

Media relations

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 24 May 2017 Updated 27 July 2022

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31 mins read

Introduction

A successful working relationship between the police service and the media is vital. Working with the media to communicate to the public can help solve crimes, bring offenders to justice and keep communities safe. It can also give the public insight into what the police are doing and why they are doing it.

The context in which the media and police engage with each other continues to change quickly as new technologies, crimes and threats emerge. This engagement is routinely positive and professional. In some instances, it involves decisions that can be subject to challenge and scrutiny. This highlights the value of guidance to assist decision making.

This authorised professional practice (APP) is designed to assist those working in police forces who engage with the media. It updates both the [2010 Communications Advisory Group's guidance](#) and the College of Policing's 2013 [Guidance on Relationships with the Media](#). It takes account of recommendations of the [Leveson Inquiry \(part 1\) into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press \(2012\)](#), and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) report [Without fear or favour](#), published in 2011.

In 2014, the College of Policing published the first Code of Ethics for policing in England and Wales. The code sets out principles to guide the conduct of those working in policing, recognising the importance of high professional and ethical standards. This APP does not duplicate the Code of Ethics and should be read in conjunction with it.

Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics sets clear guidance on specific issues that are relevant to engaging with the media.

- Openness and transparency – this is essential to maintaining and enhancing a positive relationship between the policing profession and the community.
- Hospitality, gifts and gratuities – police officers and staff should neither solicit nor accept the offer of any hospitality, gift or gratuity that could compromise their impartiality or integrity.
- Associations – membership of groups or societies, or associations with groups or individuals, must not create an actual or apparent conflict of interest with police work and responsibilities.
- Confidentiality – treat information with respect, and access or disclose it only in the proper course of duties.
- Fitness for work – being fit to carry out the role and not consuming alcohol when on duty

For further information see the full [Code of Ethics](#).

Key themes

Legitimacy is an essential aspect of the British policing model, and is well established in the UK as ‘policing by consent’. The more the public supports the police by providing information or being involved in policing activities, the greater the scope for police forces to prevent or resolve crime and other incidents. Being fair, respectful, open and transparent in communications can motivate the public to cooperate with the police and respect the law.

Generally speaking, the criminal justice system in England and Wales operates in accordance with the principle of open justice. The Lord Chief Justice has emphasised the importance of this principle. See: Judicial College. (2016). [Reporting restrictions in the criminal courts](#), p 3.

The police service has a duty to safeguard the confidentiality and integrity of the information it holds and the rights of individuals to privacy. This duty must be balanced against the duty to be open and transparent. All decisions should be underpinned by the [National Decision Model](#), which takes account of the legal framework and places the police [Code of Ethics](#) at its heart.

The following guidance offers a framework to assist those in the police service who engage with the media to do so in an open, accessible and professional way. It is possible and important for police forces to be open and transparent with the media while also respecting their duties of confidentiality and individuals’ rights to privacy.

Framework for engaging with the media

As a simple rule, police officers and staff should ask, 'Am I the person responsible for communicating about this issue and is there a policing purpose for doing so?' If the answer to both parts of this question is 'yes', they should communicate with the media.

This remains a useful rule that was endorsed and recommended by the Leveson Inquiry (part 1). It should be understood as supporting and encouraging engagement between the media and police, and should not restrict engagement to those in senior positions. Responsibility for communicating rests with all those working in policing, irrespective of seniority. Officers and staff of all ranks and roles are encouraged to provide factual information to the media concerning operational incidents or investigations.

Being open with information in itself constitutes a policing purpose by supporting policing legitimacy. This includes explaining or promoting policing work and being accountable for actions, decisions and omissions. The Code of Ethics sets principles of openness and accountability, which are consistent with the duty placed on public authorities by the Freedom of information Act 2000 to provide public access to information.

The starting point for understanding policing purpose should be one of openness and transparency. However, in some situations, the benefits to the public of being open and transparent with information are outweighed by a conflicting policing purpose. APP on information management defines policing purposes as including:

- protecting life and property
- preserving order
- preventing and detecting offences
- bringing offenders to justice
- any duty or responsibility arising from common or statute law

Individuals should apply this guidance to each set of circumstances and decide what to do in practice.

Police and the media

Defining speaking terms

All parties should understand in advance the terms on which a briefing or conversation with the media is taking place. Avoid the term 'off the record' as the basis for a conversation, as it can create ambiguity over how information is to be used and can risk the perception of inappropriate or confidential information disclosure. Always assume that a conversation is reportable unless expressly agreed otherwise in advance. The following terms may be helpful.

Reportable

All that is said may be reported, quoted and attributed, at the media's discretion. All communications should be on this basis unless exceptional circumstances apply. A quote in a media release should be attributed to a named spokesperson where appropriate and possible.

Non-reportable

Non-reportable information is provided to the media on the basis (by prior agreement) that it is for guidance only and not for publication or broadcast. It can be used to provide further context around a statement. This enables the police to have a dialogue with the media about serious or sensitive policing issues without generating publicity about them. Properly used, this may be a valuable resource in the context of an established, trusting and professional relationship. Where non-reportable information is shared, it is good practice, where appropriate, for police to work with the media to find a way to allow it to be reported. The officer or a communications officer should record the subject or subjects discussed. This record should include a note of why it is non-reportable.

Embargoed

Embargoed information is shared on the understanding it is not to be published or broadcast until after a specified event or time. This is often used when the media are briefed in advance of proactive crime operations. A decision to set an embargo should be recorded.

Respecting suspects' rights to privacy

Suspects should not be identified to the media (by disclosing names or other identifying information) prior to the point of charge, except where justified by clear circumstances, such as a threat to life, the prevention or detection of crime, or a matter of public interest and confidence.

The corporate communications department

Corporate communications departments (CCDs) – or in some forces, directorates or departments for media or communications services – offer a specialist resource for professional advice and support on communications and media engagement. CCDs may be able to offer advice, background or key messages to assist officers and staff engaging with the media. Following an interview or briefing, CCDs should also be kept informed so they are prepared to receive further requests for information on an issue.

In some situations (such as a high-profile inquiry or sensitive investigation) there will be a pre-existing media strategy to ensure that media engagement supports the operational approach. If in doubt of this, officers and staff are encouraged to check with the CCD before speaking to the media.

Police officers at all levels are expected to have some contact with the media as a routine part of the job. CCDs will not be involved in all media engagement but are there as a source of specialist support and advice. If an issue being spoken about goes beyond force level and concerns national policing, advice can be obtained from the College of Policing [press office](#) (on national standards and guidance) or the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) [press office](#) (for operational issues). Contact can be facilitated through CCDs.

Attendance at media interviews

While CCDs will not be involved in all media interaction, it may support engagement if a communications officer is present for media interviews where the subject:

- addresses national issues
- could have an impact on, or cause, community tensions
- is a high-profile case with significant media interest
- could damage confidence in policing
- is likely to generate interest from other media

Recording contact with the media

Chief officers should record all their contact with the media where policing matters are discussed. This record should be publicly available. A brief record that the conversation has taken place and of its subject matter is sufficient. Informal or chance meetings where work-related issues are not discussed need not be recorded.

Where another officer or member of staff meets with a media representative, takes part in an interview or provides information verbally or in writing for a matter for which they are responsible, it is good practice for a similar (unpublished) record to be kept.

The College of Policing has published national guidance on reporting concerns in consultation with the independent whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work. This guidance states that, if a person reporting a concern wishes to remain anonymous, they should be able to do so. The guidance can be found [here](#).

Managing inaccurate or misleading media coverage

Inaccurate or misleading media coverage can be extremely damaging to an organisation or an individual. CCDs may address inaccuracies or misleading coverage by:

- seeking a resolution with the media outlet concerned – some media organisations, such as the BBC, produce their own editorial guidelines, which can be useful to reference
- proactively publishing a correction – for example, through a force's own social media channels
- liaison through a regulatory body such as [Ofcom](#) (for broadcast media) or the [Independent Press Standards Organisation](#)

Following the guidance outlined and working with the media to be open and transparent in communications will help reduce inaccuracies in reporting.

High-profile or sensitive investigations or operations

In general, the same guidance applies to high-profile or sensitive cases as other investigations or operations. In some cases – such as those involving serious crimes, investigations into celebrities or prominent public figures, security, terrorism or major incidents – plans and procedures already exist or strategies will be developed to cope with media interest.

If so, information should be released when appropriate as agreed in the investigations or operations strategy. Media strategies should be agreed at senior operational level and should include the appointment of a dedicated police spokesperson. This can provide the gold commander or senior investigating officer (SIO) with assurance that other police officers or staff will not divulge information that goes beyond the agreed media strategy and could compromise the investigation or operation.

A high-profile investigation or operation should have a specific communications officer assigned to it in support of the media strategy. All media strategies and media-related decisions should be logged so that, in the event of a change of staff, the communications officer can be easily briefed. The media strategy should make clear who is designated as media spokesperson. This strategy should be distributed to officers and staff from the outset through team briefings and the recording of entries in decision logs. All media statements in high-profile investigations should receive approval by the SIO or gold commander before release.

If the media approach a force in advance of a high-profile or sensitive operation to request confirmation of its details, the force should not confirm the operation or release details that go beyond an agreed media strategy or could compromise the investigation or operation. The SIO should be informed so that they can consider any impact on the investigation and whether the investigation and communications strategy needs to be changed. All rationale, decisions and details of meetings and conversations with the media should be recorded.

A media organisation may request access to a high-profile investigation (which is in the public domain), for example, filming officers working on the operation or a planned search. This is at the force's discretion and terms of access, including interview opportunities, should be agreed in advance (see [taking the media on police operations](#) below). All officers and staff involved in the investigation must be briefed on the terms and conditions of media access before it is granted.

Media briefings

Non-exhaustive list of potential reasons for holding a media briefing

Will the briefing:

- provide information that is in the public interest?
- support operational or strategic objectives?
- reassure the public and highlight good police work?
- inform the public and local community of an innovative technique or noteworthy inter-agency cooperation (without revealing operational tactics)?
- deter future offenders or prevent crime?
- help manage media needs in a high-profile case?
- encourage accuracy in the reporting of a complex case?
- inform potential debate after a trial?

Media briefings provide an opportunity to engage with the media, communicate with the public and build confidence in policing. They may be considered at any point during the life of an investigation or police operation.

Officers and staff should liaise with CCDs about planning and arranging briefings. The rationale for the briefing must be recorded by either the CCD or SIO. Consideration should be given as to whether or not an embargo agreement is required. If one is required, it should have signed agreement from the media and should be retained for audit purposes.

[Download the embargo agreement template.](#)

Pre-trial briefings

Pre-trial briefings are embargoed briefings given to the media before the start of a trial. These are most commonly used in very high-profile, sensitive or complex trials where briefing will help the media to report a case accurately. Any such briefings are held by joint agreement between the police and the [Crown Prosecution Service](#) (CPS). Pre-trial briefing information is disclosable to the defence.

Pre-verdict briefings

Pre-verdict briefings are embargoed media briefings that take place after a trial has started but before a verdict is given. It should be made clear to the media that any information supplied that may prejudice a trial must not be printed or broadcast until the end of a trial and only then in the event of a guilty verdict.

All media briefings provided for broadcast or publication before the conclusion of a trial, including interviews with officers, must be impartial and must not comment or speculate on whether or not a defendant is guilty.

Where a media organisation requests a pre-recorded interview for use in the event of a guilty verdict, the force should assess the potential risks before granting the request. The media should sign an indemnity agreement before the briefing and the communications officer should record the content of the briefing.

[Download the indemnity agreement template.](#)

Taking the media on police operations

Taking the media on police operations can help them inform the public about police work and demonstrate the police service's openness and transparency. This should be done in a fair and equitable manner. It may be appropriate for police to work with a particular media organisation (for example, a news outlet campaigning against a particular crime type) but other media organisations should have equal opportunity to request similar access to operations.

When appropriate, pooled media facilities may be arranged in circumstances where there are limitations on access or space. In these circumstances, it is at the force's discretion which media organisation attends, and this should be decided with fairness and impartiality. As a rule, a pooled facility should ensure that all types of media material – words, pictures, audio and film – are catered for.

Non-exhaustive list of points to consider prior to agreeing media access to operations

- Will it help prevent or detect crime?
- Would it address matters which are in the public interest?
- Is it likely to inform or reassure the public?
- Could it potentially prejudice a trial?
- Could it jeopardise future police operations or reveal covert police tactics?
- Could it interfere with an individual's right to a fair trial and their right to respect for private and family life?
- Could it cause unnecessary distress or harassment to victims, those being investigated, their family, or innocent members of the community?

Notice and invites to media should be through the CCD. In keeping with [principle 7](#) of the Code of Ethics, police officers and staff must not disclose information, on-duty or off-duty, to unauthorised recipients. They must not provide informal tip-offs about operations.

Forces should take reasonable measures to ensure that any materials that are published do not lead to a suspect being identified, in the same way as they would when a person is arrested. An example of this would be the release of a photograph after a raid that identifies the house number in a street, which could lead to the identity of the suspect becoming known.

The media should sign an indemnity agreement. It is the responsibility of the media to ensure that they do not identify the individual in the operation, or to identify any victims or witnesses without

their consent.

Media access to private property is at the discretion of the owner, legitimate occupier or some other person who can legally authorise access. The police do not have authority in the matter and it is up to the media to negotiate their own access.

[Download the indemnity agreement template.](#)

Reporting from a scene

Reporting or filming from the scene of an incident is part of the media's role and they should not be prevented from doing so from a public place. Police have no power or moral responsibility to stop the filming or photographing of incidents or police personnel. It is for the media to determine what is published or broadcast, not the police. Once an image has been recorded, the police have no power to seize equipment, or delete or confiscate images or footage, without a court order.

Where police have designated a cordoned area, the media must respect it in the same way as the public, unless a media facility within a cordoned area has been authorised by police. The best possible vantage point for media should be considered, providing it does not compromise operational needs.

Exclusives

Media organisations should be treated in a fair and impartial manner. Where a media organisation generates an exclusive, their right to share information in confidence with the police should be respected. This means that where an enquiry is put to police by a journalist, the information being sought will not be proactively issued to other media outlets, except for operational reasons or unless it was already planned for release into the public domain. Once in the public domain, information released by the police should be available to all.

There are occasions where targeting a particular media organisation by offering them a specific story is appropriate, such as a story or campaign based on geography, a particular audience or community that the force wishes to reach, or a media organisation's particular interest in a certain issue. Targeting in this way must be justifiable and agreed with a CCD.

Documentaries

Documentaries and other programmes can offer the police significant opportunities to engage the public through the media. Requests should be agreed with a CCD. If agreement to make the documentary or programme is given, the appropriate documentation (including an indemnity agreement and an access agreement) should be completed and signed by the company following discussions with the CCD. It should be made clear in any contractual agreement that the media have full responsibility for what is published or aired.

[Download the indemnity agreement template.](#)

Non-exhaustive list of points to consider when taking a documentary request

- Would the filming or recording fit a policing purpose, such as to detect or prevent crime, to promote road safety, or to reassure the public about police effectiveness?
- Will the broadcast affect current or future police operations?
- Will the broadcast cause unjustifiable distress or harassment to those featured?
- Could the broadcast potentially prejudice a trial or interfere with an individual's human rights, including the right to privacy, or will it breach data protection law?
- Will the broadcast affect, or need to involve, partner organisations?
- What protection is required for undercover police officers, covert police activity, police tactics and equipment?
- What is the status of the production company and the quality of its previous broadcasts?
- What is the potential commitment (working hours) for members of the workforce, including members of the CCD, to facilitate this request?
- What are the potential copyright issues? Must permission be obtained from third parties to provide any of the material requested?

Arrests, charges, and judicial outcomes

Referring to reports of a crime

When releasing information for an appeal or in response to a media enquiry, care should be taken to apply the correct terms to describe a report of a crime unless there is a specific rationale for not doing so. This approach helps to ensure accuracy and prevent undermining the victim. For example, an incident reported as a rape should in principle be described as such in all communications.

Exceptions to this approach may occur where necessary to safeguard a vulnerable person, to protect a victim's interests or as an investigative tactic. In these circumstances, an incident reported as a rape might instead be described using the term 'serious sexual assault'. The SIO should record the rationale behind any decision not to use the accurate term.

Naming on arrest

Police will not name those arrested or suspected of a crime, other than in exceptional circumstances where there is a legitimate policing purpose to do so. (This guidance also applies where allegations of offences are made against deceased persons.) This position is in accordance with recommendations and findings of the [Leveson Inquiry](#) (part 1), the [Information Commissioner](#) and the Home Affairs Select Committee.

A legitimate policing purpose may include circumstances such as a threat to life, the prevention or detection of crime, or where police have made a public warning about a wanted individual. See also [key themes](#). In certain circumstances, this may include people who have failed to answer bail.

When someone is arrested, police can proactively release the person's gender, age, the place – for example, the town or city – where they live, the nature, date and general location of the alleged offence, the date of the arrest, whether they are in custody or have been bailed, any subsequent bail date, or if they were released without bail or with no further action being taken. This should not apply in cases where, although not directly naming an arrested person, this information would nevertheless have the effect of confirming their identity. In circumstances where the release of such information is likely to confirm the identity of a person arrested, particularly details relating to age or location, consideration should be given to providing less specific details. For example: 'a man in his 30's' or 'at an address in Sussex'.

The rationale for naming an arrested person before they are charged should be authorised by a chief officer and logged either by them or by the CCD. The authorising officer should also ensure that the CPS is consulted about the release of the name.

This approach recognises that, in cases where the police name those who are arrested, there is a risk of unfair damage to the reputations of those persons, particularly if they are never charged. It cannot and does not seek to prevent the media relying on information from sources outside the police in order to confirm identities.

No further action

When forces give reasons for discontinuing an investigation or releasing a suspect with no further action, they should consider either stating that ‘the evidence did not meet the evidential stage of the full code test set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors’, or that ‘further action is not in the public interest’. Where possible, corporate communications departments should liaise with SIOs to ensure that a suspect is informed that no further action is to be taken against them, before releasing this information to the media.

When informing the media that no further action will be taken regarding an allegation, no details of allegations should be disclosed if they have not already been released, except where disclosure is justified by clear circumstances, such as a threat to life, the prevention or detection of crime, or a matter of public interest and confidence.

Responding to enquiries about arrests

If a name or names are put to the police with a request for confirmation of an arrest, the response should be ‘we neither confirm nor deny’. No guidance should be given. Police should not respond by supplying other information that, although not directly naming an arrested person, would nevertheless have the effect of confirming the person’s identity.

This ensures a consistent approach to situations where a list of names is put forward until that of an arrested person arises and, if no further information is supplied at that point, the enquirer thereby draws the conclusion that the name must be right.

To receive any information in response to an enquiry about an arrest, the media need to provide details sufficient to allow that arrest or incident to be traced, including location, date and type of offence. If confirming that an arrest has been made, police should always be clear that in doing so they are not confirming the identity of the arrested person.

Information about a police investigation or ongoing operation

Information can be proactively released to aid an investigation, with appeal points asking for the public’s assistance, to maintain public confidence in policing activity, or where it is a matter of public interest. Forces should always consider the victim’s wishes when releasing information

relevant to them.

Responses to media enquiries about investigations or police activity should be open, honest and transparent. Clear reasoning should be recorded if a decision is made to withhold information because its release would have a detrimental impact on the investigation or operation. Individuals who are, or may be, involved in an investigation should not be identified and responses must be carefully worded so as not to identify such individuals. In some cases, this could mean that details of age or geography are not released.

To help avoid situations where a list of names is speculatively put to a police communications officer, the same approach should be followed as for supplying information in response to enquiries on arrests. The journalist must provide sufficient additional detail to identify an investigation or incident, without reference to a named person, before being provided with information about the investigation.

Any information that is released – proactively or reactively – should, as a minimum, include:

- the allegation or offence
- the date information received
- which unit is investigating
- arrests
- interviews under caution
- bail to return, and/or charges and relevant appeal points

As an investigation or other policing activity continues, officers and communications staff should regularly review the information that has been released and consider whether it is appropriate to release more information.

Rewards offered by media publications or others remain the sole responsibility of that third party with no requirement for the police to promote them, unless the force has been consulted and has agreed to support the reward.

Naming on charge

Those charged with an offence – including those who receive a summons to court – should be named, unless there is an exceptional and legitimate policing purpose for not doing so or reporting

restrictions apply. This information can be given at the point of charge. A decision not to name an individual who has been charged should be taken in consultation with the CPS.

Forces should proactively release charging information where the crime is of a serious nature, such as rape or murder, where the incident has already been reported in the media or on social media sites, or for public reassurance reasons.

There are several automatic reporting restrictions that are statutory exceptions to the open justice principle, including the following.

- The media is prohibited from identifying the name, address or school or any matter that is likely to identify a child or young person involved in youth court proceedings, whether as a victim, witness or defendant. Where a young person is tried in an adult court, no automatic reporting restrictions apply.
- **Section 141F of the Education Act 2002** as amended introduces an automatic reporting restriction, which prevents the identification of any teacher who is alleged by a pupil at the same school (or by someone on the pupil's behalf) to have committed a criminal offence against the pupil. This reporting restriction automatically ends if proceedings against the teacher are instituted.

The media are aware of automatic reporting restrictions and it is their responsibility to follow them. Any information permitted under such restrictions should be released upon charge, including the following: name, date of birth, address, details of charge, and date of court appearance. The person's occupation can be released if it is relevant to the crime – for example, a teacher charged with the assault of a pupil at the school where they work.

If charges are withdrawn before someone first appears in court, forces should proactively release this information as soon as possible in order to be fair to the person involved, especially if a case has been previously publicised. Ultimately, it is the media's responsibility to report accurately.

Identities of people dealt with by cautions, speeding fines and other fixed penalties – out-of-court disposals – should not be released or confirmed. Forces should say that 'a man' or 'a woman' has been dealt with and only release general details of the offence.

Identifying victims or other witnesses

The name of a victim will not normally be released unless a victim consents to being identified. There will be occasions when releasing the name of a victim may assist an investigation or an appeal to encourage other victims to come forward or to help apprehend the suspect. This will not be done without the victim's prior agreement, details of which should be recorded.

There is an automatic reporting restriction for victims of sexual offences, who are given lifetime anonymity. This does not apply if they consent in writing to their identity being published. Consent by a victim should be fully informed and freely given, with them being made aware that their names will be disclosed to the media and the public, and may be transmitted on social media.

Similarly, forces should seek the wishes of other witnesses wherever possible before publishing their identities. This strikes the right balance between the individual's right to privacy and the right of the media to report on events of interest.

Businesses

Businesses may be routinely identified as part of police investigations – for example, as part of an appeal for witnesses. In some cases, operational policing reasons may prevent businesses being identified – for example, where it could have an impact upon an investigation. The need to protect private information may also prevent businesses being identified – for example, in circumstances where identifying a business might indirectly identify a suspect. Decisions should be taken on a case-by-case basis.

Information during criminal proceedings

The release of evidential material should be agreed by the CPS and can be released by police as a media package as directed by the court. If the media request material that has not been directed by the court, it should be agreed with the CPS whether to release it and who will provide the material, as all information is the copyright of the Crown during the court process.

A [media relations protocol](#) covering this area has been created in association with the CPS, with the aim of ensuring greater openness in the reporting of criminal proceedings. It governs media access to materials relied on by the prosecution in criminal proceedings. It sets out what material should normally be released and what may be released following consideration by the CPS, in consultation with the police and all relevant parties.

Where documents have been placed before a judge and referred to in the course of proceedings, the media should have access to the documents in principle, but it is up to the court to decide whether to grant this.

For further information see Judicial College. (2016). [Reporting restrictions in the criminal courts](#)

Information at the end of criminal proceedings

Where appropriate and where there is a legitimate policing purpose, forces can proactively release information about court outcomes as a way of improving public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Specifically in respect of images, the police, as the legal copyright owner, are responsible for releasing an offender's custody photograph. The image may be released upon a guilty verdict unless there is a court order or legitimate policing purpose preventing their identification. Images may be released as soon as possible after the verdict to allow the media to publish them contemporaneously (in their next available edition or broadcast). The image can be released again upon sentence if necessary.

Deaths

Details of non-suspicious sudden deaths should only be proactively issued if there is an operational policing reason to do so. Information that a body has been found can be confirmed following an enquiry from the media, but nothing should be released that could identify the deceased. In the first instance, police should state that they are investigating the circumstances surrounding the death, or refer to the death as unexpected, until it has been established that it is either suspicious or non-suspicious, at which point this update can be provided.

Once identity has been established and next of kin informed, the identities of the deceased can be released, unless there is a policing purpose for not doing so.

In the event of an inquest, it is part of the role of a coroner to identify the deceased. It is good practice for police to talk through communications issues with the local coroner to reach common agreement about handling information on identity, in order to facilitate the early release of information in situations where formal identification has taken place and the family have been

informed. Where possible, this should allow for an open approach to releasing information, while respecting the coroner's primacy.

Inquests are always the domain of the coroner who is responsible for all communications relating to its proceedings.

Images and footage

There is a heavy media demand for images and footage. Images and footage can be released where there is a policing purpose for doing so.

CCTV

Images or footage can be issued to support a witness or information appeal about a crime. Their release must be approved by the SIO or officer in command.

Body-worn video footage

Body-worn video (BWV) footage is covered by existing protocols on releasing footage. It may be released to the prosecution during a trial, as instructed by the judge, or for another genuine policing purpose such as an appeal.

The police may wish to release BWV images to the media for a number of reasons, including tracing wanted suspects, locating people who have escaped or absconded from custody and post-conviction demands for information. The images could relate to a heroic act where the person saved is happy to be identified, or could serve an educational purpose.

The release of BWV images to the media must always be proportionate, necessary and for a legitimate purpose. Forces must make each decision on a case-by-case basis and should carry out early consultation with criminal justice partners, where appropriate.

Where images are shared with the media to identify any person shown in the images, forces must take care to obscure other persons shown in the recording whose identity is not sought.

All decisions to release images and the reasons for doing so should be recorded, along with any risk assessment. Records relating to the release of images as part of an investigation may be subject to disclosure under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996.

The NPCC has developed [advice for forces when considering whether to release BWV content.](#)

Image of wanted person

A photograph of a wanted person can be released to help apprehend that person when it is considered necessary and proportionate to the needs of the investigation. This must be approved by an SIO or officer in command. Once the person is apprehended, the CCD should be made aware so they can remove the photograph from the force's website as soon as possible and inform the media.

Image of missing person

A recent image should be obtained from family or other personal connections to the missing person. Where a missing person has previously been in custody, their custody photograph should only be used as a last resort and where the risk of harm to the individual is judged to outweigh the risk of using the image.

Tribute image

The family of a deceased person can be asked to provide a photograph to the CCD for release. Images, such as those taken from a social networking site, should not be used without first verifying that they are of the deceased person.

When images are released to the media, they should be accompanied by a caveat that provides information on copyright and conditions of use. Forces are encouraged to have a system in place to ensure that they review the publication of images on force websites and social media. Adequate safeguards should be in place to ensure the safe transmission of images and footage to avoid data breaches.

Registered sex offenders in the community

Disclosure of information to the media or public about the personal details or whereabouts of any sex offender subject to an order or monitoring under [Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) should not be made unless there is an operational reason to do so. A decision should be made only with the authorisation of the relevant multi-agency public protection panel.

If a decision is made to identify a convicted offender in the community, the CCD should be informed so they can advise on potential publicity and, where appropriate, assist in reaching local protocol agreements with the media. As with developing critical incidents, a media strategy should be agreed at senior operational level.

If the name of – or information about – a sex offender is put to the CCD by the media when there has been no decision to identify the person, communications officers should neither confirm nor deny their accuracy. They should, however, inform operational commanders to enable them to make the appropriate assessment. All decisions must be recorded. Forces are advised to agree procedures with local editors for handling media enquiries about individual sex offenders and to ensure they are reviewed and updated periodically.

Police under investigation

Publicising internal investigations and misconduct matters

Police misconduct hearings are now heard in public, and police communications should reflect such openness. It is important for public confidence in policing that the police service is open and transparent about actions and decisions relating to allegations of wrongdoing by its officers and staff, consistent with the Code of Ethics.

The police response to allegations of misconduct or crimes by officers and the related employment status of police officers are a matter of considerable and legitimate public interest. Media lines should be proactively released if officers are charged in relation to off-duty activities that involve serious criminality (for example, sexual offences, serious assaults, fraud or corruption) or matters that could seriously damage public confidence in the police service or call its integrity into question.

The misconduct and discipline system for police staff is conducted separately from that for officers and is not subject to the same statutory regulation. Wherever possible, however, the media lines should reflect the same approach as outlined for officers.

Potentially high-profile internal investigation or misconduct cases should be brought to the attention of the CCD at the earliest opportunity. This enables a media statement to be drafted in consultation with the investigating officer.

No information should be disclosed that could prejudice the outcome of any proceedings, nor should any comment be made on an individual's innocence or guilt before the appropriate body has made its decision. If needed, the force CCD can provide the individual with advice and support on how to deal with intrusive media attention as a result of publicity surrounding a case.

More detailed guidance on what information can be released to the media regarding police investigations and misconduct matters can be found in the dedicated section on [police under investigation](#).

Incidents investigated by the IOPC

The police service and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) have shared responsibility for communications in IOPC independent and managed investigations. A [protocol between the IOPC and the NPCC](#) sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the IOPC and police forces in dealing with the media in the context of such investigations. It also includes guidance on communications issues, such as the naming of police officers and publication of reports.

For further information see [APP guidance on media releases for incidents where death and/or serious injury has resulted from armed police deployment](#).

Freedom of information

Media requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

The [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) provides a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, including the police service (subject to conditions and exemptions). Every request for information should be assessed on its own specific facts. If a member of the media requests information that is readily available but is not on the force website, it should be routinely provided by the CCD. In cases where it would require a disproportionate amount of time to secure the information, or if it is unclear that it should be released, the media representative may be referred to the force's freedom of information team. Each force should have its own publication scheme that will be useful for the media.

Tags

Engagement and communication