

**IN THE MATTER OF:**

**AN INQUIRY UNDER THE INQUIRIES ACT 2005**

**INTO THE CULTURE, PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS**

**CHAired BY THE RT HON LORD JUSTICE LEVESON**

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**FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF ABIGAIL ALFORD**

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I, **ABIGAIL ALFORD**, of the South Wales Echo, Media Wales Limited, Six Park Street, Cardiff, CF10 1XR **WILL SAY** as follows:

1. In a notice dated 9 January 2012 pursuant to section 21(2) of the Inquiries Act 2005 (the 'Notice') the Inquiry has asked 23 questions of the Editor of the South Wales Echo and a Senior Crime Reporter. I am the crime correspondent at the South Wales Echo, which is published by Media Wales Limited ('**Media Wales**').
2. I understand that the Inquiry addressed the Notice jointly, on the basis that whereas the Editor would be able to answer some questions, someone in my position would be able to answer others. I have followed the numbering set out in the Notice.
3. Where the contents of this statement are within my own knowledge they are true and where the contents are not within my own knowledge I indicate the source of my belief and believe them to be true.
4. I am currently on maternity leave and will be until July 1, 2012. Immediately prior to my maternity leave, I was on sick leave for about eight weeks, from April 2011. Therefore, unless otherwise stated, I refer to the period before April 2011.
5. I am not authorised to waive any privilege on behalf of Trinity Mirror and nothing in this statement is intended to constitute a waiver of privilege on behalf of Trinity Mirror.
  1. **Who are you and a brief summary of your career history**
6. My name is Abby Alford; I am 34 years old and have been a journalist for 15 years. I completed an NCTJ (National Council for the Training of Journalists) pre-entry into newspaper journalism qualification in 1997, and in July 1997 I was taken on as a trainee reporter at the Pontypool Free Press, a weekly newspaper. I moved to the Caerphilly Campaign, another weekly newspaper, in 1998 and then, in February 1999, I took up a post as a trainee reporter with the South Wales Echo.
7. Between February 1999 and 2000 I worked in the head office in Cardiff, then the Caerphilly office and the Pontypridd office. Subsequently, after a short spell as deputy head of the district desk, I was appointed a reporter in the Bridgend office. In 2000 I took and passed the Trinity Mirror proficiency exam. It is a test of legal knowledge, particularly the law relating to defamation and contempt of court, as well as a test of shorthand ability.
8. I became chief reporter for the South Wales Echo in 2007 and crime correspondent for Media Wales in 2011. In this role I work for the Western Mail, the South Wales Echo,

Wales on Sunday and the Celtic weekly titles if required, in addition to the Media Wales website, [www.walesonline.co.uk](http://www.walesonline.co.uk).

**Relations between your newspaper and the South Wales Police**

- 2. What have been your impressions, over the years, about the culture of relations between the South Wales Police and the media? Do you consider the relationship a successful one? What changes would you like to make to the relationship (if any?)**
9. Generally I consider the relationship to be a good relationship and I have personally had a generally successful relationship with the police. It is important to recognise that the regional press is based in the community we write for and we are part of that community.
10. However, I would prefer the relationship to be more open and to have access to better lines of communication. I would prefer to have more face-to-face contact and phone contact with police officers. Since approximately 2009 I have noticed a gradual sea change, in that the police seem more hesitant about making contacts with the press than previously. They also seem reluctant to give information about matters such as crime, crime trends and ongoing incidents – in my experience I have found that often only the most basic of detail is offered via press office releases. However, I have also found that either the press office, or those individual officers who still talk directly to the press, will confirm something put to them which either myself, the Newsdesk or another reporter has found out via a third party contact who is not connected with the police, for example, a member of the community. That said, it can seem that press offices can act as a barrier: I feel that messages do not get passed on and there is little concern for our deadlines or providing information in a timely manner. Weekends are especially problematic when it becomes very difficult to obtain information. I believe this is important because at Media Wales we strive for accuracy in reporting a story, including accurately reflecting the relevant sides.
- 3. Describe the personal contact which you had with the South Wales Police at the various stages of your career. The Inquiry would like an overall picture of the type, frequency, duration and content of your contact with the South Wales Police**
11. Throughout my career it has been necessary to have frequent contact with South Wales Police. As a reporter on the weekly papers and a district reporter for the Echo, I would ring the local police station every morning and speak to the Detective Inspector. Information

would usually be given on any crimes of note that had been committed overnight and appeals for information to the public would be made. These phone calls could last anything from a few minutes to up to an hour, depending on how busy the police had been.

12. On occasion, in the event of a major crime or a major find of drugs, such as cannabis, I would go and see the Detective Inspector at the station and / or officers of higher or lower rank who were involved in the investigation or seizure. Sometimes, in the case of a knife or drug seizure, the seized items would be shown and made available for us to photograph, but we would not be allowed to touch these items.
13. If a member of the public had contacted me to report a crime or query police activity in their local area I would contact the Detective Inspector and ask for a statement. If the Detective Inspector was unavailable, another detective in the Criminal Investigations Department ('CID') would sometimes assist or, if no one was available, I would contact the press office.
14. As the South Wales Echo's chief reporter and as crime correspondent I have had frequent contact with the South Wales Police Inspector for Cardiff City Centre and Cardiff Bay. On several occasions the Cardiff area police press officer initiated contact and set up a meeting between myself and the Inspector, as the police wished to publicise their forthcoming Christmas policing campaign or a specific crackdown in the city centre, for example, on illegal street traders. During these meetings the press officer was present. I would also contact the Inspector to request information a couple of times a week if we had been made aware there had been an incident in the area – this was on a mobile telephone number which he gave me. This arrangement always worked well, as appeals for information from the public were often made. If the Inspector did not have the relevant information or could not help he would refer me to a colleague or a press officer. If the Inspector was unavailable, I would contact the Cardiff area press officer.
15. I have shadowed the city centre Inspector and other police officers on two so-called 'Black Fridays' (the busiest night for drinkers in the run up to Christmas). On the first occasion, in 2009, I do not recall whether I approached the police about shadowing or whether the police invited me. In 2010, when I saw Inspector Bishop at a licensing hearing at Cardiff Magistrates' Court he asked whether I would be shadowing the police teams on Black Friday. I accepted his invitation. I recall that the Cardiff press officer, Anna Hammond, later contacted me to ask whether I would like to accompany the police on Black Friday and I told her that arrangements had already been made. My aim of accompanying the

officers was to gain an insight into the significant policing operation on these days. I believe that writing about this operation in the paper helps the public to understand why there are so many officers out on Black Friday and the challenges that they face.

16. A photographer from Media Wales and I also shadowed the Inspector and other police officers during the policing of the first Cardiff City v Swansea City match at the Cardiff City Stadium on April 3, 2010. During the match the Inspector made arrangements for me to sit in the general family stand as it was too dangerous to stand with the police. I do not recall how this came about. In terms of other events, I also recall shadowing the police during a Bryan Adams concert at the Brewery Field rugby ground in Bridgend in about 2006. I believe that this was the first such event to be held in Bridgend that the police were keen to show how the town could host such an event.
17. Before April 2011 when I went on sick leave, Inspector Bishop contacted me with stories on approximately half a dozen occasions (I had previously provided my work telephone number and my work and personal mobile numbers to him). Examples that come to mind include him calling to tell me about forthcoming alcohol licensing hearings relating to businesses which were applying for alcohol licences for shops on St Mary Street, Cardiff, which has a high level of alcohol related crime. The police and local councillors objected to these applications for licences as they feared that the increased supply of alcohol would fuel further crime. I also recall a notable case in 2010, when the Inspector called to inform me that there had been very little crime and no car crime over the important Christmas period in Cardiff city centre.
18. I would usually talk to the Cardiff area press officer (Ms Hammond) several times a day. I would ring to find out if anything noteworthy had happened in Cardiff and would also ring to request information if a reader had informed us about a crime or an ongoing incident. Roughly speaking, the phone calls could last from a few minutes to up to half an hour.
19. Police press officers would also, on occasion, set up meetings between myself and senior officers or detectives for briefings on forthcoming drug raids or investigations that had culminated in court proceedings. In these cases, as far as I can recall without exception, information was given under embargo to ensure that the subjects of the raids were not tipped off, and that criminal proceedings were not prejudiced in any way. As far as I am aware, the embargos have been respected by Media Wales. Any relevant information obtained during these briefings was not published until after the raids had taken place, or

following conviction (depending on the subject), and was designed to give the public an insight into why certain action was being taken and how extensive investigations had been.

20. On a weekend, when press officers are not readily available, contact with the police would be via the duty control room Inspector at police headquarters in Bridgend. In the period to April 2011, I did not work Saturdays but worked one Sunday in four. My experience from the Sundays that I worked was that regular calls would be made by the weekend reporters throughout the day to find out if anything was taking place or to request information about an ongoing incident the public had tipped us off about. On the Sundays that I worked, sometimes it would be me calling the duty Inspector. However, I would often find that the duty Inspector was unable or unwilling to give out any information.
21. I have attended many press conferences organised by South Wales Police to appeal for information in relation to ongoing investigations, or to publicise a specific campaign, for example, domestic violence awareness during the Six Nations rugby tournament when drinking increases. I also recall a press conference being called by Barbara Wilding, the former Chief Constable, to explain the force's budget difficulties.
22. I interviewed Cardiff's Divisional Commander on a one-to-one basis on his appointment to the role in March 2011. I recall that when the then Chief Superintendent Alun Thomas' appointment as Divisional Commander was first announced prior to March 2011, the Cardiff area press officer (Ms Hammond) suggested that I do a one-to-one interview with him. After a while, when a firm date for the interview was not forthcoming, I chased the matter up with the press officer and a date was set.
23. I have also interviewed the Deputy Divisional Commander. To the best of my recollection this was in May 2010 at the invitation of Catherine Llewellyn, who was the Cardiff area press officer at the time. I have also interviewed various Superintendents and other senior officers regarding annual campaigns. Again this would have been at the invitation of press officers. For example, I recall that an interview with Superintendent Paul James took place in October 2008 relating to the Halloween and Bonfire Night safety campaign.

**4. Without prejudice to the generality of question (3) above, please set out the contact which you have had with appointed press officers of South Wales Police, giving, as best you can remember, the dates and summarising the gist of the communications which you had with them. In each case who initiated the contact and why?**

24. Unless she or I were on holiday, I would normally speak to the Cardiff area press officer for South Wales Police several times every day on the telephone. We would also e-mail back and forth a few times a day. Given the regularity of contact, it is impractical to provide all of the dates or to summarise the gist of the conversations. I would say that around 75 per cent of the time I initiated the contact to find out if there had been anything noteworthy, or to request information about a specific incident. Around 25 per cent of the time the press officer would initiate the contact either by telephone or e-mail to issue a press release, to give information about a specific crime, to appeal for information, or to suggest interview opportunities, such as with the new Chief Superintendent of Cardiff (see Question 3 above), or with officers involved in high profile cases. For example, in January 2011 an interview was set up between myself and officers from Cathays CID in Cardiff who had been involved in an investigation into an armed robbery. The story was published in February 2011 in the South Wales Echo.

25. Less frequently, around four or five times a week, I would have contact with South Wales Police press officers in other areas or in the head office. It is impossible to give all of the dates. As above, around 75 per cent of the time I would initiate the contact for the reasons given above and in the remainder of cases they would initiate the contact for the same reasons detailed above.

**5. Did you ever have the personal mobile phone telephone number or home telephone number of any of the people listed at (a) –(e) above?**

26. I cannot see an (a) to (e) above, but I respond to the question with reference to police officers generally. To the best of my knowledge I have never had the home telephone number of any officer. I have mobile numbers for some police officers: I assume that these are work mobile numbers since they were given to me in a work context, but do not know. All I know is that they were numbers that the police officers were happy to give to me.

**6. Describe what you were seeking to gain from South Wales Police through your personal contacts with South Wales Police personnel**

27. I am looking for accurate information relating to police matters to report. Matters such as crime trends and spates of thefts and what is being done to tackle them are quite clearly in the public interest, in my view. I also believe that it is in the public interest that accurate and timely information is given about ongoing and major incidents.

**7. Describe in general terms and using illustrative examples what you consider the South Wales Police has been seeking from you in personal dealings with them during your career**

28. I believe the South Wales Police are seeking publicity for campaigns (such as those relating to domestic violence or drink-driving), seeking witnesses to crimes (assaults, murders, rapes, burglaries etc) and to show the public the work they do and how they work in their local communities. For example, in 2009 I joined the South Wales police on patrol in Cathays, on their invitation. The police were targeting cowboy traders, waste carriers and the like, who the police feared were also responsible for more sinister crimes. This led to an article published in the South Wales Echo on May 21, 2009. In my response to Question 14 below I give a further example where I believe that the police wanted publicity for a street gang case.

**8. To what extent do you accept, and have you accepted, hospitality from South Wales Police?**

29. At press conferences or police station visits I have been given a cup of coffee and a biscuit. I was, as mentioned earlier in my response to Question 3, invited to shadow the police at a Cardiff v Swansea football game. The police told me it was too dangerous to stay with their ranks during the match so they arranged for me to sit in the family stand. There was no charge for this for me or the photographer, but we were there for work, to observe how they policed the event. I recall that the police gave me a sandwich and a cup of tea from their own catering, but I also bought food for myself. I do not recall any other instances of the police providing hospitality to me.

9. **Insofar as you accept, or have accepted, hospitality from the South Wales Police. What is, or was, the nature of the hospitality that you accept, or have accepted?**
30. Please see my answer to Question 8 above.
10. **To what extent do you, or have you, provided hospitality for the South Wales Police?**
31. I have made officers a cup of tea or coffee in my office on the occasional (no more than half a dozen) times that they have visited over the years. On Black Friday 2010 I took a few boxes of Marks & Spencer's mince pies to Cardiff Central Police Station as a thank you to the officers for letting me accompany them (see my response to Question 3 above). I do not recall providing any other kind of hospitality.
11. **Insofar as you provide, or have provided, hospitality to the South Wales Police, what is, or was, the nature of the hospitality that you provide, or have provided?**
32. Please see my answer to Question 10 above.
12. **Have you ever attended a formal press conference called by the South Wales Police? If so, for what purpose was it called and do you think it was valuable?**
33. As explained in my response to Question 3 above, I have attended many press conferences. These have related to ongoing cases or campaigns including murder inquiries, missing people and major event control. I have found the conferences useful in helping me carry out my job as all of the people with whom I need to speak for the story are usually at the press conferences, saving having to make several telephone calls.

#### **General Matters**

13. **Have the police either formally or informally ever given you prior notification about proposed arrests, raids or other action? If so, please elaborate**
34. I have been formally notified by the Cardiff area press officer (Ms Hammond) in advance about certain raids for which the police are seeking publicity (see my response to Question 3 above). An example would be raiding a cannabis farm. On such occasions we have been allowed to attend the raid to take pictures and to write up a story. These sorts of formal briefings are given, I believe, because the police often receive tip-offs from the community

about cannabis farms and they want the community to know that they are acting on those tip-offs.

**14. Have you ever been offered 'off the record' briefings by the police? If so, please elaborate.**

35. Yes. I have had quite a long career and I cannot now remember every instance, but to guess I would say more than one, but less than 10.
36. For example, there was a case where a gang of teenagers who appeared to be modelling themselves on a Los Angeles street gang held up some other teenagers at knifepoint. Police found pictures on Facebook of the attackers dressed in 'Los Angeles gang style' clothing. It was a particularly nasty case. The officer in charge told me about the case and pointed me towards a social media site where I could find a picture of one of the accused dressed up as a 'gangster' to use after sentencing – this was a different social media site to Facebook, as the Facebook pictures had been taken down, but I found a picture of him holding a knife. I believe the police wanted to make it clear that they found this sort of criminal aping unacceptable and they wanted this case to be publicised. We published a story on this, with the picture, on July 9, 2010.
37. Another occasion followed reports that a murderer had driven his victim's dead body into the local police station. We initially had a tip-off from a member of the community not connected with the police that this had happened, or that someone had driven into the station with a bomb in the car. The police station had been sealed off but we could not get it confirmed either way through the police press office: hours passed before information was forthcoming. In the meantime, I made contact with one of my police contacts, who confirmed the details with me off-the-record. This allowed us to get an accurate story out into the public domain.
38. Officers also often give us briefings on upcoming court cases that they believe should be publicised. It is impossible for our organisation to have a reporter in every courtroom and this sort of information often helps us to decide which court hearings to attend. Sometimes this information might be 'off-the-record', but other times on-the-record albeit subject to embargo until the case has concluded.

- 15. What mechanisms, if any, are in place in your workplace to monitor and record hospitality as between the police on the one hand and you, or your fellow journalists on the other?**
39. I am familiar with Trinity Mirror's editorial policy, which requires journalists to obtain clearance, in writing, from their editor or designated senior editorial manager before accepting press tips, other significant hospitality or gifts. Journalists' expenses are signed off by editors, which include hospitality expenses (eg where the journalist buys a coffee for someone. Other than as mentioned in response to Question 10, to the best of my recollection I have not provided hospitality to the police so I have not myself put in expenses claims for any such hospitality.
- 16. What training, guidance, policies and / or practices are in place in your workplace governing contact between you and your fellow journalists on the one hand and the police on the other?**
40. There are no specific policies in relation to dealings specifically with the police, but we follow the PCC Code, the law and the Trinity Mirror editorial policy (see my response to Question 15 above).
- 17. What editorial or management oversight, or control, if any, is there over communications between journalists and police at your media outlet?**
41. Our editor or news editor can query sources of stories and will do on most stories if a source is not named. We would only use reliable sources and would always look to back up a source's information where we can. If we cannot, a judgment will be made based on how reliable the source has been in the past. This applies also in the case of stories sourced from the police.
- 18. What ethical issues do you consider arise, or need to be held in mind, by a journalist communicating in the course of his or her employment with the police, or anyone serving with, or employed by, a police force?**
42. I never want to compromise an officer or to get officers to reveal information that they are uncomfortable about releasing. I want them to be comfortable with what they tell me. I would ask, "If this is published, are you happy with that?". I consider Contempt of Court Act requirements. Personally, I will also consider the victims and helping them through

assisting the police to trace the people who are alleged to have committed crimes against them. I firmly believe that for justice to be done, it must be seen to be done.

**19. What payments (if any) are considered to be legitimate financial transactions between persons serving with or employed by a police force and journalists at your media outlet? Please explain.**

43. I have never paid or had any financial transaction with anyone serving with or employed by a police force. It is simply not the culture at Media Wales to pay for information and, to the best of my knowledge, it never has been.

**20. How in practice do you get access to the police?**

44. Please see my responses above, in particular to Questions 3 and 4.

**21. Is it necessary for police forces to have a press office, and what is your view as to the utility and role of police press offices?**

45. Yes, I do believe the police need press offices. They help in major inquiries in relaying information when officers are busy on the job. Some press offices are better than others. Some seem to be more concerned with withholding information than with revealing information. My experience is that they can act as a barrier. On occasion press offices work well, but more often than not this is when they want something publicised. In that instance they have no problem using us. In my view, it would be better if the lines of communication were more open.

#### About HMIC

**22. What is your view of the recommendations contained in the HMIC's recent report "Without Fear or Favour" insofar as they concern relations between the media and the police? (If you have not seen it the report is available online)**

46. I do not think that additional formal rules to govern the relationships between police officers and journalists are necessary. My relationships with the police, both press officers and police officers, and theirs with me, have always been based on trust and integrity, with regard for the PCC Code and the law.

**23. Do you consider that there are further or different steps which could and / or should be taken to ensure that relationships between the police and the media are and remain appropriate? Please explain when answering this question what you consider to be appropriate contact between the police and journalists in a democratic society**

47. Contact between the police and journalists should be open and honest within a democratic society to ensure forces remain accountable to the public. If the law and PCC Code are adhered to I do not believe further steps are necessary to ensure relationships between the police and journalists remain appropriate. As mentioned in response to Question 21 above, in my view, it would be better if the lines of communication were more open.

**DOCUMENTS**

48. The Notice asks me to submit documents relevant to the matters that I have dealt with in this statement. I do not believe that I have any relevant documents that are currently in my possession at home. As mentioned in paragraph 4 above, I am currently on maternity leave.

49. I understand that Trinity Mirror's policies have been provided to the Inquiry already, including the Trinity Mirror editorial policy.

Signed.....

**Abigail Alford**

Dated: February 2012