

Ian Fegan, Head of Corporate Communication, Staffordshire Police:

Submission of Evidence to Leveson Inquiry

In pursuance of Section 21(2) of the Inquiries Act 2005 and in response to correspondence dated 8 February 2012 of Ms Sharron Hiles, Senior Assistant Solicitor to the Inquiry.

28 February 2012

(1) Who you are and a brief summary of your career history.

I am a graduate of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth (International Politics and History) and a post graduate member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. I have worked for Staffordshire Police for 13 years, joining initially as the force's first marketing officer. In August 2002 I was appointed to the post of Corporate Communications Manager and then in January 2010 to the role of Head of Corporate Communication. In my current role I am responsible for internal communication, media communication, digital communication and engagement and neighbourhood communication and public information campaigns. Prior to joining the force, I worked as a marketing officer for the NHS Confederation and before that as an information officer in a regional theatre. Whilst I am not a trained journalist, I do have a professional background in marketing communications.

(2) Please describe the role and remit of the press office within Staffordshire Police.

The force's media communications team (press office) directly supports operational policing. It deals with day-to-day media enquiries from the local, regional and national media and provides advice and guidance to operational officers and staff on media issues. The team work from 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, and also provide 24/7 out-of-hours on-call support for major incidents.

The team also proactively provides information on ongoing investigations, operations and organisational changes in the form of news releases, statements and appeals.

Members of the media communications team perform a traditional 'press office' function. Roles require journalistic or public relations skills and experience and two of our current staff members are former journalists. The team provides the force with a hub of expertise which improves public information provision.

Importantly, the force's communication activities are not wholly reliant upon the media and it is often the case that timely and relevant information is provided directly to the public via other communication channels. These include neighbourhood newsletters, social media channels, the force's website and email.

Ultimately, the role of the team is to support the delivery of the force's corporate mission which is to keep our communities safe and reassured.

(3) Please describe your role and responsibilities within the press office.

To whom do you report?

As the Head of Corporate Communications for Staffordshire Police I report to the Deputy Chief Constable. My role within the force is to provide senior leadership and strategic coordination for the force's Corporate Communications Department which includes a media communications team (press office). The department is staffed by 19 full-time equivalent posts. I also perform the role of an on-call media communication / press officer to provide out-of-hours operational support to senior officers.

(4) Describe the culture and relations between the press office on the one hand and other Staffordshire police staff/officers on the other. Do you consider that there is a relationship of trust and confidence? What changes, if any would you wish to make to the working relationship and why?

The culture and relations between the media communications team and colleagues we work with on a day-to-day basis is generally very good and is built on well established working relationships that foster trust and confidence. Of course there are occasions when - due to personal experience or other factors – some colleagues are less trusting of press officers who work closely with journalists. However, this is the exception rather than the rule.

One of the key factors that affects this working relationship is when our openness and transparency results in misquotes, inaccuracies or disproportionate headlines. At these times internal trust and confidence and long established working relationships can be affected.

I would suggest that the strength of working relationships is suitably illustrated by the fact that a significant number of calls received by the media communications team are from operational officer colleagues requesting advice or support on dealing with the media. Personally, I would say that, in my experience over the last 13 years, officers have become increasingly less risk-averse in dealing with the media and I would attribute a degree of this to the professional support they receive from media communication officers.

I am not sure the current approach requires substantial change. It encourages openness and transparency at all levels and relies upon the professional judgement and discretion of officers who assess individual circumstances and can ultimately call on the support of media communications professionals should they need them.

(5) Does the press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling the flow of information to the media?

All officers and staff are actively encouraged to be open and honest in their dealings with the media, to provide timely, relevant and useful information and to promote good police work. For example, most of our Local Policing Team Commanders conduct weekly media briefings and as part of their role are expected to form professional working relationships with their local media. However, whilst direct contact is encouraged at the appropriate level, the media communications department is recognised as the main conduit for getting information out to the media and as the main point of contact for the force in relation to the media. The team is recognised as having the professional knowledge, skills, judgement and systems to disseminate information efficiently and effectively. As a result, many officers and staff prefer to use the media communications team as a 'gatekeeper' function because the knowledge and skills of staff provide them with reassurance and confidence.

(6) Does the press office have a gatekeeper function for controlling access to Staffordshire Police personnel?

I would suggest that it does, in effect, provide this function but, as mentioned above, all officers and staff are actively encouraged to openly and honestly work with the local media. However, practically, media communications officers are invariably more accessible to the media than other Staffordshire Police personnel. They work in a news-desk type environment where they are virtually always at the end of a phone between operational hours. Contact details are publicised on all correspondence to the media and on our website and the force's switchboard direct all media enquiries straight to the department. We do not divulge mobile phone numbers or contact details of other personnel unless appropriate and with consent.

Where existing local working relationships exist between the media and operational officers, we are not always able to centrally track and record all contact.

There are a number of key roles where *direct* contact with journalists can be expected regarding local policing issues or other specific operational areas.

These include:

- The Force executive and senior leadership team
- Local policing team commanders
- Senior investigating officers
- Police commanders for specific incidents
- Duty inspectors in the force control room.

It's also important to remember that operational officers and police staff provide information to the public in a number of different direct ways which could be reported upon by local journalists. These include local neighbourhood and parish council meetings and increasingly via social media. All of these are officially encouraged as they enhance our openness and transparency.

(7) What is your impression of the culture within Staffordshire Police in relation to its dealings with the media (the media in all its forms):

My impression of the culture within Staffordshire Police is that it is based on professionalism and integrity at both organisational and operational levels.

On a day-to-day basis there is clear evidence of positive outcomes from highly appropriate contacts and relationships between the force's Corporate Communications Department, our officers and local and regional journalists.

I also think that a healthy tension exists in the relationship. This is due to the small number of occasions when the force's organisational objectives diverge from those of a particular media outlet. At these times frank exchanges normally take place between the force and editorial teams.

(8) Describe your impression of the culture of dealings between the press office and the media (the media in all its forms)? Do you consider the relationship between the press office and the media to be a successful one? What changes, if any, do you consider should be made to the relationship.

I would consider the relationship very traditional, businesslike and professional. It is based on openness, mutual trust, and on an understanding that we both need each other to do our respective jobs effectively.

In Staffordshire our relationships are predominantly with local and regional journalists with whom we have daily contact. There is much less contact with the national media and this usually only happens when responding to specific news events.

I think the media's attitude towards the team is generally positive and constructive with good working relationships across the county. There are undoubtedly times when organisational priorities and values differ and at these times we have healthy debates but on the whole I think the media are satisfied with our responsiveness and openness.

Ideally, I think the media would prefer more contact with individual personnel but we feel that the media communications team provides the force with a hub of expertise which improves public information provision.

Whilst I do not have a specific comment to make on how change could improve working relationships, I do think that wider consumer/market changes will inevitably alter the nature of the relationship between the traditional media and the police in the future. The growth in digital and social media will mean that new generations of consumers will increasingly be able to access policing information direct. I think forces' developing use of social media represents a major, future challenge to police/media relations.

(9) Set out your understanding of the type of contact which press office staff have with local and national media covering nature, extent, frequency and (in general terms) topics/content.

Last month (January 2012) media communications staff dealt with 634 calls from the media (on average they deal with approximately 500 calls a month). Almost 37 per cent of media enquiries over the last 12 months relate to two specific subject areas: acquisitive crime and road traffic collisions.

Day-to-day contact generally reflects the operational activity of Staffordshire Police and the media are active partners in informing the public on incidents, operations, investigations and initiatives.

As previously mentioned, the extent of our contact with the national media is much less frequent and this usually only happens when responding to specific news events. In Staffordshire our relationships are predominantly with local and regional journalists with whom we have daily contact. This is borne out by the fact that out of the total recorded enquiries in our Press Bureau information management system between February last year and February this, less than 5 per cent were from the national media. Conversely, a significant 39% were from *three* daily newspapers covering our area.

(10) Are contacts with the media restricted to certain staff or are all personnel within Staffordshire Police able to deal with the media?

Please see response to question 6.

(11) Does the press office prioritise some sections of the media over others? For instance, does it prioritise communications and relations with the national media over those with the local media? If so please give details and explain why?

As set out in the response to questions 8 and 9, there is much less contact with the national media and this usually only happens when responding to specific news events. Our strongest and most beneficial working relationships

are predominantly with local and regional journalists with whom we have daily contact. On the occasions where we do have national media interest we ensure that all information released is shared at the same time with all media and any opportunities for interview or press briefings are available to all.

We strive to deal with each news outlet equally and fairly to ensure openness and transparency. No one is entitled to exclusive information about crime which is a matter of public interest.

However, we do deal with journalists on a one-to-one basis if they come to us with a specific request for information. Due to the geography of the force and for effectiveness and efficiency, it is also appropriate that we target the media outlets that cover a specific area. For example, information relating to Burton-on-Trent would not be sent to Stoke-on-Trent media as they are only interested in news stories affecting their specific coverage or circulation area.

We would also seek to prioritise media enquiries according to threat or risk of harm and also the opportunities they give us to deliver corporate strategy objectives.

(12) Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that information is disseminated widely to the media rather than to select journalists or titles? If so, please specify. If not, do you consider that there should be?

In addition to the response provided at 11 above, the media communications department has a central email account and a dedicated media/ press email address book. These addresses have been set up in groups to ensure that specific geographical areas of the county can be targeted but also so that 'corporate' information can be disseminated widely to the media at the same time. Press releases are also published on the force website and on social media channels. Normally we would try to target content to specific geographic locations.

(13) What is the media's attitude towards the press office? In particular, are they satisfied by the provision of information and the routing of communications through the press office or do they prefer direct contact with individual personnel within Staffordshire Police?

Please see response to question 8

(14) Describe in general terms and with illustrative examples, the personal contact which you have with the local and national media. The inquiry would like an overall picture of the type, frequency, duration and content of your contact with the media.

My personal contact with the media is limited to ad-hoc occasions and broadly tends to occur on a weekly or fortnightly basis. This is usually when I am either working on a major incident or inquiry as the strategic communications lead, performing out-of-hours on-call duties, challenging significant inaccuracy or disproportionate reporting or when there is a specific 'relationship' issue that needs addressing.

Illustrative examples of recent contact with the media would be:

- As the communications lead in a Gold control room during a recent armed siege in Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent. The incident involved an elderly gentleman with mental health issues. It generated significant local and regional media interest and I was responsible, in the early stages, for dealing with media enquiries and then negotiating a voluntary news blackout with key broadcast media to support the operational objectives of the Gold commander
- As an on-call media communications officer last month (January 2012) I was called out by a senior investigating officer (SIO) following the tragic murder of an 18 month-old boy in Stoke-on-Trent. I was responsible for liaising with the SIO to provide information to the media. I did this formally by emailing a statement and then contacting the

various newsrooms covering the area to alert them to the information and deal, where appropriate, with any subsequent questions / points of clarification.

(15) Describe what you are seeking to gain for Staffordshire Police through your personal contact with the media?

During my personal contact with the media I am seeking to support operational policing and ultimately deliver the force's mission statement which is to keep our communities safe and reassured. I try to do this by building and maintaining mutually beneficial and productive relationships with colleagues in the media.

By providing accurate, timely and relevant information on local policing we are seeking to build public confidence and trust by demonstrating that we are dealing with the things that matter to local communities. I think this is really important because policing can only be successful with the consent and cooperation of citizens. The vast majority of crimes and incidents are resolved because most people do trust the police and are confident enough to report crime and give witness information.

(16) Describe in general terms and using illustrative examples what you consider the local and national media have been seeking from you in your personal dealings with them?

Primarily the media are generally seeking access to information and/or guidance to produce a story for publication or broadcast.

Clearly, in seeking this, the commercial media is driven by a commercial imperative which is to publish news which sells newspapers or increases revenues from advertising and/or listeners/viewers.

(17) To what extent have you accepted hospitality from the media whilst working in your current position?

None

(18) Insofar as you have accepted hospitality from the media, what has been the nature of the hospitality that you have accepted? What records have you kept of such hospitality?

Not applicable

(19) To what extent have you provided hospitality for the media?

The extent of this would be light refreshments during a formal business meeting or briefing. In terms of how often this takes place, I would describe such occurrences as infrequent.

(20) Insofar as you have provided hospitality to the media, what has been the nature of that hospitality? What records have you kept of such hospitality?

Not applicable over and above tea and coffee at our annual meeting with editors and the six monthly on-the-record media briefings undertaken by the chief constable.

(21) Have you ever accepted gifts from the media? If so, please give full details (including who gave you the gift, when, what the gift was, and why you believe they gave you the gift).

No. Not applicable

(22) Have you ever discussed the media, or media coverage, with politicians? If so, how important is such communication and why?

Media coverage can, on rare occasions, form part of discussions with the Police Authority, which includes local councillors. This would normally only take place if an incident or event significantly impacts upon the efficient and effective delivery of policing services in Staffordshire.

Local MPs may also be briefed by senior officers, local policing team commanders or communications staff after a significant media 'event' which could impact upon the safety and reassurance of their constituents.

(23) What do you know about the level of hospitality accepted by Staffordshire Police, including by officers of the rank of Assistant Chief Constable and above? Do you consider the level to be appropriate now and to have been appropriate in the past? In addressing this issue please give your reasons and set out what you consider to be an appropriate level of hospitality for police personnel to accept from the media (if any). What records are kept of such hospitality?

I recently became aware of the level of gifts and gratuities accepted by the force, including its senior officers, as a result of a Freedom of Information (FOI) enquiry from a local newspaper. Generally I think the level is – and has been - appropriate and in line with our force policy on gifts, gratuities, hospitality and discounts. This is supported by detailed guidance notes to help officers and staff, regardless of rank or grade, understand what is expected of them by the organisation. There are some guiding principles encapsulated within the document which are designed to assist with the interpretation of what is expected and how to deal with such situations. These include:

- Do nothing to foster suspicion or conflict between you and your official duty and the private interests of yourselves or others

- Your dealings with people must at all times be honest, fair, transparent even-handed and seen to be so
- Ensure your actions in an official capacity are beyond reproach. They must not foster or give the impression to anyone with whom you deal, including your colleagues, that you have been influenced by a gift or consideration to show favour or disfavour to any persons or organisation
- You must ensure that public funds are used in a responsible and lawful manner and that you are able to account for them properly
- Any doubts about the wisdom of accepting an offer or gift or hospitality, and it should be declined
- Appropriate records of gifts or hospitality accepted or refused should be maintained on the electronic database in accordance with this policy.

The guidance document identifies what is and is not acceptable for the following areas: money, discounts, seasonal or other unsolicited gifts, receiving and giving hospitality, alcohol, giving tips, voluntary gratuities and wills.

The media are not provided with any exception within this document and standards expected will apply in the same way to them as to any other persons or organisation.

In terms of what is appropriate, I think that accepting light refreshments during a working meeting in furtherance of routine daily business is a matter of common courtesy and is therefore within the bounds of reasonableness.

(24) Do you consider that you have been adequately trained/or given sufficient guidance on the appropriate handling of the media?

Yes, I have been fortunate enough to work with a number of experienced senior officers and police staff colleagues during my career and I have learnt

and developed as a result of this. I have also been fortunate enough to attend the national police press officers training course and also national Association of Police Communicators (APCOM) learning events. Clearly there are times when new circumstances occur which require different thinking and I would again seek further professional advice. This is readily available within the force, within neighbouring forces and nationally via the ACPO press office.

(25) Do you consider that you have been adequately trained and/or given sufficient guidance to enable you to give sound advice and/or leadership on handling the media to your staff?

Yes, please see response to 24 above.

(26) Do you provide training or guidance to your staff on (i) conducting and maintaining appropriate relationships with the media; (ii) accepting/offering hospitality; (iii) bribery and (iv) requests for 'off-the-record' comments? If so, please specify. Does that training/guidance reflect/follow the ACPO guidance?

(i) Maintaining appropriate relationships with the media is covered verbally as part of the induction process for new staff and such interactions would be covered by wider force policies such as those on gifts and gratuities, professional standards and codes of conduct. I am aware that ACPO are currently developing specific guidance which I have seen and commented upon and this will be distributed to all staff once completed. We also have a 'Dealing with the Media Guide' which provides further guidance and this is currently subject to review as part of our 'Without Fear or Favour' working group. Within the Corporate Communications Department there are a small number of senior managers. Media communications officers are encouraged to speak to them for advice and guidance as between them, they have around 40 years of work experience in the area of police / media relations. The media

communications team is managed on a day-to-day basis by a Senior Communications Officer and this area of business is also overseen by the force's Communications Manager for Public Relations and myself. This management / supervisory structure is very 'hands on' with regular input, guidance and 'on the job' training. An open plan working environment means that conversations with the media can be freely monitored by management.

(ii) & (iii) The Police Officer and Police Staff Codes of Conduct and the force's Gifts and Gratuities Policy (see response to 23 above) would apply to our dealings with the media. The force's core Corporate Strategy values should also be applied to this area.

(iv) The media communications team are provided with guidance in relation to 'off-the-record' comments and such comments and actions are recorded.

The current general guidance, contained within our 'Dealing with the Media Guide' is as follows:

Don't use the phrase "off the record" either verbally or in writing, but instead always tell the reporter "this is purely for your guidance/background understanding, and not for publication or broadcast".

If there's any doubt about whether a reporter intends to use the information we're giving for guidance, colleagues are advised to follow-up phone conversations with an e-mail, repeating the information released and reiterating the basis on which it is provided. This is recorded within our Press Bureau system.

The team work closely to the guiding principles set out in the ACPO 'Communication Advisory Group' Guidance 2010. This aims to encourage a presumption of openness, promote consistent practice and offer practical guidance, based on experience, so that decision making by forces will withstand scrutiny. It sets broad principles which individual police forces can apply to decisions as appropriate to deal with local circumstances.

(27) Do you consider that press office staff feel confident that they understand what is, and what is not, appropriate contact with the media? When answering this question, please explain what you consider to be “appropriate contact” with the media.

Yes, I consider that our media communications staff are confident in their understanding of what is appropriate contact with the media.

Contact with the media should always be business-like, professional and driven by legitimate policing purposes such as preventing and detecting crime; apprehending and prosecuting offenders; protecting life and property; maintaining law and order; and dealing with threat, harm and vulnerabilities in all of their forms within our communities.

Media communications staff acknowledge that striking the balance between our organisational needs and the demands of the media can sometimes be a challenge, but in Staffordshire relationships with media colleagues are largely based on trust, understanding, openness and transparency.

(28) Do you consider that press office staff generally feel comfortable briefing the media and responding to media requests for information?

Yes, I would consider that our media communications colleagues do generally feel comfortable doing this as it forms a very large part of their day-to-day work. On the odd occasion where there is discomfort or where a media issue is less straight forward or potentially high risk, then senior managers are on hand to give guidance and advice or indeed deal with the media direct.

(29) Do incidents that attract national media interest present particular challenges? If so, what are those challenges and do you consider that

the press office is adequately equipped to respond effectively and appropriately to such media interest?

As I mentioned before, there is much less contact with the national media and this usually only happens when responding to specific news events. In Staffordshire our relationships are predominantly with local and regional media. When we do become the focus of national media interest, the fact that we don't have the same close working relationships can be a challenge in itself. Lower levels of mutual trust and understanding could possibly sometimes be perceived by the national media as a reluctance to engage.

However, I think it is also fair to assert that the national media is, by its very nature, much less committed to, or socially responsible for, specific geographic communities in our county - unlike the local media. This has a significant dynamic upon relationships.

The other main challenge that can present itself on occasions of national media interest – particularly with rolling 24-hour news programming - is dealing with demand. As a small team, we can soon run into resilience issues and on these occasions other communications staff from the wider team are drafted in to assist.

(30) What improvements, if any, do you think could or should be made to the systems, policies and/or training in your office to ensure that press office staff conduct and maintain appropriate relationships with the media?

I think we could implement improved and more frequent training in relation to the guidelines of ACPO's Communication Advisory Group to ensure that all communications personnel have a clear understanding around appropriate relationships with the media. I think we could also set in place a formal input to all communications staff from our professional standards department around this subject. Our media policy needs to be revisited, as part of our

ongoing “Without Fear or Favour” review, to make sure we provide robust guidance around integrity of relationships between staff and the media. Future media training could include exploring the issues around appropriate police-media relationships and we need to ensure that all personnel who interact with the media, receive this training. Mechanisms already in place to record interactions between police employees and media representatives should be reviewed to consider all officer contact and not just contact via the media communications office.

(31) Are you and /or your staff members of the Association of Police Communicators? From your perspective, what are the benefits of membership of this Association? Could the Association assist or assist further in ensuring that relations between police personnel and the media are appropriate. If so, how?

All members of the Corporate Communications Department are members of the Association of Police Communicators (APCOM) and I am currently the regional representative for the West Midlands region.

The main benefits of the organisation are to develop and share good practice, encourage joined-up activity in support of marketing and campaign activity and provide a platform to develop the knowledge, skills and expertise of the membership.

I think that APCOM, through its learning events, could assist further in ensuring that relations between police personnel and the media are appropriate. It could help disseminate ACPO Communications Advisory Group (CAG) guidance and use case studies to highlight positive / negative behaviour.

(32) Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from Staffordshire Police to the media and/or private detectives a problem for Staffordshire Police?

This is not perceived to be a major problem within Staffordshire. However, there have been occasions when leaks of 'organisationally uncomfortable' information have occurred during our current change programme. This does affect the whole force and we always attempt to be measured and proportionate in our response to such instances.

In my time with the force, I am aware of one significant case where a serving officer was arrested by the Metropolitan Police in April 2005 as part of an anti-corruption investigation into illegal disclosure of information to private detectives. He was subsequently charged, tried and imprisoned.

(33) Insofar as you are able to say, to what extent are leaks from the press office specifically to the media and/or private detectives a problem for Staffordshire Police?

I am not aware of any such instances.

(34) What systems and procedures do you have in place in the press office, if any, to identify, respond to and detect the source of leaks? Do you consider that they are effective? What changes, if any, do you consider should be made?

The force's Corporate Communications Department undertakes a daily media monitoring service. This can help to identify stories and articles and, more importantly in this respect, the 'official' or 'unofficial' sources of these. It's also worthy of note that, as the first port of call for the majority of media enquiries into the force, the Corporate Communications Department is in a good position to identify potential leaks. Any concerns are raised with the Head of Professional Standards.

(35) In the last 5 years, how many investigations have been conducted into actual or suspected leaks from the press office and how many have

led to the successful identification of the source of the leak? What was the outcome of the other investigations?

I am not aware of any such instances.

(36) In the last 5 years has disciplinary action been taken against any members of press office staff for leaking information to the media and/or private detectives? If so, please identify the number of cases and their outcome. There is no need to identify the person or persons the subject of the disciplinary process.

None.

(37) Insofar as applicable, what do you consider are the driving forces behind, or the main causes of, leaks from (i) police press offices and (ii) the police service in general?

(i) Although I have no personal experience of leaks from press officers, I could see how information could be provided by a press officer through misguidance, lack of experience or poor judgement, in an attempt to assist the media and thereby the wider public.

(ii) I could also see how leaks could emanate from disgruntled members of staff, who may be in dispute with a force over matters specific to them or that form part of a wider disaffection with how the service is being led or managed, either by senior officers or politicians. Many officers are privately disaffected by what they see as unjust and unfair restrictions on pay and conditions. Some choose to articulate their arguments openly and seek to engage the media in debate to inform the argument. Others may choose to do so from a more circumspect perspective, either anonymously or through inappropriate contacts and leakage of organisational information.

(38) To what extent do you believe bribery of police personnel by the media to be a current problem for Staffordshire Police (if at all)?

I am not personally aware of any such instances.

(39) Do you or, to your knowledge, staff working for the press office ever, give “off-the-record” briefings or have “off-the-record” conversations with the media (both local and national)? If so, please give full details and illustrative examples. Please also explain why they take place and what you consider to be the benefits of such communications?

If ‘off-the-record’ means the content of any briefing is not for publication or broadcast, then such briefings may in certain circumstances be acceptable so long as they support a legitimate policing purpose, which more often than not will amount to background to existing policing operations or investigations (please see response provided to 26 iv).

If ‘off-the-record’ means the quote or content is non-attributable to the source, this can and does damage transparency and does the public a disservice as non-attributable can equate to non-accountable.

Staff within the team do provide ‘not for publication guidance’ to journalists to ensure that – where appropriate - they cover a story accurately, proportionately and, where necessary, sensitively.

For example, we regularly provide the surnames of those who have been charged to appear before court on the day of their appearance to assist reporters cover stories. This helps reporters to use their time more efficient and effectively and media coverage of such cases helps inform the public of the work we are doing to reduce crime and keep them safe.

On another occasion recently, we provided guidance to a reporter regarding a vulnerable missing person. By informing them that the missing man was missing from a care home and required care and medication, they agreed to run the story to help us. Of course, such publicity assists us if readers/listeners/viewers have information which could lead to a safe conclusion of our search / inquiries.

With reference to the example provided at 14 above regarding my involvement in the policing operation to help resolve an armed siege in Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent. I was only able to negotiate a voluntary news blackout with key broadcast media by providing not-for-publication guidance about the mental health vulnerabilities and danger/threat posed by the man at the centre of the operation.

(40) Do you or, to your knowledge, staff working for the press office, ever confirm information for the media (i.e. information which the media have obtained from other sources) on an “off-the-record” basis? If so, please give details and explain why this is done.

Following on from my response to both 26 and 39 above, we do occasionally confirm such information for the media.

In these instances, our approach serves either to support a legitimate policing purpose, which more often than not will amount to background to existing policing operations or investigations or is in the interest of welfare, or in the interests of justice.

One recent example would be when we were dealing with the unexplained death of an 18 year-old woman, whose body had been found in a flat by neighbours. Due to the obvious bruising to the body which neighbours had seen, it was soon all over social media that it was likely she had been murdered. A main local newspaper, who had been given this information by witnesses in the community, were planning a headline and story along the

lines that they believed the woman had been attacked and murdered in her flat.

At this stage, however, cause of death had not been determined. The post-mortem was ongoing and before the newspaper went to print, it became evident that the cause of death was more likely to be due to medical conditions associated with diabetes. The bruising to her body was looking like it was not related to her death.

On this occasion, 'off the record', not for publication information in relation to the findings part way through the post-mortem were shared with the newspaper to inform their approach to reporting it. The alternative could have caused potential distress to the woman's family, hampered the investigation and increased fear of crime in the area. This information was only released with the full cooperation of the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO).

Please also refer to the illustrative example in question 45 below.

(41) Insofar as applicable, what records are kept of the information shared on an "off-the-record" basis? Are records kept of all "off-the-record" briefings and the information provided at them?

Records of such briefings are routinely recorded in our Press Bureau information management system. However, there may be rare occasions where such briefings take place during times of significant media demand and are detailed in notebooks instead. Also, some "not for publication" briefings are currently conducted by local officers as part of their day-to-day media relations. There is currently no formal way of recording these and we rely on officers' own systems and files. This will be reviewed as part of the work of the 'Without Fear or Favour' working group.

(42) What do you understand “off-the-record” to mean in this context? Do you believe that members of the media always interpret it this way? Is there scope for the media misunderstanding the intentions of the police officer/police staff member when s/he provides information on an “off-the-record” basis?

I understand that “off-the-record” in this context means the content of the communication is not for publication or broadcast. This is to support a legitimate policing purpose, which more often than not will amount to background to existing policing operations or investigations or in the interest of welfare of victims or witnesses, or in the interests of justice.

In Staffordshire members of the media generally interpret it in the way it is intended, hence the guidance and our approach as discussed in 26(iv). However I do think that without this clear guidance there is scope for media misunderstanding. I cannot, however, recall any recent instances where such misunderstanding has occurred.

(43) What is your view of the practice of police officers and police staff having “off-the-record” communications with the media?

In some cases it is essential to ensure accurate reporting and ensure the welfare of crime victims, their families and witnesses. Having said that, guidance should always be given as set out above. The occasions of having “off-the-record”, not for publication communications with the media should always be carefully considered and discussed and a high degree of professional judgement applied. Crucially, it should always support a legitimate policing purpose.

(44) In your experience, insofar as applicable, where information is provided on an “off-the-record” basis, do the media tend to honour the

wishes of the person providing the information? Please give illustrative examples.

Generally speaking, in my experience, yes the media tend to honour this. Referring again to the recent incident of a siege situation, following guidance from GOLD, I managed to negotiate with the regional broadcast media not to report on the incident while it was ongoing. By sharing information “off-the-record”, not for publication with journalists about the armed man’s serious mental health problems and the recommendations from the health care specialists, who advised that there was the potential that if the man saw any TV coverage he may harm himself or the public, they agreed not to broadcast. Without sharing this level of detail this agreement wouldn’t have been reached and the incident, which was finally resolved safely, may have had a different outcome.

(45) In your experience, when police officers/staff ask the media to delay publishing particular information because of the risk of prejudice to a criminal investigation or future criminal trial, to what extent and in what circumstances do the media comply with the request? Please give illustrative examples.

Generally speaking, local journalists comply with any requests of this nature. I can illustrate this in a recent murder enquiry when a regional newspaper contacted us in relation to a story they were going to run about a relative of the murdered victim. The relative was actually a suspect in the case and our investigative team were mindful that any media coverage linking the suspect to the murder case, could not only hamper the investigation but also possibly jeopardise any future court case.

After a series of lengthy conversations with the News Editor, the newspaper decided not to run the story.

(46) In your experience, when police officers/ staff ask the media not to publish particular information at all because of the risk of harm to the public interest, to what extent and in what circumstances do the media comply with the request? Please give illustrative examples.

In my experience, generally the media do comply in these types of situations. In Staffordshire we recently had a situation where a report was received from a school girl who had been approached by an unknown man. Within a short space of time, news of the story started to circulate across social media channels. Within hours, rumour and speculation had escalated through the social media network and communities throughout the Stoke-on-Trent area were becoming increasingly alarmed about a series of attempted abductions which were unfounded.

Local media were picking up on the story and through the nature of the media calls that were being received by the media communications team, it soon became clear that potential headlines could further escalate this rumour, speculation and heightened sense of community fear. Following various discussions local media demonstrated that they did act in the public interest by reporting in a balanced, proportionate, and responsible way.

(47) Have there been occasions where, to your knowledge, the media have obtained information (from whatever source) and voluntarily not published the information because of the harm it might do the public interest or the interests of justice? Please give examples of the circumstances in which this has occurred.

I do have knowledge of such occasions, one being during the investigation of the death of a fourteen year old girl from Lichfield. A local paper received information about an incident involving two children from a local school and a 'death pact'. Following guidance from ourselves where we shared information from the World Health Organisation which stated around six per cent of

suicides are 'copycat' events that often follow certain media portrayals of suicide, the newspaper story was responsible and measured.

The example provided above in numerous responses regarding the armed siege in Shelton also demonstrates that the media can be incredibly supportive and responsible and exercise commendable corporate / social responsibility where there is a significant threat or risk of harm.

(48) What limitations, if any, do you consider there should be on police officers and police staff leaving the police service to work for the media and vice versa?

We have two staff working in our media communications team who previously worked for the same, major local newspaper. Roles in this team require journalistic or public relations skills and experience. So when recruiting externally, candidates from a media background often have relevant skills and experience. At present there are no limitations within the force on police officers and police staff leaving the police service to work for the media and vice versa.

(49) In relation to dealing with the media in general, do you consider that there is a basis for applying different standards and rules to police staff from those that apply to police officers (the latter having the powers of the office of constable). If so, (i) do you consider that different standards and rules should apply and (ii) please specify what you consider the difference should be.

No. I do not consider there should be any differentiation.

(50) 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?

I am aware that HMIC's *Without Fear or Favour* review reinforced the need for forces to explore options for identifying and monitoring emerging and inappropriate leaks to the media. Through the force's 'Without fear or Favour' working group we will need to carefully consider how best to address this issue without causing any unnecessary or overly risk-averse approach which constrains police and media relationships and is ultimately a disservice to the public.

The self-check integrity questions on pages 68 to 71 of the HMIC's report provide a very useful prompt for us to review our approaches, policies and make improvements.

(51) What is your view of the recommendations contained in Elizabeth Filkin's report "The Ethical Issues Arising from Relationship Between Police and Media"?

Whilst recognising that this report is specific to circumstances within the Metropolitan Police, I do agree with much of the substance and sentiment of what Elizabeth Filkin has recommended. I also think we could consider the recommendations as part of a current working group work that is going on within the force.

I completely concur that police forces should be open and impartial in their approach to providing public information. Whilst, as a force, we continue to work very closely with media colleagues, we have also sought to look at how different citizens with different needs want to receive information about local policing. For example, we have distributed 202,000 localised neighbourhood newsletters in 1124 editions between July 2011 to January 2012. These clearly publicise the details of local officers making them accessible and

accountable for dealing with local problems. We also now have nearly 55,000 followers across our social media sites and we actively engage with them on a daily basis. This is a different demographic to much of the traditional media.

(52) Do you consider that there are different or further steps which could and/or should be taken to ensure that relationships between police personnel and media are and remain appropriate?

I think these have largely been set out in responses above. However, one recommendation I would advocate is that there should be a robust, national police media policy to ensure wider consistency and mutual understanding between the police and media across the country.

ENDS