

December 2008

MEDIA HANDLING GUIDANCE FOR THAMES VALLEY POLICE STAFF

Most members of the public rarely have personal contact with the police and their opinions of us are often influenced by what they read, see and hear in the media. Journalists, photographers and film crews can help us earn the respect, trust and support of the communities we serve by showing the huge variety of challenges which staff face every day.

It is important that we build good relationships with the media, even when the circumstances are difficult. They have a duty to report many of those things that we have to deal with – crime, demonstrations, accidents, major events and incidents.

This guide has two sections:

- Advice on how to deal with the media at the scene of an incident.
- Advice on talking to, and writing for, the media.

SECTION ONE - A 10-point plan on dealing with the media at the scene of an incident

- 1) Members of the media have a duty to report from the scene of many of the incidents we have to deal with. We should actively help them carry out their responsibilities provided they do not interfere with ours.
- 2) The public, including victims and witnesses, their families and friends, have a right to speak to the media if they wish. Officers, PCSOs and Specials should not advise members of the public not to speak to media unless the Officer in the Case (OIC) or the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) has decided there are strong operational reasons for doing so.
- 3) Where it is necessary to put cordons in place, it is much better to provide the media with a good vantage point from which they can operate rather than to exclude them, 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 operating from other areas to which the general public have access.
- 4) Members of the media have a duty to 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. 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.

- 5) If someone who is distressed or bereaved asks for 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. If they are trespassing on private property, the person who owns or controls the premises may eject them and may ask for your 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.
- 6) Members of the media do not need a permit to photograph or film in public places.
- 7) To enter private property while accompanying police, the media must obtain permission, which must be recorded, from the person who owns or is in control of the premises. We cannot give or deny permission to members of the media to enter private premises 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.
- 8) Giving members of the media access to incident scenes is a matter for the Senior Investigating Officer. The gathering of evidence and forensic retrieval make access unlikely in the early stages and this should be explained to members of the media. Requests for access should be passed to the Senior Investigating Officer who should allow access in appropriate cases as soon as practicable.
- 9) 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 and the holder is a bona fide news gatherer. A member of the media will not object to you checking that they are who they say they are, if the situation warrants a high level of security.
- 10) Advice and assistance in dealing with members of the media is available via HQ Press Office on 01865 846699 or out of hours via HBI.

SECTION TWO - Advice on talking to, and writing for, the media

Thames Valley Police has a policy of being open and honest with the media and all members of staff are able to talk to media representatives. Staff are encouraged to use the media to provide information about the Force's activities to local communities in order to increase understanding of policing and promote community safety. However, in order to prevent this practice

being abused, the following guidelines have been prepared and officers, police support staff and special constables are expected to follow them. More detailed information on media handling is available from HQ Press Office.

Talking to/writing for the media

All members of staff are allowed to talk to the media or to write articles for newspapers/parish magazines/websites (including blogs) in their capacity as a Thames Valley Police employee providing:

- a) That the information given should not be withheld for essential legal, operational or disciplinary reasons. Members of staff discovered passing any confidential or operationally sensitive information/material to the media will be liable to disciplinary procedures. Deliberate "leaking" of such information will be viewed as a very serious matter.
- b) No comments are made which could discredit the police service in general or Thames Valley Police in particular.
- c) All comments made are in line with Force policy.
- d) No interviews are given or articles written for personal gain without prior approval from the Head of Personnel.
- e) The member of staff has considered whether he/she is sufficiently knowledgeable about the subject on which he/she is to be interviewed, or which he/she has been asked to write about.

All members of staff are expected to proactively check relevant Force policy (available from the intranet and HQ press office) and whether or not there are legal, operational or disciplinary reasons why information cannot be given out before giving interviews or submitting written articles. If in doubt, staff should check with their line manager or HQ Press Office.

Expressing personal views

Members of staff are able to express personal views on any subject but before doing so should have regard to the following:

- a) Staff expressing views on non-police related matters should have no need to refer to the fact that they are a member of Thames Valley Police.
- b) Personal views which, in style or content, discredit Thames Valley Police or the police service in general, are not acceptable and will be dealt with as a disciplinary matter in appropriate cases.
- c) It must always be made clear that the views being expressed are personal and not necessarily the views of Thames Valley Police.

- d) It is expected that staff will not publicly criticise Force policy. Anyone with concerns about Force policy should seek to resolve the matter internally through an appropriate manager. If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved, it should then be raised with a chief officer.

Partner agencies

Staff are expected not to make critical comments to the media about partner agencies, including local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts, without the authority of a superintendent or head of department.

Social networking sites

Staff wishing to use social networking sites should do so in a private capacity and should not include photographs of themselves in uniform or at work, or refer to any operationally sensitive material. Official Thames Valley Police pages will be authorised by Corporate Information.

Television and radio

Staff are encouraged to participate in local radio interviews/programmes to provide information to the public about local policing activities. As this may lead to other media inquiries, it is helpful if staff can inform their local communications team if they taking part in local radio programmes/news items.

All requests for staff to participate in local television news programmes must be referred to local communications team or HQ press office who will be able to provide advice.

All requests for staff to participate in national television programmes/news items in their capacity as a member of Thames Valley Police must be referred to Corporate Information. Staff who wish to take part in television programmes in a personal capacity, but where reference to Thames Valley Police is likely to be made, should also inform Corporate Information.