

Society of Editors

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From the Executive Director

Tuesday 11th February 2020

Ian Hopkins QPM
Chief Constable
Greater Manchester Police
4th Floor
Central Park
Northampton Road
Manchester
M40 5BP

Dear Chief Constable,

I am writing to you to express the Society's concern in relation to reported comments by Chief Superintendent Phil Davies at a police and crime panel meeting on January 28th that he does not wish his team to focus on responding to legitimate questions by journalists on the basis that 'they're going to write what they want to write anyway'. The comments, published by the Manchester Evening News, and the wider context can be read [here](#).

As recognised in the introduction to the College of Policing's Media Guidelines, which the Society was consulted on and provided feedback on ahead of publication in 2017, a successful working relationship between the police and the media service is vital and it is deeply worrying that a senior officer such as Davies does not appear to recognise the legitimate role that journalists play in asking questions of public bodies and officials.

The Society is deeply concerned that such comments are in direct contradiction to the vital role of journalists that the College of Policing purports to support - support for which you as Chief Constable openly spoke of as a guest at our conference in Manchester in 2018.

While I can appreciate the pressures that your officers are under and the need to often prioritise workload it is the role of the media to report on matters of legitimate public interest and it is unhelpful for a senior officer to suggest that answering the questions of reporters should not be a focus for his team. More worryingly, the inference that journalists will write what they wish to regardless of the facts is both inaccurate and grossly offensive. The whole point of journalists asking questions is not only to provide a clearer account and context to an issue but also to avoid inaccuracies and to provide the subject of an article with a fair opportunity to respond to concerns and criticism.

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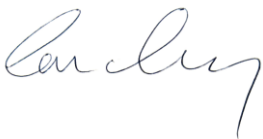
As widely reported by the Manchester Evening News, officers have contacted the paper to highlight alleged concerns ranging from lost records to delayed investigations, safeguarding concerns, crime backlogs, soaring costs and court chaos. While perceived negative coverage of the subject may be frustrating for Greater Manchester Police, such issues are undoubtedly a matter of serious public interest and legitimate discussion.

As I hope you will appreciate, a Chief Superintendent openly criticising a newspaper for performing its role not only works to undermine public confidence and trust in the force's willingness to be scrutinised but it also has an insidious effect on the value placed by other, less senior, officers on the vital function that journalists perform on behalf of the public. Ultimately, attempts to control the flow of information and the refusal to engage and answer the questions of the media only results in the public being deprived of information that it is entitled to in a democratic society.

In light of your previous support and recognition of the important role that the media plays, I would be grateful for your renewed assurances that officers in your force recognise that the media has a job to do and that there is indeed a public interest in not only scrutinising how public funds are spent but if problems exist, what the implications of such problems may be.

I look forward to your response and welcome the opportunity to sit down and discuss the issue with you in more detail if you should wish.

Kind regards,



Ian Murray,
Executive Director, Society of Editors

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