights etc

We reactively confirm that a protest has happened and provide details, but do not enter into any judgement about the rights or wrongs of the particular cause concerned. We do not discuss in any detail work carried out by police departments to monitor activists. Sometimes it is necessary to warn the media and public in advance of a major protest or demonstration if there is likely to be disruption to traffic, etc.

Air crashes

There will be considerable media interest about such incidents, particularly if they involve large numbers of casualties and enquiries should quickly be referred to the CCU, which has expertise in managing, and separate policies governing, major incidents and emergencies and will probably send MRO's to the scene to manage media interest. This policy applies to train crashes and other similar type incidents.

Air Support Unit

Specific and generic queries about the ASU are best handled by the unit itself or CCU. All requests from journalists for stills or footage obtained by the ASU should be referred to the CCU.

Animals

Animal rescues, missing animals etc, attract widespread public and media interest, as do good news stories involving the force's Mounted and Dog section.

Anonymity

The Data Protection Act 1998 requires police forces to process data for policing purposes, and therefore disclosure of personal data must be for that reason. When a victim or any other person who has provided their personal details to police states that these details should not be released to the media, this should be honoured. Sometimes, there are over-riding operational needs, and it is in everyone's interest that some details are released to the media where it pursues legitimate aims. A victim or next of kin is entitled by law not to have their personal details released without their permission. Police can release information about an incident, provided it does not lead to the identification of the victim. However, the police force does not have the monopoly on information and it is possible that the media will gain people's names from other sources.

The Data Protection Act does not apply to deceased persons, as their names will become a matter of public record at, or after, an inquest. The force will name suspicious death victims and road traffic collision victims after they have been formally identified. In cases of sudden deaths, identification is usually left to the relevant Coroner's officer.

Anti-social Behaviour

A frequent source of media coverage concerns complaints from the public about youth disorder and anti-social behaviour. Through the media we need to acknowledge and be sympathetic to these concerns. Emphasis should be placed on police actions whilst engaging the public and asking them to help by providing information. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's) tend to be widely reported by the media. A separate policy governing the release to the media of photographs of people made subject to ASBOs is available from the CCU.

Appeals for Relatives – SOS System R4

Special SOS messages are broadcast nationally by the BBC prior to the Radio 4 News at 07.00hrs and 18.00hrs. The BBC will broadcast an appeal for relatives of people who are dangerously ill but only after all other attempts to trace these relatives have been exhausted. Appeals should be made through the CCU or FIM.

Arrests/Appeals after arrests

Under the Contempt of Court Act 1981, proceedings become active upon arrest, the issue of a warrant, or summons (see 'Sub-judice'). Once a case is active, nothing should be publicised which may cause a 'substantial risk of serious prejudice' to the fairness of a trial. It is therefore important that the media is told when someone is arrested in relation to an incident which has already received media publicity.

As a rule, no details should be released which identify an arrestee, but his age and where he is from can be given. For example: "A 43-year-old man from Weston-super-Mare has been arrested by police in connection with....and is due to be interviewed later today." Once people have been charged, further details may be released (see 'Charges/Summons').

Occasionally, officers seek to make further media appeals, possibly for a specific witness, after an arrest has been made. This can be legitimate but needs to be carefully worded. In such circumstances the SIO or their designated representative needs to consult the CCU.

Assaults

Publicity about offences such as assaults depends upon the severity and nature of the incident. Factors such as age, infirmity, extent of injuries, and so on, may determine the amount of media interest. The general policy is not to identify or issue photographs of victims without their permission and that of the SIO. The media will often ask to be put in touch with the victims of such incidents. A personal account of an incident and how it has affected the aggrieved has a greater effect on readers, and attracts wider coverage, than a simple statement of facts. It is legitimate in such circumstances to ask the victims if they wish to speak to the media and respond accordingly.

Assaults on Staff

Any release that identifies a particular member of staff will only be made with that person's prior consent. However, there are occasions where the media obtain these details from another source and it is not possible to protect the identity of the person concerned. On such occasions it is deemed counter-productive to deny or refuse to confirm details, particularly if there is another member of staff with the same name.

B

Blackmail cases

Contact the Corporate Communications Unit immediately, at any time of day or night, as there are specific strategies which CCU staff will implement, in liaison with the SIO, in such cases.

Bogus callers/distraction burglaries

Details of these should be released to the media as soon as possible, in order to prevent further people being targeted. Descriptions of suspects should be issued, together with advice including the 'Doorstep Code' and also reminders that genuine callers, such as council and water company employees, all carry identification and will be happy to wait outside while a phone call is made to verify their credentials.

Bomb hoaxes/suspicious packages

Details will not be proactively offered to the media because such reports encourage copycat incidents. Many media outlets will not publish or broadcast this type of incident for the same reason. If a suspicious package is found, details may be released of time and place, whether or not a bomb disposal team was called, and if there was any disruption to traffic or local residents. The Corporate Communications Unit should be informed. The content of any 'hoax calls' and code words are not disclosed.

If a genuine device is discovered, information will be issued and managed in line with national guidelines.

Breath Tests

The fact that a driver has been arrested on suspicion of drink driving may be released to the media but initially only in vague terms until and unless he / she is charged - e.g. "a 41-year-old man from the Clifton area of Bristol has been arrested on suspicion of..." (see Charges/summons).

Once a person has been charged, then their name, aged and address may be released. The specific details / readings of the test results themselves are not divulged to the media.

Burglary

Issuing details of burglaries can help recover stolen property, identify offenders and encourage greater security-consciousness among householders. If a victim requests that no publicity is given to their crime, their wishes should, unless in exceptional circumstances, be respected.

If, in these circumstances, the media find out about the burglary from other sources, it will not be denied that an incident has happened but the media should be advised that the complainant has requested that no publicity be given to the offence.

Unless exceptional circumstances prevail, the precise location of the offence will not be given to the media. Instead a non-specific address will be offered (e.g. "a house in Bishport Avenue, Bristol, was burgled last night").

A similar approach will be taken to naming commercial premises which suffer break-ins; however, if identifying the precise premises (a pub, a petrol station, a factory unit) will increase the chances of recovering stolen goods and or elicit a greater number of potential eye witnesses, then the name of the "victim" premises may be given.

C

Cautions

Details of people who are cautioned are not voluntarily divulged to the media. If the media ask for details of a caution, simply confirm that a man or woman has been cautioned for the relevant offence.

CCTV footage

The release of CCTV footage to the media can be invaluable in maintaining media interest in an on-going enquiry, in helping to catch criminals and in tracing missing people. Making CCTV footage available will also dramatically increase the chances of TV stations giving publicity to police appeals about a particular incident.

However, the vast majority of CCTV footage is not owned by the Police but by local authorities and private companies and there may be copyright issues which need to be considered before any footage can be released by the police. Permission must always be sought from the owner.

ACPO MAG media guidelines stipulate that Forces should be satisfied that the material to be released is done so only for a "policing purpose", such as appealing for witnesses, showing good police work or reassuring the public about action taken against criminals. (see Video footage).

Charges/Summons

Where a person has been charged and is either to be placed before the next available court or has been bailed to appear before a future court, then details of the individual's name, age, street in which they live and full details of the charges may be released to the media. The same principles apply once a summons has been served on a suspect.

The policy applies only to adult offenders. It does not apply to juveniles, to cases involving sexual offences where there is a danger that naming the person charged may also identify the victim, where the interests of justice could be impeded or prejudiced or where a judge has made a specific order to withhold the identity of a person charged. Release of this type of information should only be made after consultation with the CCU.

Children/Juveniles

A juvenile is anyone under the age of 18. Those involved in criminal proceedings cannot be identified, unless a specific order is made by a judge to the contrary (sometimes the case when issuing an ASBO). Their age, sex and town of residence can be released, together with details of the offence they have been charged with.

The force is not allowed to release the names of children in care. The rare exception is when children go missing and the relevant local authority, as legal guardian, gives written permission to release the name in a bid to trace them.

Collisions

Details of road collisions may be released, including the time, date and location, together with details of vehicles involved and, if known, general information about injuries. Care must be taken to avoid attributing blame. Appropriate phrases to use are "a car was in collision with..." or "two cars collided". The names and addresses of people involved are not routinely divulged to media. See under 'Anonymity'. This may not stop the media from making enquiries of their own to get the names.

In the case of fatal collisions, the Corporate Communications Unit will not consider releasing the name of the deceased for at least 24 hours, to allow formal identification to take place and next of kin to be notified. After 24 hours, details are released after consultation between the CCU and the relevant Family Contact Officer (FCO), provided formal identification has taken place and all next of kin have been notified. Precise addresses are not given. It is sufficient to give the street name.

At the scene of fatal road traffic collisions, the media may be granted limited filming and photographic access, through consultation between the CCU and the Road Policing Unit (RPU).

Complaints Against Police

All enquiries about internal disciplinary matters involving staff are handled by the Corporate Communications Unit and enquiries should be referred there.

Details of on-going internal disciplinary matters involving staff are not routinely released to the media, but there may be circumstances where confirmation of some information will be provided in response to enquiries. Once any internal investigation has been completed, it may be appropriate and in the interests of the force's 'open, honest and accountable' policy to divulge brief details.

In the event that a member of Constabulary staff is charged with a criminal offence and subject to the nature of the offence committed, the CCU may proactively release details to the media in line with the policy on arrests and charges (see arrests and charges). The individual's rank and post will be provided to the media, together with their place of work, and whether they have been suspended from duty.

Condition Checks

It is not the primary role of the police to make condition checks with hospitals on behalf of the media. However, since hospitals will rarely give condition checks unless a name is provided by the caller, and since the police do not routinely release the names of all victims of assaults or road traffic collisions, this can be a difficult area.

In some cases, especially one which is attracting widespread media attention, it may be prudent, following liaison with the SIO and hospital authorities, for the CCU to provide the media with updates on the condition of injured parties.

Should the victim die, the media should be informed as soon as possible, in accordance with the relevant force policy on sudden deaths, suspicious deaths and fatal road traffic collisions.

Contempt of Court

The Contempt of Court Act 1981 places restrictions on the amount of information media can publish or broadcast about an incident once proceedings become active, as such publication or broadcast may prejudice a hearing. Proceedings become active when someone is arrested, charged or reported for summons. See also 'Charges' and 'Sub-judice'.

Counterfeit currency

Enquiries concerning counterfeit currency should be referred to the Corporate Communications Unit, who will stress that the number of counterfeit notes in circulation is minimal compared with genuine notes. Exact details of counterfeiting should not be given, so as not to encourage copycat counterfeiters. SOCA (Serious and Organised Crime Agency) deals with all issues relating to counterfeit currency and it may be appropriate for the CCU to refer media enquiries to the SOCA press office.

Court Cases (statements at conclusion of)

The media will frequently seek comment from police officers 'on the steps of the court' at the conclusion of legal proceedings (including inquests). In most cases, it is appropriate to comment, irrespective of the outcome of those proceedings. However, care needs to be taken in the construction of the statement, as an appeal may be pending following a jury's decision.

It is recommended that any officer in charge of such cases and who anticipates media interest should seek assistance from the CCU in preparing such a statement.

Crime

Details of certain types of crimes (distraction burglary, robbery and serious assault, for example) are frequently released to the media by the CCU, but the names and addresses of victims will not normally be released without their consent or unless there are over-riding operational reasons or where such disclosure pursues a legitimate aim, such as where the interests of the community as a whole over-ride the interests of an individual.

Exact addresses of victims are not routinely released, but it is in order to give the name of the street. In small rural areas, to avoid identification, it may be best to give more general details, such as "a house in the village of Puxton".

Details of operational procedure/methods (modus operandi) are not released other than in very general terms.

Crimes endorsed 'NOT FOR PRESS RELEASE' on district incident reports will not generally be released to the media unless there are operational reasons which justify a release or where the victim has been consulted prior to release.

The Corporate Communications Unit can help divisional and other staff to construct media appeals. Officers should remember to inform the CCU if their investigation results in arrests/charges as the media can then be alerted to cover the court case, providing positive, and reassuring, media coverage.

Crime Reduction

Wherever possible, opportunities should be taken to reduce offending and to address the fear of crime by issuing specific crime prevention advice to the public via the media and by remembering to add crime reduction/prevention advice when making public appeals for help in detecting specific crimes such as distraction burglaries, car break-ins and burglaries.

Crimestoppers

Crimestoppers is a charitable tri-partite system operated by the business community, the media and the police and provides the public with an anonymous method of providing details of offenders or suspicious activity to the police through a third party.

When making appeals to the public through the media for help in detecting crime, the Crimestoppers telephone number – 0800 555111 – should be mentioned. It is not appropriate to say all calls to Crimestoppers are free, because some mobile phone users will find they are charged. It is, however, appropriate to say that "callers do not have to give their names, but that their information could entitle them to receive a cash reward."

Criminal Records

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

Criticism

Any criticism of the force should be taken seriously and considerations made as to how best to respond to it, if at all.

The CCU will be happy to provide advice. If the criticism is justified, we should consider issuing a frank acknowledgement of it and say what action has been or will be taken to resolve the matter and prevent a repeat of it. If the criticism is not justified, we should consider how best to respond.

This may involve issuing a formal rebuttal of the criticism which can help transform a negative story into a positive one. It may be more appropriate that a letter is written and sent to the media outlet concerned. Advice and help is available from the CCU.

D

Data Protection Act 1998

This legislation restricts the release by the police of personal details about a living individual, be those details stored on a computer, captured in a CCTV image (see Video footage), held in a manual filing record, on microfiches or any other medium.

A police force is only allowed to release personal details to the media for a legitimate "policing purpose", such as the prevention and detection of crime, to aid the arrest and prosecution of offenders, for protecting life and property and for maintaining law and order.

Wherever possible, permission should be obtained from anyone who is involved in an incident, whether they are a victim of crime, a witness or their next of kin, before any personal information about them is released.

If the people involved do not give their consent, the Constabulary must be able to demonstrate that there is a clear policing purpose or public interest reason which outweighs an individual's right to refuse publicity. Advice and help is available from the Corporate Communications Unit.

Deaths in Police Custody

Contact the Corporate Communications Unit immediately, day or night. The CCU will liaise with the Professional Standards Unit and other relevant agencies and manage all media queries.

Deadlines

Media deadlines are vital - stale news is no news - and failure to meet media deadlines can have a detrimental effect on police enquiries. Radio stations offer an immediate opportunity to broadcast important information, such as a missing person appeal or details of a major road collision.

Other media, including weekly newspapers, provide less of an immediate opportunity for breaking news but awareness of their deadlines enables officers to ensure important messages are published in a timely fashion.

Documentaries

The force regularly receives requests from television documentary makers. These requests are extremely varied - from specific cases to policy and the work of specific policing units, and take some time to organise, supervise and manage.

There are benefits and potential pitfalls of taking part in such documentaries. The Corporate Communications Unit carefully considers each request on its own merits.

When TV/documentary cameras are around, you should remember that the camera could be focussed on you without you knowing.

Domestic Violence

Specific incidents of domestic violence are not given to the media but the pro-active role taken by the force in dealing with such incidents and our work with other agencies in this field should be reinforced. Publicising the force's positive work may encourage more victims to come forward when they may previously have not felt confident to do so.

Drugs - including loss/theft of

The work carried out by the Constabulary to tackle the supply of illegal drugs - in particular the execution of raids and seizures - attracts considerable media attention and successful seizures should be publicised at the earliest opportunity.

Until seized drugs have been forensically examined to determine their true nature, it is advisable to describe them as "suspected" of being what they are (i.e. heroin, crack cocaine). On occasions it may be appropriate to release photographs of the substances seized.

It is advisable to contact the Corporate Communications Unit in advance of mounting a raid in order that a publicity plan can be prepared. Following a successful operation, the unit should also be informed of any arrests / charges / court dates to further maximise positive publicity.

Details of the loss or theft of prescribed drugs should be given to the media to warn the public and the thief of the possible dangers to life of the substances if taken in large quantity. In such cases, information released to the media should include the name the drug or poison, a description of its appearance, its effect(s) and, if appropriate, the importance of anyone inadvertently taking the drugs to seek urgent medical attention.

E

Escaped Prisoners

Enquiries about escaped prisoners will be dealt with by the Corporate Communications Unit. Officers should bear in mind the effect the escapee may have on the victims of that particular offender. Details of dangerous escapees need to be released at an early stage as a warning to members of the public. Full details of the escapee, including sentence being served, town of origin, but not full address, may be released, following liaison with the relevant prison and agencies. A similar approach will be adopted by the CCU in relation to the escape from police custody of suspects/offenders.

Evidence

As a rule, we do not divulge information to the media about specific pieces of evidence pertaining to specific crimes. There are cases where exceptions are made. These decisions will be made by an SIO in liaison with the CCU, CPS and other relevant agencies.

Explosions

For explosions with terrorist or criminal connotations, all media queries should go to the CCU.

In cases of 'accidental' explosions (such as gas leaks etc), general details can be released to the media, especially when roads are closed or homes evacuated. Be cautious about discussing the cause of such an incident. It may be more appropriate for a different agency – fire, utility company, Health and Safety Executive etc – to do this.

F

False Allegations

If it is revealed that an allegation of a crime which has been released to the media is false, the CCU should be advised. Brief statements will be issued, along the lines of "police are no longer investigating/seeking anyone in connection with an allegation of..." etc.

Firearms Incidents

In the event that armed police officers discharge a firearm and someone is killed or injured, media interest is intense. In these circumstances, the CCU should be alerted immediately and will manage all media queries in line with separate specific policies and in liaison with other agencies, such as the IPCC.

The identities of officers involved in firearms incidents should not be released until and unless they are charged with criminal offences arising from the shooting incident. Nothing should be divulged about police firearms tactics, methods of entry or specialist equipment.

Incidents involving the criminal use of firearms can and generally are divulged to the media, particularly when they are used in the commission of other crimes, for example robbery. These incidents are likely to attract significant media interest and, accordingly, district officers may be best served by requesting that CCU staff handle all media enquiries.

Fires

The Fire and Rescue service normally take lead responsibility for managing the media interest in fires. Details of fires may be released by the police, particularly in cases where people have died or been seriously hurt and where the cause of the blaze is suspicious.

Care should be taken when asked about the cause of any given fire. If the cause is unknown, we should say so. Similarly, if the cause is being investigated or is suspicious, then we can say so. We should not use the term 'arson' unless and until experts have confirmed as much. The CCU and media should be informed of any subsequent arrests at the earliest opportunity.

Fixed Penalty Notices

Details of people issued with fixed penalty notices are not routinely volunteered nor will they automatically be confirmed on request.

However, this position can be reviewed in the light of certain criteria, such as the level of media interest, whether a refusal to confirm remains tenable and the views of the person concerned.

If the individual has complained directly to the media about being issued with a notice, this could be taken as consenting to publicity and justifying responses to the media which confirm that person's identity.

Food/Product Contamination

Such incidents should be treated in much the same way as cases of blackmail and kidnap, and should be reported to the Corporate Communications Unit immediately. The CCU staff will put into place specific and nationally agreed policies and procedures for handling the media in such cases.

Found Property

Details and pictures may be released to the media as the publicity could help trace the rightful owner. Care should be taken not to release too detailed a description of the recovered items as this could enable someone else to claim to be the rightful owner.

Fraud

Indecency

No details of indecent assaults should be released which will identify the victim, unless the victim themselves consent or a judge makes a direction.

Details of the incidents themselves, together with suspect(s) descriptions, can be issued to the media. See also 'Rape'.

Indemnity Forms

The Chief Constable must be indemnified against any loss, damage or injury suffered by journalists (including cameramen, sound technicians etc) who accompany police on operations (eg drugs raids).

Journalists refusing to sign indemnity forms – which can also stipulate for what purpose any material they gather can be used – will be prevented from taking part in the operation.

The CCU is responsible for liaison with the media in the context of indemnity forms and all enquiries should be referred to the unit.

Industrial accidents

Serious accidents in the workplace (factory, farm, building site etc) can be dealt with in the same way as road traffic collisions. (see 'Collisions'). We can release details of the injured party, location, nature and extent of injuries and hospital they have been taken to. In cases where the Health and Safety Executive is involved, media should be referred to the HSE for further information.

Inquests

Inquests are courts of law and as such journalists are free to attend and report on proceedings, subject to any ruling or order made by a coroner. Police officers attending are often asked for a comment at the end of all proceedings and in most cases it is appropriate to make a comment. Assistance with such statements should be sought from the CCU.

Informants

More commonly known today as 'police sources'. The identity of anyone, living or dead, who has provided information to the police must not be disclosed.

Internet

The Internet is an increasingly important tool in the fight against crime and as a means of directly communicating with the communities we serve. All news releases issued by the Corporate Communications Unit are published on the force website, and are also e-mailed directly to the relevant media.

The internet is an important tool for issuing important information quickly, as well as quickly issuing photographs of vulnerable missing people etc. However, such images need to be quickly removed if the missing person is found, or if a suspect featured in a 'wanted' section is arrested. It should also be remembered that not everyone has access to the Internet.

The force website also contains crime prevention information and advice.

IPCC

Media enquiries in cases which are being managed or investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission will be handled by the IPCC's own media relations officers. Cases which are being supervised by the IPCC or which have been referred to the IPCC but sent back to force for internal investigation, will be handled by the force's own Corporate Communications Unit.

J

Jargon

The days of "I was proceeding in a southerly direction" are long-gone. Plain English should be used at all times. Do not say a suspect was "bailed 47/3" for example, as this means nothing to the public. Instead, say "bailed pending further enquiries", for example. Similarly a "white male" is a "white man" and a "white female" is a "white woman" or "white girl".

Joint Operations

There will often be incidents involving other emergency services or agencies. It is advisable to ensure that everybody is in agreement with any release that is made. Do not comment on other agencies' actions or roles unless they have been consulted. Avoid being drawn into any criticism of their action.

Juveniles

Photographs and names of juveniles (under 18 years of age) will not be released to the media, unless a judge makes an order. If a juvenile is charged, then only their age and general location of residence is released.

K

As with all crime, information about fraud alerts the public and puts them on their guard. It is always advisable to speak to the officer in the case before any release is made.

Freedom of Information Act

This legislation places an obligation on police forces to publish a range of information including policies and strategies, minutes of meetings and performance data. This information can be - and is - published on the Constabulary's Internet.

A MRO within the CCU has specific responsibility for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act as part of their portfolio work and liaises regularly with the Corporate Information Department.

G

Good News

Police officers tend to consider the media when they need help in appealing for witnesses or publicising a crime trend. Managing the response to such incidents is important but equally important, especially in terms of public reassurance, is the publicising of good news stories, be it a successful operation, good arrest, drugs seizure, forthcoming court case, brave actions, exceptional work or a crime prevention initiative or innovation.

H

Hostages/Sieges

See also 'Kidnap' and 'News Blackouts',

Great care needs to be taken when managing the media interest in a siege – particularly those involving the taking of hostages and especially those committed by self-proclaimed terrorists or 'freedom fighters'.

The CCU should be alerted immediately and will manage the media interface, often in person at the scene, and work with other relevant agencies. Officers other than SIO's should not make comment to the media but refer all queries to the CCU, bearing in mind that the hostage takers may well be monitoring the media themselves.

Human Rights Act 1998

The Human Rights Act, which incorporates the 1950 European Convention for Human Rights into UK law, has many provisions which affect the release of information to the media by police.

These include articles providing protection against inhuman or degrading treatment, establishing the right to respect for private or family life, and the right of freedom of expression.

Principles of proportionality, legality and necessity must all be considered in making decisions that affect a person's human rights.

Anyone in any doubt about how the Act affects what they intend to release to the media should seek expert advice from the CCU.

I

Identification Parades

Appeals for people to take part in identification parades may be made, but no mention of the investigation to which it applies should be made.

Illegal Immigrants

Enquiries about specific incidents involving illegal immigrants (be they victims of crime or perpetrators) should be handled in the normal way as outlined elsewhere in this policy. More generic enquiries about illegal immigrants will almost always impact on other agencies (for example the Immigration Service) and given the need for multi-agency liaison it is recommended that such enquiries are referred to the Corporate Communications Unit.

Inaccuracies in media coverage

Inaccuracies published or broadcast by the media can provoke a negative response from the community, cause additional distress, increase the fear of crime, reduce reassurance and possibly pose legal problems which could jeopardise and investigation or likely outcome.

Minor errors can be dealt with by speaking directly to the journalist concerned. In very minor cases, the situation can be resolved with an understanding that efforts are made to prevent a repeat of such an error. In a less minor matter, a correction may be published or broadcast.

More serious matters should be raised with the Corporate Communications Unit, who will address it at editor/managerial level with the media concerned. The most serious matters can also be referred to the Press Complaints Commission.

Kidnap

All such cases should be referred to the Corporate Communications Unit immediately. There is a strict, nationally agreed policy between the police service and the media in the event of a kidnap where life is deemed to be at risk.

L

Leaks to media

Staff who make unauthorised disclosures to the media, particularly about forthcoming or current operations, could face disciplinary action. Such disclosures can jeopardise the operations and compromise months of work. Occasionally, it may be beneficial to inform the media in advance of something the police are about to do but this should be done under controlled conditions, such as a pre-operation briefing, with the use of embargoes and indemnity forms.

What can be encouraged is to alert the media to a forthcoming, newsworthy, court case.

Letters to Newspapers/Magazines

Anyone writing a "letter to the Editor" of a newspaper or magazine in their capacity as a force employee should seek the clearance of their line manager first.

If the letter concerns a matter of policy, that could draw the force into adverse publicity or create controversy, it should be referred to the Corporate Communications Unit for further advice.

M

Major Incident Scene Management

When a major incident is declared, the investigating team or the Force Incident Manager will contact the Corporate Communications Unit or, out of office hours, the on-call Media Relations Officer. District should, in the meantime, designate a liaison officer (a senior police officer) until their arrival. The MRO has no authority to physically control vast numbers of the media but can work with district resources to provide designated media areas and 'vantage points' in order to manage a large media crowd.

In the case of major emergencies, the Corporate Communications Unit has a Major Emergency Plan and, if necessary, can set up and manage a media briefing centre and co-ordinate a multi-agency response to the situation.

Media Monitoring

The Corporate Communication regularly receives newspapers and cuts and files relevant stories. Through the force video unit, television news broadcasts can be videotaped and where advance notice is given, radio broadcasts can also be recorded.

Media Requests

Media requests to carry out research, examine working practices and procedures, accompany officers on raids, execution of warrants, general patrols and other duties, should always be referred to the Corporate Communications Unit.

However, in exceptional circumstances, the Queen's Bench Divisional Court has stated that they do not consider it to be in the public interest that legitimate investigative procedures such as the execution of warrants and interviewing of suspects which might involve the innocent and which might lead to prosecution and trial, should be accompanied by the media. Media briefings should take place after the events to provide details which can be released.

Media Strategies

Where incidents are likely to prompt sustained media interest, the Corporate Communications Unit can help devise and implement media strategies, to help manage the coverage of such incidents. The Unit needs to be alerted at an early stage and provided with as much information as possible in order to be able to provide informed advice and to draft the most appropriate and effective media strategy.

Missing Persons

Media coverage of missing persons can yield positive results and save many police working hours. Full details should be released if written permission is provided by next of kin. However, if next of kin or guardians refuse consent, that decision may be over-ruled providing there is a legitimate reason to do so, for example the missing person is vulnerable and could harm themselves, or it is believed that the missing person could be a victim of crime. It is important to issue information concerning a missing person as quickly as possible, and wherever possible a photograph should be provided. Where missing people are found, the Corporate Communications Unit must be informed immediately to cancel the appeals and withdraw the photographs from circulation/website.

Minority Ethnic Groups/Ethnic Origins/Equality

Nothing should be released to the media which could be considered racist, sexist or prejudicial in any way.

Information about a person's ethnic background should not be proactively offered unless it is strictly relevant to a crime or case, for example if an offence is thought to be racially motivated or if issuing a description of a missing person, clearly their colour would need to be issued.

Terms such as 'coloured', 'half-caste' and 'Afro-Caribbean' are not acceptable. Some peoples in the Indian sub-continent do not consider themselves as 'Aslan' so this term should also be avoided, as should 'oriental', which may also be classed as racist and offensive. Similarly, the term 'gipsy' should not be used to apply to non-Romany people.

Murder/suspicious deaths

In such cases, the Corporate Communications Unit will be responsible for liaison with the media, in conjunction with the Senior Investigating Officer. Engaging the media at an early stage is important in order to dispel speculation and rumour and to provide some public reassurance. A co-ordinated, consistent approach needs to be taken. (see 'Sudden deaths'),

N

News Blackouts

A voluntary agreement exists between the police and editors to operate a news blackout. This only applies to very serious cases, particularly kidnapping or abduction, where life is at stake. The decision to ask the media for a blackout rests with the Chief Constable or his nominated deputy. See also 'Kidnap'.

No Comment

In the spirit of open, honest and accountable policing, 'no comment' is *not* an option. It is counter-productive to encouraging public reassurance and confidence in the police. Contact CCU for advice as there are ways of saying very little without saying 'no comment'.

O

Off The Record

The general rule is that nothing should be said to a journalist that you are not prepared to have broadcast/published. Journalists will sometimes use something you have said informally or off the record, and attribute the comment to a "police source". Be wary.

Old Cases

Journalists sometimes seek to publicise details of old cases, both detected and undetected. There may be significant benefits in co-operating with such requests but they can be time consuming. Consult the CCU.

Operational Follow/Tactical Pursuit

These are frequently in the news. Details can be released and confirmation given that a vehicle was being followed by police or that a pursuit took place. Give specific details about any resulting collision and confirm that a full investigation will take place. Sometimes a pursuit is called off for a number of safety reasons; this can be disclosed along with an explanation of the reasons.

The terms used by the force are 'operational follow' and 'tactical pursuit'.

Opinions – individual v corporate

Police regulations, this policy and certain pieces of legislation provide a criteria within which it is sometimes appropriate for an individual member of staff to provide a journalist with a personal view.

As a general rule, however, it is advisable for officers not to express a personal opinion (eg about the declassification of a certain type of illegal drug) as this could be contrary to force policy/legislation. Guidance and advice should be sought from the CCU.

Out-of-hours Media Management

Outside normal office hours (Mon-Fri, 07.30hrs-18.00hrs) there is one Media Relations Officer available to the force on a call-out basis. This person is contactable through the Force Incident Manager. Members of the media direct their out-of-hours calls to the FIM, who will decide to handle it themselves, request the journalist to call the office when open, consult the on-call MRO or ask the on-call MRO to deal. Any police officer dealing with an Incident out-of-hours which is likely to generate media interest should first make contact with the FIM.

P

Partnership

Opportunities should always be taken to promote multi-agency partnership working in releases and statements to the media. It may also be appropriate to engage the local community in partnership working, appealing directly to a local community for information, for calm and also to thank the community for their support for police operations.

Paedophilia and Sex Offenders

Those who have a history of committing sexual offences, particularly against children, will come into particular scrutiny by the media and the public. Concern will often turn on the identity of the suspect and the area in which he/she lives.

The force has a separate media policy governing the release of information about convicted sex offenders, which is available from the CCU. Advice in such matters should always be sought from the CCU.

Any decision to publicly identify a registered sex offender, or any individual considered to pose a particular danger to children and vulnerable adults, needs to be justified for legal and moral reasons and all enquiries should go to the CCU.

In terms of Sex Offender Orders, media strategies as part of the MAPPA process can be prepared when required. Contact the CCU for further details.

Photofits/CD-fits

Photofits/CD-fits should only be released in conjunction with the Corporate Communications Unit.

Photographs of wanted/convicted people

Photographs of persons wanted by the police should only be released through the CCU which, in liaison with the SIO, will consider whether the offence the individual is suspected of committing warrants such rare action. Provided the apprehension is in the public interest, the release to the media of a photograph of the wanted person would outweigh any question of prejudicing a free trial.

The OIC will be advised to seek the advice of the CPS prior to the release of the photograph.

There are times when it will be beneficial to release photographs of offenders once they have been convicted. This procedure will be performed by the Corporate Communications Unit, in liaison with the OIC and in line with a separate policy which takes account of ACPO MAG guidance notes.

Police Authority

The Corporate Communications Unit provides media relations support for the Avon and Somerset Police Authority. One MRO has specific responsibility, within their portfolio of work, to handle corporate communications for the Police Authority.

Police Officers (issues of Identification)

The home address of any serving police officer or member of police staff should not be released without his or her permission unless they are charged with a criminal offence and their address has already been given in open court.

On occasion the media may wish to refer to an officer who has come to attention because of a particular act of bravery (see Rescues/Bravery). In these cases, and only with their permission, it is appropriate to refer to their place of work (eg "based at Police HQ, Portishead).

Police Vehicle Collisions (POLACS)

Details of minor, damage-only, POLACS are not routinely or proactively released to the media but brief details (in line with our policy on collisions, see 'Collisions') can be confirmed on request. Information about POLACS involving serious injury or death should only be released by the CCU following liaison with the Road Policing Unit and with the IPCC, which is likely to be involved.

Politics/Politicians/Elections

Whilst demonstrations and incidents of public disorder that require police action can be commented upon, from an operational perspective, the political beliefs or reasons behind those demonstrations should not be commented upon.

The police should also avoid being used for political point-scoring in the run up to local and general elections. Officers must remain impartial and avoid being used by any candidate to endorse their work or manifesto, either through quotes or photographs.

Policy

Questions concerning any matter of force policy on a given subject should be referred to the Corporate Communications Unit.

Pooling

Sometimes when dealing with sensitive matters, where a victim of crime or relatives are speaking to the media, it is appropriate to organise 'pooled' interviews rather than ask victims/ relatives to face large numbers of journalists and cameras. This involves a minimal number of interviews being conducted and the journalists sharing them. Contact the CCU for more advice/guidance.

Pre-Trial/Verdict Briefings

Avon and Somerset Constabulary will consider, in appropriate circumstances, holding pre-trial and pre-verdict media briefings on major court cases. The CCU will organise and run such briefings, in liaison with the SIO and in accordance with ACPO MAG guidelines.

Press Conferences

These are 'on the record' media briefings, usually held after serious incidents or in the cases of vulnerable missing people. The CCU should be consulted and can advise on how to organise and run a media conference.

Prisons/Prisoners

The police service is not responsible for the prison service and unless exceptional circumstances prevail, all media queries should be referred to the Home Office Prisons Department or the individual prison concerned.

For security reasons, details about where particularly sensitive prisoners are being held, or those held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, must not be disclosed to the media.

In the event of a prison escape (see 'Escaped Prisoners'), major crime, riot etc, occurring at a prison in the force area and which leads to police involvement, the CCU will manage all media queries in liaison with the HO and prison authorities.

Public Disorder/Demonstrations/Protests

General details about a demonstration or disorder should be released to the media reactively but consider that publicity is often the main aim of the organisers of such events and no comment should be made on any political topics, religious views, or ethnic origin of anyone detained following such an event.

Public Warnings

Warnings published in the interest of public safety should be given priority. They can be about a number of dangerous or potentially dangerous situations and will normally be given good coverage by the media.

Q

Quotes

Every member of staff is an ambassador for the force and can speak to the media, as long as it is directly relevant to their own field of expertise/experience. Care should be taken to avoid confusing personal opinion with force policy. See also "No Comment" and 'Off The Record'.

R

Rape

Details of rapes can be released to the media in order to make appeals, reassure the public that a suspect has been arrested, and/or to provide safety advice and warnings to the public. However, nothing should be released to the media which could identify the victim or lead to the identification of the victim, unless the victim elects – in writing – to waive their right to anonymity or a judge directs otherwise.

Rape is a very emotive word, and also relates to a specific sexual act with a strict definition in law. In the early stages of an enquiry, it is usually reported that police are investigating an allegation of 'serious sexual assault'. Should interview/evidence confirm that this was a rape, within the legal definition, then the media should be informed accordingly.

Details of someone charged with rape can be disclosed to the media, but not if it will lead to the victim being identified (particularly relevant if the accused is a relative of the victim).

In all such cases, you should always take account of the victim's wishes and the effect media coverage will have on them, whilst balancing against the need to catch the person(s) responsible.

Rescues/bravery

Details of heroic action, bravery above and beyond the normal course of duty, or rescue attempts by police officers or members of the public, should be given to the media, with the consent of all parties involved. Media releases are issued in relation to force bravery awards, and representatives of the media are invited to attend award presentation days.

Stories where a member of the public is reunited with a police officer who has saved their life or rescued them from a life-threatening situation, usually receive extensive, and positive, media coverage and are to be encouraged.

Rewards

Anyone who calls the Crimestoppers number, even if they choose to remain anonymous, could qualify for a reward if their information leads to the arrest and conviction of an offender.

In some serious crime cases, other organisations or businesses may come forward and offer a reward. This offer should be confirmed in writing by that organisation before such an offer is publicised. It should also be recorded in the relevant incident policy book.

Once such an offer is confirmed, the statement given will be along the lines of: "Local insurance firm Insurance Limited is also offering a £500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible."

Robbery

As a matter of routine, details of robbery are proactively released to the media in order to appeal for witnesses, trace stolen property and, when appropriate, to provide crime prevention advice. A swift appeal for witnesses, especially one which takes in a public place, can help trace offenders or vehicles.

Care should be taken not to release details which could lead to the identification of an individual victim of robbery. Instead it is generally sufficient to provide general details, eg "A 42-year-old Clevedon man".

Commercial organisations usually ask for the amount of cash stolen not to be disclosed although, where possible, a guide should be given, such as hundreds or thousands of pounds. Where a store staff member is robbed during a regular trip to the bank to deposit the weekly takings, mention of this should be avoided as this could alert potential offenders to this routine and could lead to repeat victimisation.

Media questions concerning security or policy at post offices or any particular chain of shop should be referred to the relevant headquarters of the company concerned.

S

Safety Cameras

The force is just one member of the Safety Camera Partnership, and takes the lead in responding to issues concerning enforcement and where criminal damage may have been caused to cameras. Issues such as the location of cameras and policy matters, should be referred to the partnership's own communications officer, who leads on such issues.

Security

The force does not comment on royal security, national security or that of politicians and people in the public eye, for operational reasons.

Special Branch

It is not force policy to discuss the work of Special Branch.

Statistics

Journalists frequently ask about statistics, generally those relating to crime. Detailed statistics are available on the force website, www.avonandsomerset.police.uk and also on the Home Office, website, www.homeoffice.org.uk. Individual requests for crime statistics will be considered on their own merits.

Sub-judice

Care should be taken in releasing certain information to the media once proceedings become active under the Contempt of Court Act 1981. At this point, matters are said to be 'sub-judice' and there may be a substantial risk of serious prejudice to any forthcoming court case with what they broadcast or publish. See also 'Contempt of Court').

Sudden deaths

In circumstances where a sudden death is being treated as suspicious, contact should be made immediately with the CCU which, in liaison with the SIO, will manage all media enquiries.

If the death is sudden, but non-suspicious, we would not as a matter of routine, divulge any details to the media proactively, but confirm in response to queries that an incident is being dealt with. If the deceased is a prominent or well-known figure, it may be appropriate to involve the CCU at a very early stage.

As a matter of policy we do not routinely provide the media with details of cases where people are suspected of taking their own lives. Brief details can be confirmed upon request, but enquiries should be directed to the relevant Coroner's Office.

In all cases of sudden death care should be taken to ensure all next of kin are aware before the name(s) of the deceased is released to the media.

Suspects

Once proceedings are active, sub-judice rules apply and nothing should be released which identifies an offender. Where there is no known offender, then under the PACE Act 1984, "nothing inhibits an investigating officer from showing a video film or photographs of an incident to the public at large through the national or local media, or to police officers, for the purpose of recognition and tracing suspects." See also "Wanted Persons".

T

Terrorism

Special security considerations apply when terrorist activity is suspected. Calls on this subject should all be referred to the Corporate Communications Unit who will manage media liaison in conjunction with the SIO, Head of CID and SB.

It may be prudent, at times, to issue 'awareness' news releases, depending on level of threat. For example, a news release in the run up to Christmas concerning suspicious packages in shopping centres may be timely. Release should be written on an "aware not scare" basis.

Train crashes

See 'Air Crashes'.

Trespassing

Another common media story concerns complaints from local residents after 'travellers' have moved onto a particular site. Often police are seen attending such locations and the media often ask for a police comment on the matter.

It is NOT the duty of the police to evict people who have moved onto, and are effectively trespassing on, privately owned land. It is the responsibility of the landowner.

The police presence at such locations is in a 'peace keeping' one, to help prevent any possible incidents of disorder.

U

Undercover/covert operations

Details of covert operations, including the nature of the operations, the location, the number of officers involved etc, are not divulged to the media for 'obvious operational reasons'. Such operations may, occasionally, be the subject of advance briefings to the media, conducted under an embargo basis using indemnity forms. In these circumstances the CCU should be informed in advance of the operation being mounted and in advance of the media being informed of any briefing.

V

Victims of Crime

The general policy is not to release the names and addresses of victims of crime or their next of kin, unless they consent. Media will often ask to speak to the victim, as a "personal" account of an incident usually makes better reading, gives the journalist a better story and therefore warrants a more prominent place in the relevant publication or on a broadcast.

Video Footage

When releasing footage, consideration must be given not only to the individuals whose faces (and therefore identities) appear on the video but also who owns the copyright.

In most cases permission must be obtained from the owner of the footage (often a local authority or private company) before it can be released although in exceptional circumstances police can still release such footage without that permission having first been obtained (see 'CCTV footage').

When determining what, if any, footage can be released on a case-by-case basis, CCU staff should be consulted for advice. They will be influenced by current guidance from ACPO MAG.

Voice-bank

A 'voice-bank' is one of the systems used by the force to release information to the media. The 'voice-bank' is a system whereby Media Relations Officers and, out-of-hours, Force Incident Managers, can record messages which the media can listen to by dialling 0870 345 1555. Only MRO's and FIM's are authorised to make voice-bank recordings.

W

Wanted Persons – Release of Details

Photographs of named persons wanted by the police should only be released through the Corporate Communications Unit. The consideration should be whether it is felt the offence warrants such action, and, provided the apprehension is in the public interest, the release to the media of a photograph of the wanted person would outweigh any question of prejudicing a free trial. The officer in the case will be advised to seek the advice of the Crown Prosecution Service prior to the release of the photograph.

Website

See "Internet".

Witnesses

Names and addresses of witnesses are not disclosed to the media by the police unless exceptional circumstances prevail (for example a witness expressly states they are happy for their details to be forwarded to journalists and that they will not be placed in any danger by so doing).

X

X-Rated

Be wary of your language and of 'off the cuff' comments when the media is around. Inappropriate comments made as an 'aside' after a formal statement has been given could be overheard by media. Microphones and TV cameras at scenes of incidents/media conferences can often be switched on and running before formal statements/interviews are given.

Y

Yesterday's News

Murder cases and serious crimes fuel a strong demand for follow-up stories, new lines and media updates. If an appeal has been issued and some interviews completed, do not think that the story will automatically become 'yesterday's news'. Sometimes it is appropriate to 'drip feed' information to the media rather than give every piece of information at once. The CCU can advise and help provide a strategic, long-term, approach to media handling with a given incident.

Z

Zero Tolerance

This is an emotive phrase which can conjure images which do not necessarily project a positive image of the force. While the public wants to see a robust police force which takes a tough line with criminals, a balance has to be struck as it can be counter-productive to public reassurance if a force is perceived to be too 'heavy handed.' See also 'Jargon'.

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