

## INTRODUCTION

The Press Officer Handbook is guidance for press officers in the media centre dealing with media enquiries and should be treated as a reference point. If the answer to your question is not found in these pages – please ask for it to be included in any updates. This is a document for internal use only within the Department of Media and Public Relations.

It should be read in conjunction with the PSNI Media Policy booklet available on PoliceNet.

## INAPPROPRIATE DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

All information held by PSNI and in turn accessed by you as a Press Officer is subject to data protection legislation and often the Official Secrets Act.

Inappropriate disclosure of information to the media can potentially impact on the Human Rights of individual citizens, whether victims, suspects or arrested persons.

Leaking information to the media about individuals, investigations or other police activity also has the potential to impact on criminal investigations or court proceedings. This can damage both the effectiveness and reputation of the organisation.

All police officers and staff should be aware of the harm, which can be caused by mischievous leaking or unguarded/unofficial comments.

Behaviour of this nature constitutes a breach of the Code of Ethics and may also lead to those responsible being the subject of a criminal investigation.

## THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Department of Media and Public Relations is the primary resource available to officers and staff in dealing with the media. All requests for information, interviews and any queries from media should be directed in the first instance to the Press Office. They will provide advice and assistance, draft any required statement or facilitate any subsequent interviews or press conferences.

The Police Service policy is that all contact with the media must be coordinated through the Department of Media and Public Relations and, if contacted by media, every member of staff should decline to comment until they have referred the matter to the Department of Media and Public Relations.

This policy should not however be used to discourage the development of local relationships between individual local media outlets and their respective DCU. However the Department of Media and PR should be consulted particularly when matters of wider interest or policy are concerned.

## GENERAL POLICY

As a general rule, when an officer/member of staff is talking to the media about an incident, they should confine themselves to the facts as they know them - what, when, where, and who. The why and how of a crime or incident are often at the core of an investigation and commenting on them should generally be avoided. Do not be tempted to give personal opinions.

## SERVICE POLICY

The majority of police officers and staff, particularly those of junior ranks should not comment on service policy without consultation with the department of Media and PR. It is therefore incumbent on all press officers to be knowledgeable of service policy and procedures.

## JOURNALS

Press officers should maintain a desk book or journal in which should be recorded details of duty performed, including dates and times. They should also be used to record any incidents or enquiries received of significant note. Notes made in journals should always, where appropriate be logged on Solcara for the information of other staff at other times.

These journals should be retained and on termination of service returned to administrative staff for filing and retention by the service.

## A – Z

### ACCIDENTS (see ROAD COLLISIONS)

It is Police Service policy not to use the word 'accidents' – they are either 'collisions' or 'crashes'. Basic details can be confirmed but never give opinions about the cause of a collision. The details of people killed in collisions should not be released to the media until the coroner is satisfied that formal identification has taken place and the next of kin have been informed. *(Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS and ROAD ACCIDENTS).*

### AMOUNTS OF CASH STOLEN

Specific details of cash or securities stolen in raids on banks, building societies and post offices should not normally be given out to the media unless permission has been given by the senior investigating officer and the head office of the company involved. This is particularly relevant in relation to small businesses as detailed information about the exact amount of cash stolen (even if we say large amount could be used by criminals and could compromise security and set premises up for repeat attack. It is vital that small financial premises do not feel vulnerable to future attacks as a result of information released. General details about an incident can be publicised, but questions about security should be referred to the company concerned. Quantities of cash should only be described as small/large, or simply 'a quantity of cash'.

### ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Individuals and groups will often contact the media themselves to try and gain publicity about their actions. If this happens an incident can be confirmed to the media if appropriate, however as a general rule we do not pro-actively publicise the activities of animal rights activists. If the incident involves public safety, for example contamination of foods or products, HQ Press Desk should be informed immediately. *(Please also see CONTAMINATION OF FOODS / PRODUCTS).*

### APPEALS FOR RELATIVES

Appeals for relatives can be made through HQ Press Desk, but radio SOS appeals to trace relatives will only be used by the BBC if someone is dangerously ill. No broadcast will be made for relatives of someone who has died. Broadcasts can be made through BBC local radio stations and BBC Radio 4 nationally.

## APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

The PSNI Guide to Appropriate Language in the workplace and Wider Community should also be consulted.

Police Service staff should never use any language which could be considered sectarian, racist, sexist, homophobic or in any way discriminatory. When describing a person (e.g. a missing person, crime victim or suspect) no reference should be made to a person's religion, colour, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation unless it is strictly relevant.

In Northern Ireland words can stir strong emotions. Police staff should always be mindful as to the words we use to describe incidents or situations. For example, 'riot'. It is not a word we use. Appropriate alternatives would be 'serious public disorder', 'disturbance', and 'attack on police'.

This is not to lessen the seriousness of any incident. This can be stressed to the media. Care should also be taken with numbers. 100 people on the street and two fighting does not mean 100 people are involved.

The following are some terms and examples that should be considered when composing press releases.

## ARRESTS AND CHARGES

Under the Contempt of Court Act, a case becomes active upon an arrest or the issue of a warrant or summons. There is then a legal responsibility on journalists not to publish or broadcast any details which may prejudice a fair trial. It is therefore extremely important that the media are informed as soon as proceedings are considered to be active if the crime has been publicised.

Therefore, the Press Office should be contacted as soon as possible after the arrest has been made. Officers should specify whether a person has been arrested or has attended a police station voluntarily.

When a case is active nothing should be released which would create a substantial risk of serious prejudice to a court case, and nothing should be released which identifies a suspect. However, the sub-judice rule should not be used as an excuse to release nothing. The main facts of the matter can still be given.

For example: *"A 21-year old man from Belfast has been arrested by police officers in connection with ... .. and will be interviewed later today."*

Once a suspect is detained press conferences and media interviews should be refused, other than to confirm a statement similar to the example above or where they are required for operational or investigative purposes.

Also under the Contempt of Court Act, we have a duty to tell the media when a suspect has been charged. When a person has been charged and has appeared at court, their age, gender, occupation, the area where they live and full details of the charge can be released, although this is normally handled by the Northern Ireland Court Service.

## ARSONS & FIRES

Full details about fires can be released to the press, but this should follow liaison with the fire service. Make it clear if arson is suspected after taking advice from the officer in charge of the investigation, and use the opportunity to appeal for help/witnesses. No information should be released about the cause of the fire until this has been firmly established. Details of people who have been injured or killed in a fire can only be given to the press once formal identification has taken place and relatives have been informed. *(Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS and CONSULTATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES).*

## ASSAULTS

We do not release details of every single assault which takes place in Northern Ireland as this can increase fear of crime. The decision to publicise offences depends upon, the investigative merit, the nature and severity of the incident or whether the case has any unusual aspects. It is our policy not to identify or issue photographs of victims of assaults without their permission and that of the investigating officer. A victim's address should not be released. *(Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS and PHOTOGRAPHS).*

## 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, **BUT ONLY IF THEY GIVE THEIR PERMISSION** and after weighing up the potential risk to the officer generated by such a move.

## BLACKMAIL

In cases of blackmail officers must inform the Press Desk before releasing any information to the media.

## 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. Where possible give details of the road where the incident happened to raise awareness and pinpoint appeals for witnesses. If the road name would identify a vulnerable victim, use the name of the nearest main road instead. Always use the opportunity to pass on crime prevention advice to the public. Liaison with the appropriate utilities should be considered.

## BOMBS – HOAXES & SUSPECT PACKAGES

Details of bomb scares /hoaxes and suspect packages can be confirmed, including details of the time, place, whether a bomb disposal team was called and if there was disruption to local people or traffic. If a genuine device is discovered the Press Desk must be informed. No details of any code word should be released, except to say something along the lines of "a recognised code word was received". *(Please also see EXPLOSIVES and TERRORIST INCIDENTS).*

## BOMBS/EXPLOSIONS

### WARNINGS

It is not our policy to disclose to the media which organisation or individual received a telephone warning. It should suffice to state that, "...police received a telephone bomb warning..."

### EXPLOSIVE DEVICES

We should never disclose how, or why a device failed to explode.

### PAINT BOMBS

Do not use the term "paint bomb". Please use "paint was thrown" or "paint attack" – but not the word "bomb" – unless of course explosives were used.

## BRAVERY

The media are always interested in a story of bravery. If police officers or a member of the public have been involved in an act of bravery, the Press Office should be contacted so a press release can be distributed to the local media, unless of course an individual's circumstances mean this could pose a security risk. Before releasing details of any incident press officers should consider any possible ramifications particularly where there could be embarrassment caused to a victim or member of the public. It would be inappropriate if we were perceived to be promoting ourselves on the back of another's misfortune.

## BREATH TESTS

The Police Service 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. But if a motorist has been charged with an offence following a breath test, certain details can be confirmed. *(Please also see ARRESTS & CHARGES).*

## BURGLARIES

Releasing general details about a burglary can help recover stolen property. If the victim asks for their details not to be released to the media, their wishes should be respected, but details of the incident itself can still be released, the general location (but never give out details of house numbers/names) - details of what happened and what was stolen, as long as it does not lead to the identification of the victim. Do not go into details about the precise method of entry. With domestic burglaries in particular we should never release details about any sums of cash stolen, nor should we use terms such as 'substantial sums'.

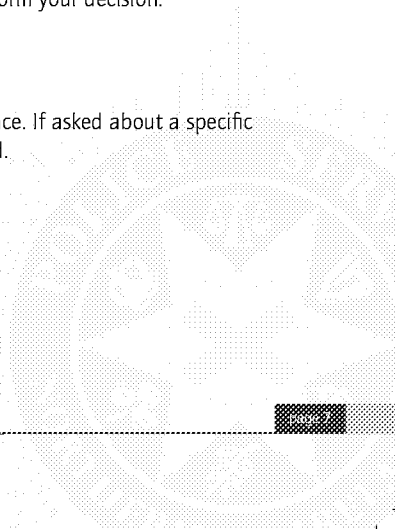
## CAR THEFTS

Following a number issues raised in relation to car thefts/hi-jacking incidents it is important to ensure that any releases accurately reflect the nature of the actual offence committed.

In short a car is deemed to have been hi-jacked if force or the threat of force has been used against the driver/owner to affect the theft. If the car has been taken as a consequence of being left unattended, perhaps from outside premises with the keys left in the ignition then the incident should be described as a vehicle/car theft. In essence if force has not been used directly against the driver/owner it is not a hi-jacking. Please ensure that you get all the relevant information from the investigating officer to inform your decision.

## CAUTIONING

Do not release the identity of anyone cautioned for an offence. If asked about a specific case, refer to the fact that a man or a woman was cautioned.



## CCTV FOOTAGE – RELEASE OF

Footage should only be released to the media to fulfil a policing purpose.

At least one of the following criteria should be satisfied:

An appeal for witnesses or an attempt to identify suspects

Where police believe that the footage is likely to offer road safety and/or general crime prevention advice

Where police believe the material is likely to provide reassurance to the public (e.g. police action taken against criminals, motorists etc)

When access to the material may dispel rumour or speculation which is threatening public disorder

An illustration of good police work which may have resulted in the arrest of suspects and the detection of crime

To demonstrate accountability within policing.

Care should be taken and, if doubt exists or it is felt necessary, the advice of the PSNI legal services department should be sought to ensure that any footage released to the media would not jeopardise existing or future legal proceedings. Video material should only be released on the authority of an officer of ACPO rank or by an officer acting under his/her delegated authority.

All releases of material should be done by the Police Service Media and Public Relations department. Licence agreements which cover the use of any material released to the media and detailed terms and conditions of use, rules on copying and archiving clips, etc. should be issued for every release. These can be obtained from the Administration Office in the Media and Public Relations Department and a signed copy should be returned there for filing.

There are specific arrangements and guidelines in place for the release of video footage of the policing of parades. Any such release is co-ordinated by the relevant Senior Press Officer in consultation with the Gold or Silver commander and the Human Rights lawyer.



## COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE

Enquiries about complaints against the police should be referred to the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland's (PONI) office. In some circumstances police may have to respond to media enquiries about an incident where a complaint has been made to PONI in order for example, to rebut inaccurate or misleading comments. It is important that the press office liaises with the Police Ombudsman's press office to make them aware of comments.

## CONDITION CHECKS

We do not automatically release the names of people involved in accidents/incidents, making it difficult for journalists to do condition checks. Where possible the Press Desk will endeavour to carry out checks on behalf of the media.

## CONSULTATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In many cases, police officers are called to incidents involving the other emergency services, or other agencies. In most routine cases, each organisation has its own role to play and each can respond to media enquiries without hindering the work of the others. However if it is felt that a joint press release or comment is required, remember too much consultation is better than not enough! Do not comment on other agencies' actions or roles unless they have been consulted. Always avoid being drawn into criticising other agencies.

## CONTAMINATION OF FOOD/PRODUCTS

The Press Office should be informed immediately about any threats of or actual incidents of contaminated food or products as there are special procedures regarding release of information about this type of incident.

## COUNTERFEIT MONEY

At the request of the Bank of England the only information to be released about counterfeit money should follow the guidelines in recognising a forgery i.e. quality of paper, colour of ink, watermarks and the silver strip.

Details of the amount thought to be in circulation should not be released. Any details to be released to the media must be provided and released through the Press Office.

## COURT CASES

### PRE-TRIAL BRIEFINGS

Pre-trial briefings must not be held without prior consent of an officer of ACPO rank in consultation with the PPS and the Department of Media and PR. The strict rules of disclosure mean that such briefings should be the exception rather than the rule.

ACPO guidelines say these rare cases should:

Be an example of exceptional police work

Demonstrate the use of innovative or unusual detection techniques

Be of exceptional public interest

Be where media interest is so great, a controlled briefing is the only way to ensure accurate reporting and minimise distress for victims/relatives

If after being approached by a member of the media to provide background information on a case an officer or member of staff seeks advice from a press officer they should be instructed to direct the enquirer directly to the Press Office.

### STATEMENTS FOLLOWING A COURT CASE

Journalists often approach members of the service immediately following a court case asking for a police comment. Except in cases where a statement has been pre-prepared in consultation with the department of Media and PR staff members should decline to comment in detail. Comments should never be made that would imply disagreement with any decision of a court.

When a case has resulted in a conviction lines such as, "We welcome the outcome/conviction and hope it will help to provide some degree of closure to the victim/their family." Further we should never comment on any sentence passed other than to reiterate that, "...sentencing is a matter for the court."

Again unless a statement has been pre-prepared in consultation with the department of Media and PR staff members should decline to comment when there has been an acquittal. It should be simply stated that, "We have heard and will now study the courts decision. Until such times as we have done this it would be inappropriate to comment further."

Further to this we should avoid making statements that could be interpreted as being defamatory or implying guilt of a person who has been acquitted.

## CRIME PREVENTION

Crime Prevention messages should be promoted at every possible opportunity. Reassuring the public by putting the fear of crime into perspective, whilst at the same time giving practical crime prevention advice through the media, is the responsibility of every member of staff.

## CRIMESTOPPERS

The Police Service fully supports the Crimestoppers scheme which gives the public a chance to speak to the police anonymously by telephoning the free phone number 0800 555 111. Every opportunity should be used to publicise this number when appeals for witnesses are made in the media, stressing that callers do not have to give their name.

"The following line is appropriate. Detectives at Anytown are appealing for anyone with information to contact them on 0845 600 8000. Alternatively members of the public can pass information anonymously to the Crimestoppers charity on 0800 555111."

## CRIMINAL RECORDS AND PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS

Criminal records are confidential and under no circumstances should there be any discussion with members of the media or anyone else outside the service as to whether or not a person has previous convictions.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT

See PSNI Managing Critical Incidents policy. If a critical incident is declared, the Director of Media and PR and/or Head of News must be contacted at the earliest opportunity.

## DESCRIPTIONS

When releasing descriptions of offenders refer to gender, age, height, build, hair colour and style and clothing. If there are any other special characteristics such as a scar, a tattoo or birthmark, these can also be included. Only mention someone's race if it is strictly relevant, and avoid using words which could be considered offensive e.g. half-cast or coloured. Instead use white, black, Asian, mixed race etc. Descriptions of offenders come under the disclosure rules and any information released to the media should therefore be carefully recorded as the defence could request this information.

## DISCIPLINARY MATTERS/SUSPENDED OFFICERS

Any media enquiries about police officers who are the subject of criminal or internal discipline proceedings must be referred to the Department of Media and PR. Press officers will then consult with Professional Standards Department and the Police Ombudsman's Office when they are involved.

The identity of individual officers should never be given nor confirmed.

## DOCUMENTARY FILMING REQUESTS

Requests from TV stations and independent production companies, asking for Police Service staff to take part in documentary programmes should always be referred to the Head of News. All requests for our co-operation/participation in programmes or documentaries should be submitted via a written brief which outlines what the programme makers want from us, what angle they are pursuing, how many other people will be taking part in the programme and who they are. We will then respond, also in writing, telling them whether or not we wish to take part in the programme and what exactly we will provide in terms of interviews, briefings and filming opportunities. *(Please also see JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING POLICE OFFICERS ON SEARCHES / OPERATIONS / PATROL and RELEASING POLICE HELD VIDEO FOOTAGE TO FILM MAKERS).*

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/ABUSE

The term domestic violence should not be used. Incidents of this type should always be referred to as 'domestic abuse'.

## DRUGS & POISONS – LOSS OR THEFT

If poisons or prescription drugs are lost or stolen, a press release can be helpful to warn the public about the possible danger. Name the drug or poisons, explain its possible effects and stress the need for urgent medical attention should the drugs have been taken. Always check that the information you release has been confirmed by an expert e.g. a pharmacist or doctor. Do not release information which could encourage repeat offences. Inform the media if the drugs are recovered and thank them for their help in publicising the case.

## DRUGS SEIZURES

When releasing details of drug seizures, say what a substance is thought to be. This cannot be confirmed until the drug has been tested. Be circumspect about releasing street values. For advice on drugs analysis and street values contact the Police Service Drugs Squad.

## ELDERLY

Avoid the use of words such as elderly, aged or old. Use "older people".

## EQUALITY

Police Service staff should never use any language which could be considered sectarian, racist, sexist, homophobic or in any other way discriminatory. When describing a person (e.g. a missing person, crime victim or suspect) no reference should be made to a person's religion, colour, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation unless it is strictly relevant. Beware of being too specific about colour and/or race when giving a suspect's details in a witness appeal. It would be wrong to say someone is African-Caribbean unless a witness knows for certain that he/she is. It is better to say black, white, Asian, etc. The words coloured and half-caste should not be used as they are considered derogatory. Use the description mixed race instead. *(Please also see DESCRIPTIONS).*

## EXPLOSIONS

### NON CRIMINAL

Information about non-criminal explosions can be released as soon as the senior investigating officer has confirmed basic facts. Details of damage, the number of casualties, helpline/Casualty Bureau numbers, traffic diversions and emergency services at the scene can be released, but only after clearance from the SIO. Do not comment on the cause of the explosion. The media should also be referred to other appropriate organisations.

### CRIMINAL / TERRORIST

Media enquiries about explosions involving possible criminal / terrorist offences should be referred to HQ Press Desk or the regional press offices immediately. It is not Police Service policy to disclose to the media how, or why, a device failed to detonate. Nor does the Police Service disclose to the media to which organisation or individual a telephone bomb warning is made.

## EXPLOSIVES/ARMS FINDS

The Police Service is committed to projecting the success of arms and explosives finds and seizures made by police and military by offering media facilities, but taking care not to compromise other agencies such as SOCO, ATO or Forensic Scientists. Each incident should, however, be decided on an individual basis, with liaison between the Press Desk and the senior investigating officer.

## FIREARMS

The Press should be informed of all firearms incidents. The number of armed officers deployed to an incident should not be given out. Nothing should be released about tactics, methods of entry or specialist equipment and skills.

## BALLISTICS TESTS

*It is not Police Service policy to release details of ballistic test results, or histories of any particular weapon or weapons, as legal implications may arise in subsequent court proceedings.*

## FOUND PROPERTY

The Press Desk or Maydown press office can help arrange publicity for found property to try and re-unite it with its owner. The media are particularly interested in high value or unusual property. Always withhold one identifying feature of the property to ensure it is claimed by its rightful owner.

## FRAUD

Information about frauds can alert the public and put them on their guard. But do not divulge exact details of the fraud which may encourage copy cat crimes. Enquiries about major fraud cases should be referred to the Press Desk.

In cases of serious fraud investigations involving several Police Services, the Serious Fraud Squad (SFO) should be contacted by the Press Desk before any press release is issued.

In response to media enquiries regarding finances or personalities of particular businesses which the journalist believes are under investigation, Police Service staff should decline to comment and ensure that no inference is drawn from such a refusal.

## IDENTIFICATION PARADES

The fact that an identification parade is being, or has been held, is not to be offered to the media. Any information about an ID parade, especially the results, should not be released to the media.

## INDEMNITY AGREEMENTS

Indemnity agreements have been drawn up to protect the Police Service against claims for personal injury, trespass or damage when the media accompanies police officers to any incident. *(Please also see JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING OFFICERS ON SEARCHES / OPERATIONS / PATROL).*

## INTELLIGENCE MATTERS/INFORMANTS

### GENERAL

The use of the term 'informants' should be avoided. As an alternative we should refer to Covert Human Intelligence Sources, often referred to internally as CHIS.

The Police Service issues the following statement in response to queries about our use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) and surveillance equipment:

*"The Police Service has always made it clear that in combating serious crime in all its many forms, the police rely heavily on intelligence gathering by all lawful means, including the use of informants. Intelligence is absolutely crucial to the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland, as is the case elsewhere.*

*Over the years, intelligence has proved to be the most significant factor in saving life and preventing crime. The Police Service will therefore seek by every lawful means to enhance its intelligence gathering capability because it is the duty of a Police Service to protect the community to the utmost of its professional ability."*

Further, where appropriate we should add the following.

In line with all other police services across the UK the use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources by the PSNI is strictly governed by the Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and is fully compliant with human rights legislation.

Sources are handled in accordance with the strictest national guidelines and are not above the law. If they engage in criminality, they will be arrested and brought before the courts.

### INFORMANTS:

The response to queries about whether an individual is an informant is:

*"Police do not confirm or deny that any individual is or ever has been an informant."*

This policy must be strictly observed.

### SECURITY INFORMATION MESSAGES/PMIS SERVED

If asked about information messages/threat messages to members of the public, our response is:

*"We do not comment on the security of any individual, however where we believe someone needs to review their personal security we would always seek to inform them. We would never ignore anything that would put a person at risk."*

## INTERNET

Press officers should be discerning in relation to what material is selected for publication on our press release section of the website. This should be an historical archive of noteworthy or important announcements/ events / incidents. There is no need to place less important releases that may only be of interest to the relevant local media on the public website.

Press officers publishing releases to the web site should always be mindful of the international nature of the potential audience.

## INTERVIEW REQUESTS

The Departmental view is that we should consider every facility request as an opportunity and as such they should only be declined for good reasons. It is important that there is consultation with relevant officers/police staff. At times there may be investigative or logistical reasons for declining interview requests but there should always be a valid reason.

If events happen outside normal office hours that are likely to have prominence in the upcoming news cycles, press officers should prepare for the possibility of requests from the early morning news and current affairs programmers by identifying possible interviewees or collating information to assist in the preparing of statements.

If such requests are made and subsequently agreed to, press officers should always bear in mind the requirements of other media outlets and the need to facilitate further requests, particularly from television and print media.

When any interview request is received it is important that the press officer receiving it records the details in the department's Press Bureau application, SOLCARA. This should be the case regardless of whether the facility has been accepted, refused, is pending or indeed the request has been withdrawn. If a request is to be declined or withdrawn the reason for this should be added to the original request.

The accuracy of any information contained within Solcara however is totally reliant on the person recording it. Therefore it is important that the details recorded are accurate and complete. It is also the responsibility of the press officer entering facility requests to periodically check those that are 'pending' and to ensure any updated information is added. Likewise when a pending facility has been completed the record should be amended accordingly.

Where a press log exists within Solcara in relation to an incident any interview or facility bids should be added through the 'Related Records' tab on the Solcara incident log.



## **JOURNALISTS ACCOMPANYING OFFICERS ON SEARCHES / OPERATIONS / PATROL**

Media representatives will only be allowed to accompany officers if there are specific reasons why the Police Service would benefit from their attendance. A signed indemnity should always be obtained from the company concerned, together with an editorial rights approval by the Police Service's legal adviser.

Media representatives will not be briefed about major crime operations prior to their implementation unless there are sound operational reasons for doing so. This policy is not aimed at preventing media representatives from attending police operations or filming officers, but at ensuring the Police Service complies with the law and protects officers and the rights of victims, witnesses, suspects and innocent members of the public.

All media requests to accompany officers will be referred to the HQ Press Office.

## **JOYRIDERS**

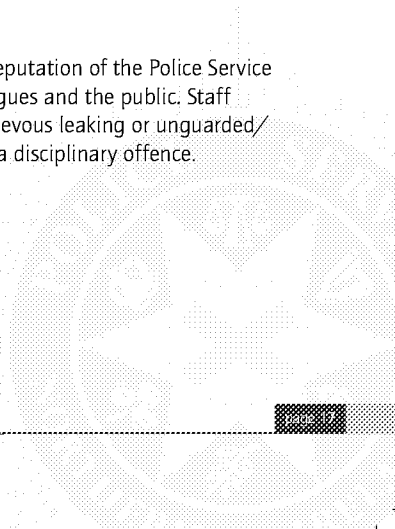
The term joyrider has been extensively used by the media to describe those involved in car crime. The Police Service does not use this term to describe those involved in car theft, and actively discourages the media from doing so.

## **KIDNAPPING / ABDUCTION**

In cases of kidnapping or abduction where a life is genuinely thought to be at risk, the media can be asked to impose a news blackout. This can only be endorsed by the Chief Constable (or his deputy). The Media and PR Department has contingency plans to coordinate a news blackout and should be informed of incidents immediately.

## **LEAKS TO THE MEDIA**

Information which is leaked to the media can damage the reputation of the Police Service and cause confusion and misunderstanding amongst colleagues and the public. Staff should be aware of the harm which can be caused by mischievous leaking or unguarded/unofficial comments. They should also be aware that this is a disciplinary offence.



## LIAISING WITH OTHER AGENCIES/ORGANISATIONS

Many incidents involving police that raise media interest involve other organisations and companies. It would be impossible to list all such incidents however some examples are;

- Tiger kidnap situations involving the Post Office or banks etc.
- Robberies from cash in transit companies or banks
- Cross boundary arrest operations involving other police services
- Incidents involving utility companies such as Phoenix Gas, N.I. Electricity
- Emergency incidents at airports, ports,
- Contaminated food incidents involving large supermarket chains
- Child abuse cases involving Social Services
- Security alerts affecting the public transport network
- Traffic management issues involving the roads section of DRD

While in the majority of these cases police will be the lead agency and as such will have responsibility for the media aspect, press officers should ensure that where possible, partner organisations are kept up to date and if appropriate informed of our intentions prior to making them public.

## MAJOR INCIDENTS

Reporters are often only minutes behind police officers arriving at the scene of a major incident, and need to be managed. Officers at the scene should request a press officer at the earliest opportunity by contacting the Press Desk so that a 'media liaison point' can be established where information can be relayed and the media can see what is happening from a safe distance. The Press Desk will endeavour to ensure a press officer is always available to attend major incidents to support the senior investigating officer in dealing with the media.

## MEDIA MONITORING

The Police Service operates a 24-hour seven-days-a-week Media Monitoring service. Television and radio news bulletins and current affairs/documentary programmes that relate to or impact on the PSNI or policing are recorded. It should however be stressed that the Police Service does not hold copyright for the use of these recordings.

Were broadcast video or audio material is required for evidential purposes it is the responsibility of the investigating officer to obtain it. This will involve the officer approaching the broadcaster/publisher and often requires them to seek a warrant or court order directing that the material be provided to police. The involvement of the department of Media and PR should go no further than providing the above information and advising officers of contact information.

## MISSING PEOPLE

In cases of missing people who are under 17 years of age, press officers should always ensure that permission from the Primary Carer or Parent has been obtained through the investigating officer before making any media appeal or releasing a photograph. This is particularly important if the missing person is in care or the subject of a court order. In these instances the investigating officer should be advised that permission must also be sought from the relevant authority, i.e. the court or social worker. It is always advisable that press officers obtain and keep a record of the officer making any request and informing them that permission has been granted.

In many situations missing persons have been residents or in-patients of hospitals, Care or Mental Health institutions. There would be few cases where we would refer to or acknowledge this fact. In any case the institution from where they have gone missing should not be named. We can say, "...was last seen in the area of..." or "*went missing from their home in the... area...*".

The department do not, as a matter of routine, publish the details of missing people on the Media and PR Missing Person Internet pages. The majority of missing people do return and we want to be proportionate.

There are however exceptions. For example, where police suspect that the missing person has been the victim a crime connected to their disappearance or where the person has been missing for a long period of time and there has been a high level of media interest. The decision to publish details on the Internet or elsewhere lies with the investigating officer.

We are always anxious that the rights of those who want to be "missing" are balanced with the rights of a distraught family. However, all cases must be judged individually. If in doubt, consult with the SIO or Head of News.

Missing person appeals should not, generally speaking, be used when the missing person is suspected of an offence and wanted by police. There may however be an exception to this when the personal safety of the person is an overriding factor.

## MO – MODUS OPERANDI

Modus Operandi or MO as it is commonly referred to by police officers is the method by which an act is carried out. Many criminals have a particular MO and when this has been identified and associated with an individual it can often point investigators to one suspect over any other.

Press releases and appeals that contain such details could be seen as encouraging a particular course of action by or even educating those individuals with criminal intent.

Statements such as *"thieves forced open a door with a screwdriver"* not only fall within this area but are also speculative.

## MUGGINGS/SNATCHES

We do not use the terms mugged, mugging or snatch. If force or the threat of force has been used against a person to steal from them then the offence is robbery and should be referred to as such. Where a weapon has been used or was in the possession of the culprit at the time it would be an armed robbery. Were force or the threat of force has not been used then the offence is theft and again should be so described.

## MURDER / SUSPICIOUS DEATHS

Murders always attract a great deal of press interest so it is vital for officers to contact the Press Desk about the incident as quickly as possible - a holding statement can then be prepared. The initial press statement will only be released after consultation with the senior investigating officer, and the death will be referred to as 'suspicious' until the cause of death has been established and a murder enquiry is confirmed by the SIO. The victim's identity should never be released until relatives have been informed and there has been formal identification of the body.

The SIO must approve all press releases about a murder. Only the SIO or an officially nominated police/press officer should talk to the media about a murder. Press officers can be contacted 24 hours a day via the HQ Press Desk. Unless there are exceptional circumstances why this cannot occur, a press officer will attend any briefings given to the media by the senior investigating officer.

## NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS

The Police Service has developed a policy regarding the naming of victims involved in crime, road collisions and other incidents, which aims to balance the needs of victims and the needs of the media. This policy reflects guidance from the ACPO Media Advisory Group and takes into account the most recent data protection and Human Rights legislation.

While this is the guidance it is only guidance. In practice the PSNI have set and follow the following guidelines.

- Other than murder we do not generally identify or confirm the identity of victims of crime.
- Every effort must be made through the Investigating Officer and Family Liaison Officer to establish the wishes of victims or their families, regarding the release of personal information to the media. Indeed it is often the specific desire of investigators that victims/witnesses do not speak to any media at least until statements etc have been recorded.
- Should there be a need or request from the media, Police Service staff should always ask a balanced question when trying to ascertain the wishes of the victims or their families. It would not be appropriate to ask 'You don't want your name in the press do you?' Responses should be recorded by the officers on the relevant forms.
- If a victim or their family does not want his/her personal details given to the media this request must be honoured unless the investigating officer decides there is an operational or investigative reason why this information should be released. However, details of an actual incident can still be released as long as this would not allow a journalist to 'piece together' the victim's identity, e.g. saying an attack took place outside the victim's home in ..... Road when this is the only property in a named road in a small village.
- In the majority of fatal road traffic collisions details of the deceased person are released to the media however when the victim's family specifically request that the details are not released then this request should be honoured.
- In cases where a police officer knows or suspects that a victim may be vulnerable to a repeat crime if their identity is made public it is imperative that his information/suspicion is imparted to the press office. While we do not name the victims of crime we need to be aware of relevant information when dealing with media queries.

Under no circumstances should the media be given the name of someone who has died until their next of kin have been informed and the investigating officer in consultation with the FLO has authorised release of the information. The deceased's family should be made aware of potential press interest and the fact that the victim's details will be a matter of public record following an inquest opening.

If, despite this, the family are adamant that their relative should not be named by the police and if refusing to release the name will not impact in a negative way on the police investigation (i.e. by making the media refuse to run witness appeals) then consideration may be given to withholding the name. However, it should be made clear to the media that the name is being withheld at the request of the family and no such decision should be taken without having first consulted the investigating officer.

Journalists can discover the names of victims from numerous sources other than the police. They then often ask the Police Service for confirmation of these details. Each of these cases should be judged on an individual basis. Consideration should be given as to whether confirming details would help accurate reporting of the facts and so be of direct benefit to the individual involved or the Police Service (e.g. because there would be serious consequences if the wrong person was named)

Even in cases when we have been asked by the relatives of victims not to identify their loved ones press officers should take active steps to ensure that journalists who request confirmation of an incorrect name are suitably advised to prevent the publication of erroneous information.

We do not name victims of suicide or non-suspicious deaths.

## **NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF SUSPECTS OR ARRESTED PERSONS**

The Police Service does not name or confirm the identity of suspects or arrested persons. Furthermore we do not name those convicted of offences. This should be a matter for the Northern Ireland Court Service.

## **NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF WITNESSES**

Nothing will be released to the media which is likely to identify any witnesses to a crime without the consent of the senior investigating officer and the witness themselves. The likelihood of a witness ever being named or identified by police would be truly exceptional.

## **NAMING/IDENTIFICATION OF YOUNG OFFENDERS**

Nothing should be released to the media which is likely to identify a juvenile offender i.e. anyone who is aged under 17. If a juvenile is charged, only his/her age and a general area of residence will be given out to the media e.g. a 16-year-old youth from Portadown, rather than a 16-year-old youth from Park Road, Portadown. Do not release details of where a juvenile goes to school.

## **NAMING BUSINESSES UNDER INVESTIGATION**

As a general rule it is PSNI policy to never identify or confirm the identity of individuals who have been arrested or are under investigation. This should also be applied when a business is the subject of an investigation.

In response to media enquiries relating to the finances or personalities of particular businesses, we should decline to comment and ensure that no inference is drawn from our refusal to comment.

## NAMING OF BUSINESS PREMISES IN WITNESS APPEALS ETC

When making appeals for information or witnesses to a particular incident, press officers should only name the premises if it is necessary for investigative purposes.

When an investigating officer requests that we name a particular business in a release we must always question why and ensure the reasons for naming it are consistent with the investigative purposes and actual witness appeal. The investigating officer should also be told to advise the owner of the business of our intentions.

When not naming a particular business could be prejudicial to a successful investigation then those premises should be named.

## OFF THE RECORD

If a story is good enough, there is no such thing as 'off the record' to a journalist. Officially, 'off the record' means giving a journalist background information or guidance which is definitely not to be printed or quoted. But no matter how good a relationship you may have built up with a journalist, if you speak 'off the record' and a story seems too good to miss, the temptation may prove too much and it could appear in the newspapers/on the radio/television. Great care should be taken before talking 'off the record'.

## PARAMILITARY MURDERS – CLAIMS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The Police Service has the following policy statement on such claims:

*"The starting point in this matter is that there is no justification for murder – none whatsoever. Whatever the motive and whoever the victim, murder is unlawful and reprehensible. Added to the awfulness of the crime is the further distress and grief caused to the bereaved families through the practice of paramilitary organisations stigmatising the victim with frequently false allegations in an attempt to justify their crime. It is a question for serious consideration whether such claims should be published at all. It is not the policy of the Police Service to aid and abet terrorist propaganda by being drawn into public comment on such claims made by these organisations."*

## PARAMILITARY ATTACKS/SHOOTINGS

The Police Service has the following policy statement on such incidents:

*"These are not punishment beatings or attacks. These are organised paramilitary mutilations of victims, serious criminal offences which must be rejected outright by every right-thinking person. We appeal for full public co-operation to bring these activities to an end."*

The Police Service does not refer to punishment beatings and tries to dissuade the media from doing so. They should be referred to as paramilitary attacks/shootings.

## PHOTOGRAPHS – RELEASE OF

### CONVICTED OFFENDERS

Following the conviction of an offender at court, official police photographs can only be released to the media on the authority of the senior investigating officer/senior area detective. In the case of terrorist trials, we do not release photographs. The legal justification is based on Article 2 of the ECHR, which imposes on public bodies the duty to protect life. This duty includes not exposing persons to unnecessary risk. Knowing that groups on both sides would use photos to target the opposition, the police could not justify routine disclosure of photos.

Police photographs of non-terrorist defendants may be issued if they involve either significant public interest, or a serious arrestable offence. Serious arrestable offences include:

Murder, manslaughter, rape, kidnapping, certain other sexual offences

Any other arrestable offence if its commission has led to, or is intended, or likely to lead to certain serious consequences. These are serious harm to the security of the state or public order; serious interference with the administration of justice or the investigation of offences; the death of any person, serious injury to any person; substantial financial gain to any person or serious financial loss to any person.

Photographs are only issued through the Press Office. Any photographs released must be produced without prisoner reference numbers. Legal Services are always contacted before photographs are released to the media.

### SUSPECTS

Photographs of suspects are issued only in extreme circumstances and there are very strict guidelines governing their release. The photograph of a suspect can only be given to the media on the authority of the senior investigating officer, in consultation with an ACPO rank officer and the Public Prosecution Service, bearing in mind the Contempt of Court Act.



Photographs should always be released via the Press Office.

## **VICTIMS**

Victims' photographs should not be released without the permission of the victim or their relatives. Pictures of assault victims are very powerful images and can encourage responses for help, information and witnesses. Where a decision is made to release a picture, the Press Office will distribute the pictures to the media.

## **INCIDENT PHOTOGRAPHS**

It is not Police Service 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 investigating officer in the case.

## **POLICE OFFICERS AND STAFF**

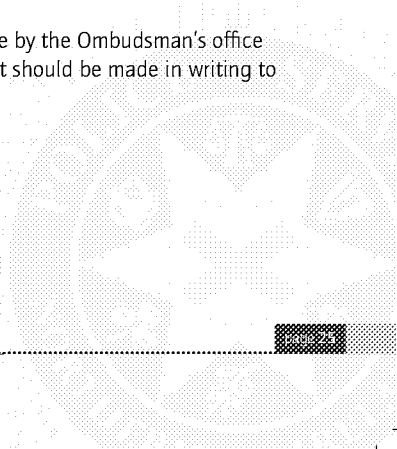
Pictures of police staff will only be released with the permission of the officer/member of staff or his/her relatives.

## **POLICE OMBUDSMAN**

If the police ombudsman is actively investigating an incident, please remember that it is generally inappropriate for the PSNI to comment.

It should however be remembered that even when PONI are involved they will only be investigating matters relating to the actions of police officers. In most cases PSNI will still be investigating the criminal (non police) aspect and detectives may still require appeals for witnesses or information to be issued. In these circumstances media staff at PONI should be advised of the content of the release as a matter of courtesy and to ensure that the information does not prejudice any investigation. When any conflict arises there should be consultation between investigating officers.

Outside of the above circumstances, when requests are made by the Ombudsman's office for information or copies of releases etc from us, that request should be made in writing to the Head of Department, or Head of News.



## **POLICING BOARD ISSUES**

Press Officers should not comment on committee papers either prior to the meeting taking place or afterwards, without first discussing the matter with the Head of News or Head of Department. Usually only Policing Board members and officers of ACPO rank comment on Policing Board matters.

## **POSITIVE PUBLICITY**

Although the media has a natural and understandable interest in serious crime, a great deal of work is non-crime related, working with our communities to improve safety, solve problems and improve quality of life.

It is important that we try to balance press coverage by actively promoting all the positive work by Police Service staff. Journalists do want to hear about unusual, imaginative and pioneering projects and we should take every opportunity to let them know what we are doing.

## **PRESS CONFERENCES**

Press conferences are an effective way of dealing with significant media interest in a serious crime or major incident. By holding a press conference many media enquiries can be dealt with in a relatively short period of time, which is preferable to an SIO receiving a relentless stream of calls and requests from journalists over several days.

Press conferences should always be arranged through the Press Desk, who will notify all the relevant media. Corporate display boards and audio/video recording equipment can be organised and a press officer will usually attend to coordinate the conference and brief the senior investigating officer on questions the media are likely to ask.

## **PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Press photographers and TV camera crews will always want to get as close as possible to the scene of an incident. They will not go away until they get the pictures they want. In many cases it is sensible to create a 'media liaison point' which allows photographers and TV crews a view of the action without interfering with the work of the emergency services, rather than refusing them access and leaving them to take matters into their own hands.

Once the incident is under control a senior officer can consider giving the press greater access to the scene. Police officers cannot be held responsible for the taste and decency of pictures taken by photographers and film crews – that is a matter for editors.

## **PRISONERS**

### **PERIODS OF DETENTION**

It should be noted that these times only refer to detention when a person has NOT been charged.

### **PACE PRISONERS**

The period of time a person can be detained by police following arrest begins at the 'relevant time.' In simple terms and as is generally the case in practice, the relevant time begins when the arrested person arrives at the custody office.

Initially the detained person can be detained for a maximum of 24 hours. These can then be extended with authority of a Superintendent up to a maximum of 12 hours. If at the end of these 36 hours further detention is required this must be granted by a magistrate at court. The magistrate can grant a maximum of 36 hours bringing the total now to 72 hours. Should further detention be required a final period of 24 hours can be granted by a magistrate following a second application to the court. This makes a total of 96 hours at which time the detained person must be charged or released.

24 hours.....initial  
12 hours.....Superintendent  
36 hours.....court application  
24 hours.....court application

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96 hours.....total detention time

### **TERRORIST PRISONERS**

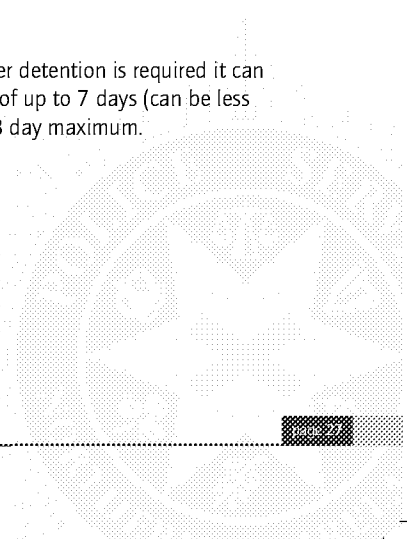
Sections 23 to 25 of the Terrorism Act 2006 amended Part II and Part III of Schedule 8 to the Terrorism Act 2000, extending the maximum period of pre-charge detention of terrorist suspects from 14 to 28 days.

Initially detained persons can be held for 48 hours. If further detention is required it can only be obtained by application to a court. Further periods of up to 7 days (can be less than 7 days) can be applied for when required up to the 28 day maximum.

48 hours.....initial  
7 days (up to).....court application  
7 days (up to).....court application  
7 days (up to).....court application  
5 days (up to).....court application

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28 days.....total detention time



## DISPOSAL OF PRISONERS/DETAINED PERSONS

When a person is arrested by police and details of that arrest have been made public through the media it is incumbent on the Service to give details of any subsequent actions.

There are 3 main forms of disposal for detained persons Released without charge. "A person arrested by police at High Street on 1 April has been released without charge." It may be the case that the person is to be dealt with by way of a summons. If this is so we should add the following line. "A file is being prepared for the PPS."

Released on bail. "A person arrested by police at High Street on 1 April has been released on bail pending further enquiries."

Charged to appear at court. "A 55 years old man has been charged with robbery and is expected to appear at Belfast Magistrates court at 10am on 2 April. As is usual the charge will be reviewed by the PPS."

## ESCAPED PRISONERS

### From Police Custody

The Press Office should be informed at the earliest opportunity and all media enquiries referred to them. Information will only be released to the media after consultation with the senior investigating officer. 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 given out unless the escape happened after a court appearance or if the escapee is considered to be dangerous and the public need to be warned.

Press officers should also bear in mind the possible involvement of PONI and consult with them if appropriate.

### From Prison

The Press Office should be informed immediately if there has been a prison escape. They will then consult with the SIO, the prison authorities and/or the Northern Ireland Office regarding release of information about the circumstances of the escape, and deal with all media enquiries.

## PUBLIC DISORDER

Public disorder incidents can be released to the press. Details can include how many people were involved, injuries and any damage. Any statement to the media should also contain the number of people arrested, details of the people charged, bail details and court dates. *(Please also see ARRESTS & CHARGES and NAMING OF VICTIMS)*. Avoid criticising or making any comments about other organisations which may be involved in the incident.

## PURSUITS

Details of all police pursuits are not routinely released to the media unless they result in a serious/fatal accident. However, if the media are aware of an incident, brief details can be given, confirming that a vehicle was being followed by a police car, the time and location of the pursuit, how it began, brief details of the vehicle which was being followed and any injuries.

Do not give specific details about how any resulting accident happened, but confirm there will be a full and thorough investigation. If the pursuit was abandoned for safety reasons, say so and explain why. Confirm if officers used any devices such as Stinger to stop a vehicle. HQ Press Desk should be informed immediately if a pursuit results in serious injury or death.

## RACE/HATE CRIME

The Macpherson definition of a racist incident is: "any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person" and it is important therefore for us to use this definition to acknowledge that an incident is racist.

However, the guidelines go on to say that care should be taken to ensure that offences are not described as "racially motivated" or "racially aggravated" where there is no evidence to directly support this. There is a distinction between a "racist" and a "racially motivated" incident. The first relies on perception, the second on actual evidence.

So describing an incident as "racist" does not necessarily mean it is "racially motivated" or that the offender would be charged with a "racially aggravated" offence

ACPO set out two questions

### IS THIS INCIDENT BEING DEALT WITH AS RACIST?

*"Yes, there is a perception that this was racist and we have recorded it and are treating it in this way." Guidance may also be given that as with all UK police services PSNI declare an incident as racist in accordance with recommendations made by the Macpherson Report."*

### IS THIS A RACIALLY MOTIVATED/RACIALLY AGGRAVATED INCIDENT?

*"It isn't clear – this will form part of our investigation but until we find the person responsible it's difficult to say what motivated them. We are however, treating this as a racist incident." Again the above guidance can be given.*

## RAIDS

Police officers do not carry out raids. This term is generally employed by the media to refer to what are in actual fact searches carried out with legal authority. The term should not be used and efforts should be made to enlighten those members of the media who persist in referring to police activity in this way.

## REWARDS

Details of rewards offered in connection with crimes should only be released to the media with the authority of the senior investigating officer. The Press Office must be told about any reward on offer. When rewards are to be offered it is necessary for the SIO to consult the services legal advisor, as it is often the case that a legal contract has to be signed.

## RIDE ALONGS

'Ride alongs' present an opportunity for media to accompany police on patrols and get a flavour of the work carried out. However when organising such a facility it is important that press officers comply with the following where possible.

Ensure completion of the indemnity form for each person accompanying you. Also provide all those persons with the accompanying "Note to Media Representatives" and ensure their understanding of its contents. Journalists should also be briefed in relation to possible risks and actions to take should something unforeseen arise.

Give consideration - before access to the briefing room or other areas within the station - to any sensitive material on display and ensure that such material is covered or removed.

Make sure all our other colleagues are aware of the facility and that only those who agree are filmed. However, all staff should bear in mind that a recording, which includes audio, is being made.

Agree beforehand on what parts of the briefing can be recorded and make sure it is only the particular Op that is covered. It is often advisable to arrange a 'second' briefing for the benefit of the media thus ensuring that any sensitive information that has to be imparted to officers relating to suspects or target areas is disclosed only to police officers separately.

All ride alongs should be approved by Head of News or Media Centre Manager.

## RIVAL GANGS

This term has caused grave offence in the past and should be avoided. It would not be inappropriate to state that two groups were involved however it would be suffice to say "A number of people were involved in the disturbance".

## ROAD COLLISIONS

The Police Service usually only release details of serious injury or fatal road collisions, because of the sheer number of accidents in the Province. However, information about unusual non-injury road collisions will also be released, e.g. if they resulted in severe traffic congestion, multiple vehicles were involved, or emergency vehicles were involved.

Media statements about road collisions should include the date, time and place of the incident, the make and model of vehicles involved, any disruption to traffic, details of any diversions, and most importantly witness appeals and police officers' contact telephone numbers. Never speculate about the cause of a road collision or attribute blame, instead use phrases such as "two cars collided", or 'a lorry was involved in a collision with a van'.

Identities of people involved in road deaths should not be released until they have been formally identified and relatives have been informed. *(Please also see NAMING OF VICTIMS).*

Press photographers and camera crews will want to take pictures of the scene of a major road collision. Try and find them a vantage point such as a bridge, to view the recovery. The officer in charge can authorise the media visiting the scene, under supervision, once casualties have been removed. Contact HQ Press Desk if you need a press officer to attend the scene, or if an urgent broadcast is needed about traffic problems/diversions.

## ROBBERIES

Press statements asking for witnesses to a robbery, describing offenders and any vehicles they may have used can be issued extremely quickly by the Press Office. The identity of any victim or staff who are threatened should not be released to the media. Most companies, banks and building societies have a policy regarding the release of photographs/stills taken by surveillance cameras. Checks should always be made with the companies and the SIO before releasing CCTV/surveillance material. Extreme care should be taken, particularly in relation to small businesses in disclosing the exact amount of money or property stolen. This information could be used by criminals and could compromise security and set premises up for repeat attacks. Any decision should be taken in liaison with the SIO who should ensure the victim is content with what is being released to the media.

## SEIZURES/SEARCHES

Where police have carried out searches that have resulted in the recovery of items, e.g. drugs, firearms, explosives, contraband/counterfeit goods press officers should liaise closely with the SIO in relation to the wording of any release. This is particularly important when the operation has been intelligence led.

When drugs have been recovered we should never issue the weight/quantity of drugs alongside the estimated value, only one or the other, lest we be accused of setting the street value of illegal drugs.

## SEXUAL OFFENCES/RAPE/INDECENCY

Nothing should be released to the media which identifies the victim of a sexual offence - no name should ever be offered or confirmed.

Basic details of the attack can be given out to warn others and/or for witness appeals but do not release explicit details of the offence. A victim or a victim's family may suffer added trauma if they read these details. Officers should only refer to incidents as 'a rape', 'an indecent assault' or 'a serious sexual assault'.

Occasionally reporters will ask to interview a victim about their experiences. As always any such requests must be referred to the senior investigating officer who will make a decision. In the event that it may be appropriate for an approach to be made this should usually be done by the victim making it unnecessary for press officers to pass on the victim's details.

When releasing details of a serious sexual offence or a rape, the term 'he/she also suffered minor injuries' should never be used.

## SEX OFFENDERS

There have been some reports in the media about the numbers of high-risk sex offenders living in particular DCUs.

The Police Service is committed to openness and transparency. It is organisational policy to publish the overall numbers of sex offenders in Northern Ireland and in each council area. It also the policy however NOT to break those figures down further into categories of low, medium and high risk offenders in individual council areas.

It is also important to explain when talking about the number of sex offenders that the number of individuals assessed within each category moves up and down depending on dynamic risk assessment. Some are recalled to prison some leave Northern Ireland and others level of risk is reduced. The number is never static.



The issue of sex offenders and in particular those who offend against children always generates a high degree of media interest.

The Police Service does not name or confirm the identity of suspects or arrested persons. Furthermore we do not name those convicted. This should be a matter for the Northern Ireland Court Service.

There are occasions when it may be necessary to release the details of a registered sex offender. This is particularly the case when there is deemed to be a risk to public safety. However in these cases the decision to release details including photographs can only be taken by a police officer of ACC rank. On all such occasions press officers must consult with the Head of News.

## SHOOTING INCIDENTS INVOLVING POLICE

Press releases of this nature must be factual and exclude justification, such as 'the officer was in fear of his life so he fired his ppw'. It is not our policy to refer to the absence, presence, nature or timings of any warnings given in shooting incidents involving the police and army. That is a matter for the investigation.

All incidents involving shots fired by police (excluding training or incidents where members of the public are not involved) are investigated by the Police Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's office would suggest that the use of the word "warning" pre-judges justification for firing shots i.e. there was behaviour, which warranted a warning.

In a past case a DCU commander was of a mind to state publicly that warning shots were fired - agreement was made with the Ombudsman's office and **as this was factual** we said: "shots were discharged in the air." This way our concerns were met with regard to public reassurance that we were not shooting at people. It also complies with our policy position of "factual and excluding justification."

## STAFFING FACILITIES

Generally all requests by a member of the media to speak to a police service representative should where possible be staffed by a member of the Department of Media and PR. Only in exceptional circumstances should this not be adhered to.

On occasions a down the line interview can be arranged with an officer about a straight forward media issue but only when the press officer has assessed that the officer would be a suitable interviewee and had been given guidance on how to manage the call. In these cases the press officer concerned should always have a prior discussion with the interviewer to agree specific parameters and any proposed line of questioning. The press officer should then communicate these issues to the interviewee during a full briefing.

## SUICIDE / ATTEMPTED SUICIDE / SUDDEN DEATHS

Where a sudden death has occurred the police service has a duty to investigate. Even in circumstances where no crime is suspected police must still investigate the death for the information of HM Coroner.

Only a coroner's court can decide that a death was suicide and the word should not be used before an inquest has made that decision. Phrases such as 'at this stage there do not appear to be any suspicious circumstances and we are not looking for anyone else in connection with the incident' can be used. Details of when and where a body was found can be given to the press.

The identity of a dead person should not be released until the next of kin have been informed and the coroner is satisfied that a formal identification has been made. Officers should warn the family that such cases are likely to attract media attention and that detailed information will be made public at an inquest.

Attempted suicides are not normally released to the media, but general details can be confirmed if reporters are aware from another source. (*Please also see RESCUES/ ATTEMPTED RESCUES*).

## TERRORIST INCIDENTS

The Press Office should be informed immediately about any suspected terrorist incidents, and all media enquiries should be referred to the Press Office. Any press statement must be cleared by the officer in charge of the incident.

## VIPs

In general, media enquiries regarding VIPs will be treated in the same way as media enquiries about other members of the public.

Press officers should pay due regard to any security implications. Where doubt exists press officers should consult Head of News.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

Always consult parents or guardians before any personal details and/or photographs are released about children and young people.

## WEEKLY PAPER COLUMNS

The 'Crimebeat' column featured weekly in the Belfast Telegraph and the News Letter's 'On The Beat' can be very effective tools for us to highlight crimes and can often assist investigators in particular when trying to identify criminals.

It is vital however that the information we collate and provide for these features is completely accurate. There have unfortunately been occasions in the past when the press office has released incorrect information.

While it is understood that as press officers we must rely on others to provide us with accurate information we must take all reasonable steps to ensure that accuracy. Asking pertinent and appropriate questions can assist in this. When pictures are to be published it is important to ensure that they relate to the information provided. Where possible the investigating officer or the person providing the material should be asked to indicate individuals depicted and to clarify their involvement.

Consideration should also be given when preparing text to be used to accompany images. Regardless of the circumstances everyone is innocent under law until proven otherwise. It is therefore very important that the wording of the script does not suggest or imply that the pictured individual is guilty of an offence. Terms such as "...police investigating a robbery at xxx are keen to speak to this man as he may have information which could assist the police investigation" should be used.

Terms that could be seen as implying guilt should NEVER be used. Examples of these would be, "police want to speak to this individual about a robbery" or "the person pictured is wanted by police in connection with a robbery."