

Thames Valley Police - Media Team

Service Level Agreement

Background

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) is designed to provide Thames Valley Police staff and officers with a clear framework to enable open, transparent and consistent interaction with the media whilst ensuring professional conduct and integrity. It also provides the media with guidance as to level of service it should receive.

The force's Media Engagement Policy was last revised in 2020.

Thames Valley Police Media Team

The force's Media Team is made up of qualified communications professionals with years of experience in media management, public relations and internal and external communications.

The team provides all levels of communications support for crimes, incidents, trials and events. Some of the work undertaken by the team consists of:

- Devising communications strategies
- Writing and publishing press releases
- Writing social media content
- Managing communications at incidents
- Managing communications at court trials
- Developing content to support investigations, incidents and court trials
- Organising and executing press conferences and briefings
- Training officers and staff in media law, media engagement and interview techniques
- Supporting victims and families of victims with media engagement
- Supporting the promotion of the force's campaigns
- Providing a 24/7 media support service to the force
- Answering media enquiries

Our priorities

While the team responds to enquiries from the media it is primarily tasked by the organisation to support officers with appeals, court cases and family and victim liaison. We also proactively source opportunities to promote the work of the force and to protect the public.

As with a newsroom, we must prioritise our workload. We do this in terms of safety to the public and protecting the most vulnerable.

Our first priority is to focus on the incidents where communication is needed to prevent threat, risk and harm to the public. We then prioritise work that will help prevent or detect crime. At all times we work to ensure the force is transparent and accountable.

We apply our time and resources to the media and communication channels that will give us the greatest impact and bring the greatest operational benefit. This can mean either prioritising the channel / media that enables us to reach the most people, or sometimes it can mean focusing our attention on channels that may have smaller but very specific audiences, e.g. minority ethnic communities, students or certain age groups.

The team answers approximately 10,000 enquiries from the media every year and will respond to media enquiries when there is policing purpose. The more background information the reporter can provide the Media Office the better the team will be able to assist. For example, in order to respond to an enquiry about an incident the team requires a road name and date to search the force's systems. A 'time of incident' will also assist the team in being able to respond in a prompt manner.

Contacting the Media Office

The Media Office opening hours are:

- 7am to 6pm Monday to Friday
- 9am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday

To contact the Media Office during these hours please call 01865 542047 or email mediaoffice@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

For urgent media enquiries after closing hours, contact the control room inspector on the normal media office number, 01865 542047. You may be asked to leave a message. A Media Officer is available 24/7 to take media enquiries that relate to incidents where there is deemed to be a threat, harm or risk to the public, or there is likely to be significant impact on the reputation of the force, otherwise your enquiry will be answered when the Media Office reopens.

Classification of media enquiries

The team is introducing a classification system for media enquiries so they are prioritised by the seriousness of the crime and threat, risk and harm to the public. This approach will help to better manage the expectations of the media so they can plan their workload.

- Priority 1 response time: we will aim to answer these enquiries within 6 office hours.
- Priority 2 response time: we will aim to answer these enquiries within 24 office hours.

- Priority 3 response time: we will aim to answer these enquiries within 48 office hours.

Enquiries that fall outside these priority categories, such as low level crime or feature requests we will aim to respond to within seven days.

Please note that all of these response times are subject on a case-by-case basis to the agreement from the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO).

The Media Team work under the direction of the force command structure and all material relating to incidents and investigations are subject to clearance procedures. The ultimate responsibility for the media strategy associated with an investigation sits with the SIO.

Classification categories

Priority 1 – target response time 6 office hours

- Murder where an offender(s) is outstanding
- Stranger rape where an offender(s) is outstanding
- Terrorism offences where an offender(s) is outstanding
- Attempted murder where an offender(s) is outstanding
- Incidents formally classified as ‘Major Incidents’
- Sexual assaults where an offender(s) is outstanding
- Arson with intent to endanger life where an offender(s) is outstanding
- High risk missing people
- Ongoing kidnap/abduction investigations where there is no media blackout
- Fatal road traffic collision that have happened within the last 24 hours
- Enquiries regarding wanted appeals relating to any of the aforementioned crimes

Priority 2 – target response time 24 office hours

- Murder where no suspects are outstanding
- Stranger rape where no suspects are outstanding
- Terrorism offences where no suspects are outstanding
- Attempted murder where no suspects are outstanding
- Sexual assaults where no suspects are outstanding
- Arson with intent to endanger life where no suspects are outstanding
- Robbery

- Aggravated burglary
- Assault
- Serious injury road traffic collisions
- Other wanted enquiries

Priority 3 - target response time 48 office hours

- Burglary
- Arson where there is no intent to endanger life
- Other sexual offences
- Historic fatal road traffic collisions
- Drugs offences
- Other offences such as vehicle crime, theft and criminal damage

Appendix 1: Contents of College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice (APP) Media Relations

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Appendix 2: A-Z of common subjects

Abduction/ Kidnapping

In cases of abduction or kidnapping where a life is genuinely thought to be at risk, the media may be asked to impose a news blackout however this will only be considered as a last resort and where absolutely necessary. The media will be asked not to report the incident if it is likely to make the release of the hostage more difficult.

Any request for a news blackout must be endorsed by a senior officer.

Amounts of cash stolen

Specific details of cash or securities stolen in raids on banks, building societies and post offices will not be given out to the media unless permission has been given by the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) and/or the head office of the company involved.

Quantities of cash should only be described as small/large, or simply 'a quantity of cash'.

Arrests and charges

The force follows the College of Policing's authorised professional practice which can be found via the following link - <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/engagement-and-communication/media-relations/> or see Appendix 1.

Arsons and fires

Media enquiries about fires should initially be directed to the relevant fire service. If the fire is being investigated as a suspected arson the force's Media Office will respond to enquiries from the media.

The Media Office will make it clear if arson is suspected after taking advice from the Officer in the Case (OIC), SIO or a senior officer in charge of the investigation, and use the opportunity to appeal for help/witnesses if appropriate.

No information will be released about the cause of a fire until this has been established. Personal details of people who have been injured or killed in a fire will only be provided to the media/ confirmed once formal identification has taken place and relatives have been informed.

Assaults

We do not release details of every assault which takes place in Thames Valley. The decision to publicise offences will depend upon the nature and severity of the incident, whether the case has any unusual aspects or if there is a real chance of witnesses coming forward.

We will usually proactively publicise incidents of GBH or wounding unless it is related to a domestic violence offence.

It is our policy not to identify or issue photographs of victims of assaults without their permission and that of the OIC, SIO or a senior officer. A victim's address will not be released.

Assaults on police officers

We do not notify the media of every assault on a police officer, but if an officer is seriously injured on duty, their name, rank and station can be released, subject to their permission or their family's permission.

The media sometimes ask for a photograph of the injured officer, but this would only be provided with the agreement of the officer or a member of his / her family.

Baby deaths

Due to the complex nature of baby deaths and the time it can take for medical test results to be returned, the media strategy will be discussed and agreed with the SIO and a Media Officer on a case-by-case basis. Therefore the normal approach for the release of information regarding murders and suspicious deaths, arrests and charges may not apply.

Bogus officials

Media reports about bogus officials and distraction burglaries can alert people to be on their guard, and can be used to appeal for information. Details of the road where the incident happened and the *Modus Operandi* can be released to raise awareness, as well as appeal for witnesses.

If it is likely that a road name could possibly identify a vulnerable victim we will confirm the incident happened within the area of a nearby main road.

We seek the media's support to use every opportunity to pass on crime prevention advice to the public.

Bomb alerts, hoaxes and suspect packages

Details of bomb scares/hoaxes and suspect packages will not be automatically released to the media unless there is a need to warn and inform the public.

If agreed for release, the statement will be approved by Counter Terrorism Policing South East where appropriate and a senior ranked officer from TVP. It will confirm details, including the time, place, whether a bomb disposal team has been called and if there was disruption to local people or traffic.

Breath tests

Thames Valley Police does not issue details about any individuals who have been breathalysed. If a reporter is aware from other sources that a person has been breathalysed, we will not confirm or deny the identity of the motorist.

However, if a motorist has been charged with an offence following a breath test, their name, gender, age, address and court hearing details will be provided to the media. Details of bail can also be released if applicable.

Burglaries

Details of every domestic burglary will not be released proactively. In some cases if a press release may help recover stolen property or identify a possible offender a release can be made.

If the victim asks for their details not to be released to the media, his/her wishes will be respected. However, details of the incident itself may still be released. The general location (but not house numbers/names), details of what happened and what was stolen can be provided as long as it does not lead to the identification of the victim.

Cautioning

Thames Valley Police does not release the identity of anyone cautioned. If asked about a specific case, the force will confirm the fact that a man or a woman was cautioned.

CBRN (chemical, biological, radio-active, nuclear)

Any statements to the public relating to a CBRN incident are cleared by the OIC, SIO or a senior officer or by Gold Command if the Emergency Plan is in operation.

Complaints against the police

To answer enquiries about complaints, the Media Office requires the following details: Complainant's name, date the complaint made the complaint to the force, how the complainant made the complaint to the force (e.g. over the phone, online, at a police station), details of the complaint, complaint reference number (if known).

The Media Office will establish if an official complaint has been made to Thames Valley Police before any response is given. The force has a complaints procedure which will determine if the complaint is justified. Until this process has been completed any statement given to the media will not attempt to apportion blame or determine the outcome of the investigation into the complaint.

The force's Professional Standards Department will also be consulted before any statement is released.

Condition checks

It is not the job of the Media Office to carry out condition checks for the media. However in cases where the victim's injuries are life threatening and a crime has been committed i.e. attempted murder, we can commit to one condition check per media outlet per day.

If the injuries have been caused by a Road Traffic Collision and there is no criminal investigation then the Media Office will not carry out condition checks for the media. They will be referred to the relevant hospital media office.

Counter Terrorism Policing South East (formerly SECTU)

Any media enquiries regarding work undertaken by CT Policing South East should be sent to CTPSouthEastCommunications@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

Court details

The Media Office only has access to details of a defendant's first court hearing at Magistrates' Court – the team can provide the name of the court and the date of the scheduled hearing. For enquiries about further court hearings the relevant court must be contacted directly by media as this information is not held on the force's systems.

Criminal records

Criminal records are confidential and under no circumstances will there be any discussion with the media as to whether or not a person has previous convictions prior to court proceedings.

Post-sentence, in consultation with the Criminal Prosecution Service (CPS) and other criminal justice organisations, it may be possible to disclose previous, unspent convictions. This process will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Deaths in police custody

Following a death in police custody an initial statement will be prepared by the Media Office and authorised by an officer of ACC rank or higher. It will normally include:

- Confirmation that a death has occurred
- Details of the deceased, subject to next of kin having been informed
- Confirmation of the cause of death, subject to the agreement of the coroner, and the confirmation that the matter has been referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission
- The name of the investigating officer(s) once appointed
- Confirmation whether an officer(s) has been transferred or suspended
- Details of any charges in connection with the investigation
- If appropriate, details of any police prisoner procedures

Documentary requests

Thames Valley Police receives a large volume of documentary requests every year. As a result of this, we will proactively get in touch with the requests that we are interested in supporting.

If you do not receive a reply within eight weeks, please assume that we are unable to support your request.

Facilitating filming of our officers and staff can involve significant resources and it is important that they can carry out their work with minimal disruption. Therefore, there needs to be a clear business case in terms of value to the public and a policing need for TVP to agree to feature.

From 1 April 2019, Thames Valley Police is charging for TV production companies who wish to make a documentary. These charges have been developed in line with the OPCC's Proposed Fees and Chargeable Rates, and NPCC guidelines. For more information regarding these fees, please see our [charging model](#).

(https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/thames-valley/about-us/media/tvp_documentary_requests_fees_and_charges.pdf)

Production companies will be required to sign a contract/access agreement with Thames Valley Police. This is important for data protection, media law and indemnity reasons, but not designed to give the police editorial control.

For more details about documentary request visit

<https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/police-forces/thames-valley-police/areas/au/about-us/documentary-requests/>

Escaped prisoners

a) From police custody

Basic circumstances of the escape such as where and when it happened, can be confirmed if asked. Details of the person who escaped will not normally be published proactively unless the escape happened after a court appearance or if the escapee is considered to be dangerous and the public need to be warned.

b) From prison

The Media Office will consult with the SIO, the prison authorities and/or the Home Office regarding release of information about the circumstances of the escape if the prisoner considered dangerous.

Major incidents

If a major incident is declared Thames Valley Police will be collaborating with the other emergency services and the agency with primacy will be confirmed. We will work closely with the other agencies to co-ordinate our messages to provide key messages to the public.

If urgent messages need to be delivered to the public we will prioritise the use of social media channels.

Media blackout

On some occasions, such as during an ongoing abduction/kidnap or an act of terrorism, the force might request a media blackout, or may request that the media don't report specific details, such as a suspect's name. These requests will only be given if there is a threat to national security or to lives.

Misconduct

The force follows the College of Policing's authorised professional practice which can be found via the following link - <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/engagement-and-communication/media-relations/>

Thames Valley Police publishes information about public misconduct or special case hearings and all misconduct hearing outcomes on its website (search for Misconduct).

It is important for public confidence in policing that Thames Valley Police is open and accountable about misconduct proceedings involving officers, staff, Specials and volunteers.

Details of any upcoming misconduct hearings to be held in public, including details of how to attend, are published on the force's website www.thamesvalley.police.uk

Missing person appeals

Publicity can often play an important role in helping to trace missing people, and officers and staff view this as a valuable investigative tool.

If a missing person has been assessed as 'high risk' the Media Office will be notified immediately. If known, the following information will be released to the public via our website and/or social media channels:

- Name and age of the missing person
- Street they live in or area they come from
- Date, time and location of when they were last seen
- Description of the missing person and the clothing they were wearing when they went missing
- Places or locations they are known to frequent
- Any other reasons for concern
- A recent photo of the missing person. TVP will seek permission for the release of the photo from the next of kin. However if the missing person is considered to be in immediate risk the photo can be released with the permission of a senior officer.

The Media Office does not publish appeals for low or medium risk missing people. However, these appeals can be published by a police officer or by the relevant local area admin support.

Murder/ suspicious deaths

Murders always attract a great deal of media interest and often impact on the immediate local community.

A Media Officer will be appointed as the communications lead for the investigation and will act as the single point of contact for the SIO. They will set the communications strategy in consultation with the SIO and coordinate both the media management and community response.

There will be a proactive release of information to the public and the media at the earliest opportunity.

The victim's identity will not be confirmed until a formal identification has taken place. However, in some exceptional circumstances and in agreement with the SIO it may be necessary to confirm who the deceased is believed to be prior to formal identification taking place i.e. if there is a delay in identification due to the state of the body or if releasing this information might aid witnesses coming forward. However, this can only be done with the approval of the SIO.

The cause of death will only be released once confirmed following a post mortem. However, in some circumstances it may be necessary to confirm details of suspected injuries, e.g. gunshot wound or puncture wound. This would need to be approved by the SIO.

Naming victims and witnesses

The force follows the College of Policing's authorised professional practice which can be found via the following link - <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/engagement-and-communication/media-relations/> (See Appendix 1)

Naming individuals who have died in road traffic collisions or in non-suspicious incidents

The Media Office will only name those who have died in RTCs if the family give permission or want to publish a tribute.

The Media Office will not name people who have died in non-suspicious circumstances.

Photos

a) Convicted offenders

The force will release mugshots of a defendant aged 18 or older who has been convicted and sentenced to 18 months or more in custody in a court of law within the last seven days.

The Media Office will provide mugshots following conviction for more serious offences such as murder or rape.

The OIC, SIO or a senior officer alongside the Media Office will also consider releasing mugshots of persistent offenders or individuals who have been made subject to a Criminal Behaviour Order.

There must be no court order preventing him/her from being identified and pictures of juvenile defendants who have been convicted will only be released if the court allows them to be identified. Mugshots of defendants sentenced under Section 37 of the Mental Health Act will also not be released.

The OIC, SIO or a senior officer has to:

- agree in writing (hard copy or e-mail) to the release of a mugshot,
- confirm the person in the photo is the offender,
- be satisfied that the release of the photo is in the public interest
- confirm there are no reporting restrictions in place.

The victim's wishes will also be taken into consideration as to whether the mugshot should be released.

The media should provide the following information to the Media Office in order to request a mugshot. This is to ensure that the mugshot provided is that of the defendant and not a namesake.

- Name of the defendant
- Date of birth or age of the defendant
- Address of the defendant
- What they were convicted of, including date of the offence
- What sentence they received
- The date of the sentence
- The court at which they were sentenced

b) Incident photographs

It is not force policy for police photographs taken at the scene of incidents/operations to be routinely issued to the media, especially if those photographs are to be used as evidence in court. If a specific request is made, a photograph can only be released with the consent of the SIO. However these pictures are quite often released post-trial.

c) Police officers/staff

It is normal for the media to request pictures of police officers/staff who have been involved in an act of bravery, or if they have been assaulted and seriously injured. Pictures of

officers/staff will only be released with the permission of the officer/member of staff or his/her relatives.

d) Wanted persons

Photographs of wanted people are issued only in exceptional circumstances and there are very strict guidelines governing their release. The photograph can only be given to the media on the authority of an LPA Commander rank or higher.

e) Victims

Victims' photographs will only be released with permission from the victim or their relatives.

Pursuits

Details of all police pursuits are not routinely released to the media unless they result in a serious or fatal accident or are linked to a serious crime.

However, if the media are aware of an incident, brief details may be given, confirming that a vehicle was being followed by a police car, the time and location of the pursuit, how the pursuit started, brief details of the vehicle which was being followed, and any injuries.

Details about how the accident happened will not be confirmed so as not to prejudice any investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission or any future court proceedings.

Rape

The force follows the College of Policing's authorised professional practice which can be found via the following link - <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/engagement-and-communication/media-relations/> (See Appendix 1)

If a rape or serious sexual assault is reported to police but the offender is known to the victim, Thames Valley Police will not issue a proactive press release to the media unless there is an operational need to do so, e.g. if the offender is at large and, or there is a danger to the public.

Recording interactions with the media

We expect all police staff and officers to record all interactions with the media. This includes time and date of the meeting, brief details about its purpose, content, and persons involved should be recorded. This information is sent to the Media Office and logged in Vuelio.

Police staff or officers discovered inappropriately passing confidential or operationally sensitive information, known as 'leaking', to the media are liable to misconduct proceedings and, or criminal proceedings.

Any gifts received by the media or members of the public must be recorded.

Where police staff or officers have a family/association/friendship/relationship with a member of the media outside their professional policing role, it must be disclosed and recorded under the force's Disclosable Association policy.

Road collisions

We don't answer enquiries about road traffic collisions unless the enquiry is about a press release we have published. Our Joint Roads Policing Unit and control rooms post messages on social media to inform the public about collisions that are causing disruption to traffic. You can follow this account on Twitter: [@TVPRP](#)

Royal family

It is not force policy to comment on the personal or household security of members of the Royal family or any other VIP residents of the Thames Valley area.

All media enquiries will be directed to the appropriate Royal household.

Sieges

The Media Office will be informed as soon as possible about a siege, and if appropriate, a Media Officer will be sent to the scene to set up a media reception point.

If possible, and in consultation with the senior officer at the scene, the Media Officer will organise a vantage point where the media can watch from a safe distance.

Media statements will only be released with the authorisation of the officer in charge of the incident.

Social media and alerts

The Media Office does not have capacity to answer enquiries from the media about tweets, alerts or messages issued via the force's mobile phone app. Information published on these platforms has gone directly to the public rather than via a press release and the officer will have published all the information deemed relevant. More than 200 members of staff and officers are trained to use social media and they are encouraged to engage with any members of the public or media that reply or ask questions.

Statistics/FOIs

The Media Office does not hold all the force's statistical information but may be able to assist in obtaining data through the force's Governance and Service Improvement department. However it usually takes approximately ten working days for data to be compiled and checked. Some enquiries may have to be submitted as a Freedom of Information request depending on the complexity or any legal issues connected with the

enquiry. For more details please [visit our request information page](#). To make an FOI email publicaccess@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

Stolen property

The Media Office can help arrange publicity to try and reunite owners with their stolen property.

Trespassing

Trespassing is a civil matter so any enquiries the media has about an incident of trespassing such as an unauthorised encampment should be directed to the landowner, e.g. the local authority. Only if the force has removed trespassers using Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act will the Media Office be able to provide details.