



Media Engagement Policy

Policy

1. Introduction

This policy document outlines the Force's approach to media relations and instructs police officers and police staff, special constables and volunteers on the expected engagement standards and behaviour.

Officers, staff, special constables and volunteers with any concerns about handling the media must call the team..

The policy incorporates recommendations from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) on police integrity and meets or exceeds national best practice and guidance set by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Communications Advisory Group and [Authorised Professional Practice \(APP\)](#).

This will ensure all media relations activity, whether conducted by the News and Media Team, or others in the Force, is carried out consistently and for a legitimate purpose in line with the Standards of Professional Behaviour and the [Code of Ethics](#), adheres to national best practice and demonstrates openness and integrity.

2. Scope

This policy and procedure covers all aspects of media relations activity and interaction including integrity in interactions with media representatives, the process for recording, categorising and releasing information to the media, how to facilitate different kinds of media interaction and media training.

3. Policy Statement

2.1 It is our policy to maintain a positive and open relationship with the news media and provide prompt and helpful responses whilst maintaining the integrity of operations and protecting the human rights of individuals.

News media refers to genuine members of the media who carry identification which can be produced on request. The most reliable form of identification is the [UK Press Card](#) which includes a number you can call to verify that the card is genuine.

2.2 It is our intention to maintain an open and transparent approach and we will only withhold information for legal, operational or security reasons or where there is a duty of confidentiality.

2.3 Records of all contact with the news media will be kept, to ensure that there is a clear and fully searchable audit trail and to demonstrate the integrity with which all our relationships with the news media are conducted.

Procedure

1. Introduction

1.1 The Surrey Police Media Engagement Procedure combines a number of guidance and advice documents into one procedure and is intended to provide staff and officers with a clear framework around interactions with the media to ensure these interactions are conducted in a transparent and consistent manner and are in keeping with the high professional conduct and integrity standards expected by Surrey Police.

“The media has a significant role in holding policing to account and in informing the public about the work of the police service. There is an obligation on the police service to engage with the public, both to communicate what the police are trying to do strategically and, at an operational level, to engage the public in fighting crime, such as to make appeals for information and for the identification of suspects and witnesses.” ACPO Guidance for Relationships with the Media 2013

“The College of Policing and the NPCC should consider how confidence between the police service and the media can be rebuilt. This process will require a balanced and engaged approach from both policing and the media.”

Recommendation from the Independent external review of Lancashire Constabulary’s operational response to reported missing person Nicola Bulley, November 2023

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2. Rationale

2.1 The media has a duty to report on many incidents dealt with by the police. It is important to build good working practices to ensure information given by the Force supports timely and accurate reporting.

2.2 Public confidence in policing can be greatly influenced by the media. Most members of the public rarely have direct contact with the police and will form opinions based on what they see, read and hear.

2.3 The media can be an effective tool for public engagement and can support operational activity through appeals for witnesses and information.

2.4 The police service has a duty to be open and transparent, wherever possible, but must balance this against the duty to safeguard the confidentiality and integrity of information.

3. The role of the News and Media Team and Corporate Communications team

3.1 The News and Media Team (within Surrey Police's Corporate Communications and Engagement Department) is the first port of call for all members of the media who are looking for responses to media enquiries. A team of trained Communications Officers provide a desk-based service during working hours and an on-call service out of hours to ensure that enquiries are dealt with in a timely and efficient manner.

3.2 As well as being a specialist resource to meet the considerable demand for information from the media and the public, the team has a proactive role to play in police operations or investigations where an effective communications strategy is a critical aspect of success.

3.3 The Corporate Communications and Engagement Department also supports the Digital 101 team by monitoring social media posts / commentary on incidents which have attracted significant engagement, are of high public interest or pose a threat to trust and confidence in policing. Where misinformation / disinformation is evident, the team will seek to correct through engagement with the online commentary.

3.4 We will strongly defend the Force if we are unfairly criticised. If we make mistakes, we will explain where we have fallen short of the Standards of Professional Behaviour and Code of Ethics. Lessons learned are debriefed and implemented via appropriate internal mechanisms.

3.5 Incorrect data provided by the News and Media Team or published on any of the Force's social media channels should be rectified immediately and reported to the Information Management Team – more information is available here.

3.6 In addition to the above, the Corporate Communications and Engagement Department offers professional advice, support and training to police officers, police staff, volunteers and special constables who are in contact with representatives from the media or are using media channels to communicate with the public.

Staff and officers with concerns about handling the media must call the team on 01483 632000 or e-mail !Media Relations.

3.7 Further information can be found in the A-Z Media Guidelines. These guidelines are based on the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice on Media Relations which can be found [here](#).

4. Who should speak to the media?

4.1 Police officers and police staff are encouraged to speak to the media about factual matters which relate to their role in line with the Media Engagement Policy. The media can be used to provide information about Force activities in local communities to increase understanding of policing and promote community safety. Officers and staff are requested to speak to the News and Media Team to notify them that an interaction is planned or has taken place.

4.2 Whilst it is important to maintain good local relationships with the media, they must remain professional and appropriate.

4.3 Information must not be given to the media where there are legal, operational or disciplinary reasons for withholding it. If in doubt, seek advice from the News and Media Team.

4.4 The vast majority of media queries and requests for interviews are received and dealt with by the News and Media Team. If you are approached for comment by the media, consider whether it is appropriate, and you have sufficient knowledge to be able to respond. If you are in any doubt or if the matter has significant community issues attached to it, is politically sensitive, a major crime incident, or could impact on the reputation of the Force, please contact the news desk for advice (see 14.0 Quick Check for assistance.)

4.5 A record of all interactions between police officers and police staff and the media must be made. The time and date, brief details, content and persons involved must be recorded on their Mobile Data Terminal.

4.6 Requests for formal statements or media interviews must be directed to the News and Media Team to log on its data management tool – currently PR Manager - and facilitate any arrangements and/or offer advice as required.

4.7 Media briefings held with Safer Neighbourhood Teams on the operating bases, where a Communications Officer is not present, must be recorded in the form of minutes or brief notes and sent to Media.Relations to be logged.

4.8 A member of the Corporate Communications and Engagement Department must be present at organised formal media interviews with senior officers.

4.9 The basis of any conversation with the media must be clearly established between both parties before information is exchanged. Definitions vary but the following descriptions commonly apply.

* Reportable – All that is said may be reported, quoted and attributed, at the media's discretion. All communications must be on this basis unless exceptional circumstances apply. A quote in a media release must 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 must record the subject or subjects discussed. This record must 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 must be recorded.

4.10 A decision that embargoed or non-reportable material is necessary rests with the senior investigating officer in liaison with the News and Media Team. This decision must be documented, and a record of what information was given and to whom must be logged on PR Manager.

5. Integrity

5.1 All police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers are required to adhere to the principles of the Code of Ethics in any dealings with the media.

5.2 It is essential to the standards of integrity demanded of the police service that police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers recognise and avoid (or respond appropriately) to potential conflicts of interest. These can be understood as situations where there may be competing obligations or interests to those which relate to the legitimate policing purpose for engaging with the media.

5.3 Information must not be given to the media where there are legal, operational or disciplinary reasons for withholding the information.

5.4 Police officers, police staff and special constables discovered inappropriately passing any confidential or operationally sensitive information/material to the media will be liable to misconduct proceedings. Deliberate "leaking" of such information will be viewed seriously, and appropriate criminal and gross misconduct proceedings will follow.

5.5 Any gifts or hospitality provided by media representatives must be recorded in accordance with Force policy on Gifts, Gratuities and Hospitality.

5.6 Where a police officer, member of police staff, special constable or volunteer has a family member or personal relationship with a member of the media outside of their professional policing role it must be disclosed to Professional Standards.

5.7 Police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers have a clear duty to report to a line manager any corrupt practice or perception of corruption (e.g. offer of reward for information, any unacceptable level of hospitality, or seeking to engender an inappropriate relationship.)

5.8 Interviews given or articles written for personal gain must only be done with approval from Professional Standards and in line with the Business Interests Policy.

5.9 All police officers and police staff are expected to proactively check relevant Force policies and whether or not there are legal or operational reasons why information cannot be given out before giving any comment.

6. Dealing with the media at the scene of an incident

6.1 Members of the media have a duty to report from the scene of many of the incidents dealt with by police. We should endeavour, where possible, to help them carry out their responsibilities, provided they do not adversely affect ours.

6.2 Advice and assistance in dealing with members of the media is available from the News and Media Team or out of hours an on-call Communications Officer is available via the Force Command Centre.

6.3 Members of the media do not need a permit to photograph or film in public places. This also applies to members of the public using their mobile phones or personal recording equipment in public places.

6.4 The media may take photographs and film incidents and we have no legal power or moral responsibility to prevent or restrict what they record. It is a matter for their editors to control what is published or broadcast, not the police.

6.5 There has been an increase in reported incidents involving auditors and social media bloggers targeting police premises with the purpose of capturing staff on camera and live-streaming to social media platforms or uploading with edited content. Auditors use security concerns surrounding the filming of staff and premises alongside limited powers to prevent it. They appear to provoke staff and incite staff into potentially embarrassing reactions, often asserting that staff are overstepping legal boundaries. When dealing with auditors/bloggers, the ACPO Guidance for Photographers 2010 states that there are no powers prohibiting the taking of photographs, film or digital images in a public place. Therefore, members of the public and press must not be prevented from doing so. Please Refer to [NPCC Guidance on Auditors and Bloggers](#).

6.6 Once images are recorded, we have no power to delete or confiscate them without a court order, even if we think they contain damaging or useful evidence.

6.7 If cordons are necessary, it may be advantageous to provide the media with a good vantage point from which they can operate otherwise they may try to get around the

cordons and interfere with police operations. Providing an area for members of the media does not exclude them from other areas to which the general public have access. The News and Media Team can help to establish a Media Rendezvous Point (MRVP.)

6.8 In the early stages of an incident, you may be approached for comment at a cordon or scene. Journalists must be referred to the News and Media Team who will be able to give appropriate details as agreed with the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) or Officer in the Case (OIC) and ensuring that they protect the investigation and safeguard the individuals involved.

6.9 If someone who is distressed or bereaved asks the police to intervene to prevent members of the media filming or photographing them, we may pass on their request, but we have no power to prevent or restrict media activity. More advice on dealing with media intrusion is available from IPSO ([Independent Press Standards Organisation](https://www.ipso.co.uk)).

6.10 If representatives of the media are trespassing on private property, the person who owns or controls the premises may eject them and may ask for police help in preventing a breach of the peace while they do so. The media have their own rules of conduct and complaints procedures if members of the public object. The media will often seek to speak to witnesses, neighbours or local people at the scene of an incident. It is the choice of individuals whether they wish to speak to the media in such circumstances and, provided that no cordon is breached, officers must not seek to restrict the activity or tell individuals not to speak to the media.

6.11 Giving members of the media access to incident scenes is a matter for the Officer In Charge (OIC), SIO or a senior officer. The gathering of evidence and forensic retrieval make access unlikely in the early stages and this must be explained to members of the media. Requests for access must be passed to the Corporate Communications team to discuss with the SIO.

6.12 To help you identify genuine members of the media, most will carry identification which they will produce to you on request. The most reliable form of identification is the [UK Press Card](#) which includes a number you can call to verify that the card is genuine. A member of the media will not object to you checking that they are who they say who they are, if the situation warrants a high level of security.

6.13 To enter private property while accompanying police, for example on a drugs operation, we cannot give or deny permission to members of the media whether the premises are directly involved in the police operation or not. This is a matter between the person who owns or is in control of the premises and the members of the media.

6.14 Media accompanying police on proactive operations, i.e. drugs raids must be reminded they are not entitled to enter private property without the permission of the property owner and that care must be taken not to publish or broadcast material which would identify the property or its owner. They must also be reminded that their material will be subject to the rules of disclosure.

6.15 The indemnity agreement to be signed by media outlets when accompanying the police on proactive operations.

7. Exclusives

7.1 Media organisations must 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 must 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.

7.2 Once in the public domain, information released by the police must be available to all.

7.3 There are occasions when 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 the News and Media Team.

7.4 On some occasions, it may be necessary to briefly delay the release of information to the media to ensure that resources are in place to respond to public feedback, for example an appeal for witnesses or information, where officers need to be immediately available to respond to arrest named suspects.

8. Positive news stories

8.1 Police officers and police staff must seek to identify opportunities to communicate proactively about the Force, its work and policing in general. Anyone with ideas for proactive news stories must contact the News and Media Team for assistance.

8.2 Legitimacy and public confidence in policing can be supported through positive news stories as well as reactive responses to news. In particular, stories may be found where members of the public have helped police achieve good results and can provide an opportunity for a force to thank the public in return.

8.3 Where a positive outcome in an investigation or at court is anticipated, it is good practice to bring matters to the attention of the News and Media Team in good time.

9. Challenging inaccuracies

9.1 The media have a responsibility to produce accurate and balanced reporting.

9.2 Where possible, it is good practice to challenge inaccuracies or lack of balance. There are a number of ways of doing this. The News and Media Team will be able to provide advice.

9.3 If a mistake has been made by a police officer or member of police staff and misinformation has been given to the media it is important to correct that quickly to ensure accurate reporting. The News and Media Team will be able to give advice on how to do this.

10. The Force unfairly criticised by the media

10.1 When police officers or police staff or the force are unfairly criticised in the media in a work capacity, Surrey Police will look to challenge the particular article or programme. Each case will be judged on its merits and includes an assessment of any possible impact. There may be occasions when sending a letter from the force may unnecessarily draw additional unwanted attention to the original piece, so this will be considered.

10.2 The Force will demonstrate support for its employees, special constables and volunteers in the difficult job they do. Any member of staff who feels an item should be responded to, must contact the News and Media Team or their staff association.

10.3 Inaccurate or misleading media coverage can be extremely damaging to an organisation or an individual. The News and Media Team 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, or 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.

11. Impact of media relation on diverse groups or people

11.1 When developing and issuing media communications, the News and Media Team must consider the potential impact of messaging on all communities, particularly those from under-represented or marginalised groups. Communications must be accurate, proportionate, and framed in a way that supports public confidence, avoids harm, and reflects the diversity of Surrey's communities.

11.2 Messaging must not reinforce stereotypes, stigmatise particular groups, or unintentionally associate protected characteristics with criminality or wrongdoing.

11.3 The News and Media Team should ensure that language, imagery, and framing are inclusive, respectful, and trauma-informed, particularly in relation to hate crime, domestic abuse, safeguarding, use of force, and other sensitive policing activities.

11.4 Person-centred language must be used wherever possible, and care must be taken to avoid victim-blaming, sensationalism, or unnecessary detail that could cause distress or lead to identification of victims, especially within small or close-knit communities.

11.5 In preparing media releases and public statements, the News and Media Team must consider how different communities access information and ensure engagement

is not limited to mainstream media outlets alone. Where appropriate, this may include engagement with community, faith, LGBTQ+, disability, or other specialist media platforms to support reassurance, understanding, and accessibility.

11.6 Communications must be provided in clear and accessible formats, using plain English, with consideration given to translation or alternative formats where there is a clear community need. Support could be accessed from advisory groups or partner agencies such as [Surrey Coalition](#).

11.7 For sensitive or high-impact communications, the Communications Team must consider whether specialist advice is required prior to release. This may include consulting the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, staff networks, liaison officers or community engagement teams, or relevant liaison officers to understand potential community impact and mitigate unintended consequences.

11.8 Where inaccuracies or harmful narratives arise in media coverage, the News and Media Team must take timely and proportionate steps to correct misinformation and provide reassurance, in order to maintain transparency and public trust.

12. Release of photographs

12.1 CCTV images - These will only be issued to the media if their release has been approved by the SIO or OIC and the conditions outlined in the A-Z Media Guidelines have been met.

12.2 Pictures of named (wanted) individuals - Images of both known and unknown persons can be released to the media prior to arrest or charge. Care must be taken to ensure the wording is accurate – for example – it must not imply the person is guilty of the offence but state that police want to speak to this person in connection with an incident/offence. With known individuals, efforts must have been made to locate them by other means prior to the release of their image to the public where practicable or must be released if they are a danger to the public. Any appeal must be cleared through the SIO prior to release. If the person in the photograph is apprehended and later released without charge, the media must be informed as soon as possible, and the picture removed from the Force website and any Force social media channels.

12.3 Pictures of defendants - A defendant is 18 or older and has recently been convicted in a court of law. Pictures of defendants aged between 15 and 18 years may only be released if the court allows them to be identified after they have been convicted of a serious crime (such as murder) in a crown court or if related to a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO).

12.4 Upon conviction – The case is deemed as being of indictable or significant public interest (murder, sex offences, large fraud, kidnap, or persistent offending) and there is no court order preventing him/her from being identified.

12.5 Upon sentencing – The defendant has received a custodial sentence of 12 months or more, is a persistent offender, has been made subject to a CBO and there is no court order preventing him/her from being identified. An exception may be made if the case has attracted significant public interest.

12.6 The OIC, SIO or a senior officer (inspector or above) must be informed that a picture is planned for release in order to raise any concerns and to confirm the person in the photo is the offender.

12.7 Pictures of staff/officers/special constables/volunteers and members of the public - This applies to any photographs taken of officers/staff or members of the public who are not defendants in a criminal case.

12.8 A consent form must be signed by any member of the public who appears in a photograph prior to release or publication by the organisation.

12.9 Surrey Police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers whose photographs are taken during the course of their duty will be given the chance to opt out prior to publication.

12.10 No images of children under the age of 18 years can be released or published without the signed consent of a parent or legal guardian.

13. Social Media

13.1 Social media channels can have benefits as a way to start conversations, build communities of interest, engage with the public and quickly provide information on breaking incidents.

13.2 All police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers are expected to use social media in line with joint force Social Media Policy Surrey and Sussex on Acceptable Use of Social Networking Websites.

13.3 The same rules and ethos that apply to traditional media also apply to the use of social networks such as Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter).

13.4 It is important to note that constraints apply even to the private use of any social media platform by serving police officers and staff. Personal information that could impact on your professional reputation or that of Surrey Police must not be shared. Additionally, cases or work-related issues must not be discussed on private accounts via Facebook, X, or any other social media.

13.5 Monitoring of the social media channels for Surrey Police is carried out by the Digital Desk in the Force Command Centre and supported, where appropriate, by the Corporate Communications and Engagement Department. Local Beat accounts are managed by Safer Neighbourhood Teams who are responsible for ensuring the content is appropriate and legally sound. Media queries about information posted on Beat Facebook accounts will be directed to the Neighbourhood Team running that account in the first instance to provide a suitable response in line with the guidance given in this document. The News and Media Team can be contacted for advice on suitable content and legality issues or to escalate a potential reputation risk or critical issue for the Force. This practice also applies to any other individuals or teams using social media on behalf of the Force.

13.6 Please refer to The Social Media Policy Surrey and Sussex.

14. Covert tactics

14.1 Covert tactics, including those referred to in evidence, are successful because they are covert. It is unhelpful to future operations to draw attention to tactics in media interviews.

15. Quick Check

15.1 This guidance may not provide answers to every situation but seeks to set an approach and ethos which will help police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers to be clear on best practice and establish a productive and effective relationship with the media.

15.2 Officers, staff, special constables and volunteers must always be clear about why they are doing something and how it may be perceived by others.

15.3 As a simple rule, ask yourself: 'Am I the person responsible for communicating about this issue and is there a policing purpose for doing so?'

15.4 To summarise:

- Inform the News and Media Team and seek advice if required
- Prepare well
- Record interaction
- Expect to be recorded and behave accordingly
- Share information if it is right for policing purposes

16. Legal Basis and Guidance Framework

16.1 Every interaction we have with journalists must be conducted within a legal framework to ensure that the disclosure of information to the media is lawful.

16.2 Numerous acts of parliament provide a context in which information will be disclosed including, but not limited to, the Contempt of Court Act, the Children and Young Person's Act and the Sexual Offences Act, the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act and Human Rights legislation.

16.3 [The Authorised Professional Practice](#) issued by the College of Policing provides further assistance in recommending best practice in the context of police / media relations and Surrey Police's A-Z Media Guidelines operates within the context established by these notes.

17. Conclusion

17.1 This document is intended to give all police officers, police staff, special constables and volunteers an overview on how best to engage with members of the media. Further details about specific situations can be found in the A to Z of Media Guidelines.

17.2 Training is available for police officers and staff who are in regular contact with the media and require help with interview techniques etc.

17.3 Police officers and police staff are encouraged to build positive and professional relationships with members of the media but are reminded that help and advice is available from the News and Media Team.