



The Policing and Media Charter



Introduction

This Charter has been created following consultation between the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#), [College of Policing \(the College\)](#), [Crown Prosecution Service \(CPS\)](#) and representatives from the media, the [Society of Editors](#), [Crime Reporters Association](#) and the [Media Lawyers Association](#).

The purpose of this Charter is to set out how journalists and press officers interact with one another, with the overarching aim of strengthening the relationship between policing and the media. It is the outcome of a two-year dialogue about rebuilding the relationship by providing new guidance to police officers, communications teams, journalists and their editors.

This charter is intended to promote consistent standards and decision-making in the release of public information across all police forces, building on the principles of openness and transparency in the police [Code of Ethics](#) and the College's [Media and communications APP](#).

The principle of open justice is an essential element of the rule of law in England and Wales. It is an important feature of our criminal justice system that it is generally transparent and administered in public. It is open to public scrutiny, except for any agreed reporting restrictions, and the media play an important role.

It is often said the media are the public's eyes and ears. A successful working relationship between the police and the media is vital for democracy. It can inform the public of police work, bring offenders to justice and promote the rule of law. It can also prevent the public being misled by social media speculation and misinformation.

This Charter represents a set of jointly agreed principles for police, press officers and journalists. It is complemented by the [Media and communications APP](#) and the [CPS' Media Protocol](#), both of which have been revised as part of recent dialogue. It is further supplemented by recommendations made in the [Repairing the Relationship report](#) from the [Crime Reporters Association](#), the [Society of Editors](#) and the [Media Lawyers Association](#), which have been accepted by the police. These are provided in [Annexe](#).

Strengthening relationships

The foundation for all conversations and interaction between journalists, police and press officers should be mutual respect, professional courtesy and cooperation.

Relationship building: It is important that policing is accessible, providing for two-way engagement with communities, stakeholders and the media. It is the responsibility of both policing and the media to explore how this relationship can be strengthened and maintained. Both sides are committed to continuously improving ways of working and communication, including through better use of telephone calls and in-person engagement.

Examples of local best practice include regular scheduled meetings, briefings or round tables between police press officers and local journalists, where successes and challenges are discussed. 'Hot debriefs' should be considered following high-profile incidents, operations and investigations.

Better understanding of each others' working environment: The context in which the media and police engage with each other continues to evolve and regularly involves decisions that can be subject to challenge and scrutiny. This highlights the value of guidance to assist decision-making. Both a newsroom and police press office are challenged environments, where funding changes can significantly impact capacity. It is important that both policing and the media commit to retaining a 'current' understanding of the others' operating model, including current priorities, ways of working and use of technology. Regular meaningful interaction and engagement is encouraged, particularly between press officers and local/regional publications.

Journalist training: Press officers expect to work with journalists who have been trained to understand the criminal justice system and media law, ideally to an NCTJ standard or equivalent. This is important when handling information about live police investigations and ongoing criminal court proceedings.

Training of police officers: Media engagement should not be restricted to senior positions or Corporate Communications departments (CCDs).

Engagement between police and the media is encouraged for officers and staff of all ranks and roles, providing the person is responsible for communicating about the issue at hand and there is a clear policing purpose in doing so. Regular, meaningful interaction and engagement is encouraged between the police and media, particularly between press offices and key journalists and/or media outlets.

The NPCC, the College and staff organisations are working together on training for all ranks to promote a better professional relationship between police and the media.

Not all police officers will be trained to work with the media, but officers receive training if they are likely to interact regularly with journalists in their roles, for example chief officers and senior investigating officers (SIOs). The police and press should work together to ensure that officers feel more confident and comfortable speaking to the media. Forces are encouraged to engage journalists they work with frequently, such as local and regional reporters, in the learning and development process where appropriate, with the College doing the same at a national level. This could include, for example, media training for chief officers, shadowing opportunities or attending panel discussions.

Identifying the media

The College's [Media and communications APP](#) guidance applies to accredited members of the media who hold a valid press card issued by the [UK Press Card Authority](#). It does not apply to citizen journalists, or social media content gatherers or auditors, who do not hold a valid press card.

The police accept a valid UK Press Card, or a letter from the editor of a title subject to the regulator [Independent Press Standards Organisation \(IPSO\)](#) or [Ofcom](#) or similar, as verification of an accredited journalist. Requests from, or engagement with, non-accredited individuals may be considered on a case-by-case basis taking a risk-based approach. It is important to consider the credentials of the person or organisation making the request, whether they are bound by clear codes of practice or have access to legal advice on how they should cover criminal cases.

The UK Press Card Authority is overseen by the UK's newspaper associations, broadcasters, press agencies, periodical publishers, media trade unions and professional associations. The card is issued only to reporters, photographers, video camera operators, and other technical staff involved in the business of gathering news. The UK Press Card is formally recognised by all broadcasting and written news media, by policing and the Ministry of Justice. Police officers and communications officers may request to see a valid press card before providing information or material, or prior to allowing media into an area reserved for the media or a media briefing. In circumstances where a card has been lost or stolen, a letter or email from an editor or manager can be provided to prove UK Press Card membership.

There is a phone number on the reverse of cards that can be used by officers to check validity.

Engagement between policing and the media

Police officers at all ranks may have some contact with the media as part of the role. Relevant officers should seek to have a trusted dialogue with journalists and aim to provide timely updates, especially during major and critical incidents, providing both reportable and non-reportable briefings.

Policing should aim to share as much information as possible on an attributable basis; officers and staff are encouraged to be open, accurate and lawful when dealing with the media, as releasing information about a police investigation can assist officers and is vital to police maintaining public confidence. Being fair, respectful, open and transparent in communications can motivate the public to cooperate with the police and respect the law.

Defining speaking terms: The basis on which information is disclosed by the police will be defined by policing purpose. Categorisations by which information is disclosed are set out in the College's [Media and communications APP](#). All parties should understand in advance the terms on which a briefing or conversation with the media is taking place.

The APP states the term 'off the record' should be avoided, as it can create ambiguity over how information is to be used. It can also risk the perception of inappropriate or confidential information disclosure.

The four defined categories of basis of conversation are reportable, non-reportable, under embargo and for use but non-attributable. They are defined as follows:

- **Reportable information:** All reportable information may be reported, quoted and attributed, at the media's discretion. All communications should generally be on this basis. A quote in a media release should be attributed to a named spokesperson where appropriate and possible.
- **Non-reportable:** Non-reportable information is provided to the media on the basis (by prior agreement) that it is for guidance only and not for publication or broadcast. It can be used to provide further context around a statement. This enables the police to have a dialogue with the media about serious or sensitive policing issues without generating publicity about them. Where non-reportable information is shared, it is good practice, where appropriate, for police to work with the media to find a way to allow it to be reported in the future. ➤

- **Under embargo:** Embargoed information is shared on the understanding that it is not to be published or broadcast until after a specified event or time.
- **For use but non-attributable:** Information that is for use but non-attributable may be published but cannot be attributed to the source. Always assume that a conversation is reportable and attributable unless expressly agreed otherwise in advance. For example, guidance may be given that an incident is not as it appears, using phrases such as 'We have no information to suggest that this has happened,' or 'it looks like this suspect package might not turn out to be a threat'.

Providing guidance: Experienced and senior communications officers should be empowered to make reasoned judgements on the issuing of non-reportable information – for example, to inform timely editorial decisions and to ensure accuracy. However, it should be made clear to the media where the decision to release information is not the responsibility of the press office and requires approval – for example, from the senior investigating officer (SIO).

In particular, in high-profile or sensitive investigations or operations, or during major incidents, the press office should work with communications leadership and senior operational leads, usually the gold commander or SIO, to determine what can be released.

Press officers will offer, as a minimum, a holding line during a major incident. Providing guidance in major incidents can prevent panic caused by social media speculation, misinformation and rumour.

Contact arrangements: Every force must consider its arrangements for managing media engagement and enquiries. These details should be published on the force website, including operating hours, any out-of-hours arrangements, and the complaints process for the media and members of the public for police-published information.

Telephone contact: All forces should be prepared to answer the phone to respond to press queries, and the press office telephone number will be advertised online. Press officers will introduce themselves by name (but not for being quoted in stories), expecting journalists to do the same. Having a conversation can be a vital opportunity for a force to offer guidance and accurately set out the position, particularly in times of breaking news when speculation is often rife on social media.

Email contact: Police forces should advertise online their generic press office email address for media queries, and journalists should include in email queries their name, their telephone number and the title they are writing for.

Contact information: Forces are encouraged to share with media a list of their press officers, their email address, direct telephone number and details about specific force area responsibilities. This should be regularly updated and available to accredited media on a not-for-publication basis.

Deadlines: Journalists should seek to submit their queries as far ahead of their deadline as possible and make clear to the press officer when that deadline is. This is to ensure the press officer has sufficient time to access information from police systems, and where appropriate, consult with SIOs. More complex queries (particularly those not linked to an incident) may require extensive work and senior officer approval, so journalists should consider this when submitting enquiries. Press officers will endeavour to manage expectations with journalists about deadlines. If a press officer does not provide a response by the agreed deadline but does so afterwards, journalists should endeavour to include the response in online copy still and in a timely manner.

Complaints and corrections: Inaccurate or misleading media coverage can be extremely damaging to an organisation or an individual. Corporate Communications departments (CCDs) should promptly address inaccuracies or misleading coverage by: seeking a resolution with the journalist or media outlet concerned in the first instance; proactively publishing a correction or clarification – for example, through a force's own social media channels; liaison through a regulatory body, such as Ofcom (for broadcast media) or IPSO (for newspapers, magazine, and digital news).

Journalists wishing to raise a complaint related to the handling of an enquiry (or similar) should initially do so through the head of communications. Advice can also be obtained from the National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing communication teams.

Journalists should respond promptly to requests from press officers for correction or clarification in copy, or to complaints. Journalists should be prepared to provide an email address and telephone number for their senior manager or editor, should a complaint require escalation. Police forces can consider a formal IPSO complaint if an issue cannot be resolved with a journalist directly.

Advisories: The press regulator IPSO has also become an established route by which families can inform the press about issues, such as whether they are seeking privacy and would prefer not to receive media approaches. These notices are advisory.

Journalists' safety: Every police force has a designated journalist safety liaison officer (JSLO), as set out in the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists' **National Action Plan**. The National Action Plan is jointly co-chaired by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office. The JSLO is the go-to person for issues relating to the safety of journalists, whether in person or online.

Communicating news with the media: Forces should use emailed press releases as a primary form of communication to inform the national media in the event of a story that is of national interest. Forces are provided with a current mailing list of the Crime Reporters Association (CRA) and national media, and it is the responsibility of the CRA and national media to ensure the mailing list is kept up to date. Many forces will also publish press releases on their website and share them on their social media channels. Wherever possible, the name and telephone number of the press officer who can deal with questions about the matter will be included in the emailed press release.

Timeliness: News is a perishable commodity and updates should be released as soon as possible to prevent social media speculation, misinformation and false rumours taking hold of the narrative (unless there's a good operational or legal reason not to). Force communications should be agile and responsive, providing regular and timely updates, especially during major and critical incidents. Whilst press officers will always endeavour to provide journalists with information as quickly as possible, in the case of a major incident journalists should regularly check force channels (including social media and the website) for updates too.

Best practice for tactical day-to-day working

Media briefings: Media briefings may be considered at any point during an investigation or critical incident and can also be considered for strategic purposes.

Media briefings should be for accredited media who hold a UK Press Card and include those with a letter from the editor of a title regulated by **IPSO** or **Ofcom** or similar. Requests from individuals who do not hold a UK Press Card may be considered on a case-by-case basis and a record should be kept of this decision.

Senior investigating officers (SIOs) should liaise with Corporate Communications departments (CCDs) about planning and arranging briefings. The rationale for the briefing must be recorded by either the CCD or the SIO. This should consider whether or not an embargo agreement is required. If one is required, it should have signed agreement from the media and should be retained for audit purposes.

The CPS should always be consulted prior to any police-only briefings held in respect of criminal investigations or proceedings. This is to advise on the risk of prejudice to any criminal justice proceedings presented by the release of information at the briefing.

It is up to the officer in the case (OIC) and a CCD representative to clarify the basis on which a media briefing is taking place. It is also important to clarify the language that should be used to describe these briefings in conversations with journalists, to ensure a mutual understanding of what

is expected. There are three types of media briefing that could be deployed: reportable briefing (including press conferences); non-reportable background briefing; non-attributable background briefing.

Media briefings linked to criminal proceedings: Media briefings linked to criminal proceedings, particularly in high-profile or sensitive cases, should be considered. Embargoes may be used to delay the release of information shared in a media briefing. Any media briefing linked to criminal proceedings must follow the CPS **Media Protocol**.

Pre-trial or pre-verdict briefings help the media to understand a prosecution and inform reporting. For the police, they provide an opportunity for officers to answer questions and explore potential issues well in advance of the end of a case, instead of leaving it to verdict when there may be little time for press officers to seek answers before publication. These briefings enable the work of the police and courts to be better understood by the public. For broadcast media in particular, the verdict in a case can be 'on-air' within seconds and pre-trial and pre-verdict briefings can significantly help reporting of the case.

Interviewing victims: Policing communications should always consider the wishes and rights of victims, including the family of deceased victims, with consideration given to children, young people and vulnerable adults. It should always be the choice of the victim or relatives whether to speak to the media. Family liaison officers (FLOs) and communications officers should support victims to speak to the media directly, when they wish to do so, and should ensure that victims and families feel free to express their own views. Where this is not possible, or in line with the wishes of the victim or witness, CCDs may act as a conduit and facilitate interviews and support with publicity in the manner they request. The media discourage interviews by police press officers of witnesses and victims and may not use the footage because it is not an independent interview by an accredited member of the media.

Regardless of previous decisions, victims and relatives may change their position on whether they wish to speak to the media or not. This should be respected. If families do not wish to speak to the media, policing will provide as much information as possible to support publicity, including photographs where they are available.

Exclusives: Media organisations should be treated in a fair and impartial manner. Where a media organisation generates an exclusive, their right to share information in confidence with the police should be respected. This means that where an enquiry is put to police by a journalist, the information being sought will not be proactively issued to other media outlets, except for operational reasons or unless it was already planned for release into the public domain.

Social media: Policing should consider a robust strategy to tackle some of the risks to investigations posed by social >

media. Communications officers should have processes in place for rapid and appropriate escalation of potentially contentious or harmful online content – in most cases, authorised users should quickly identify content of this nature and escalate according to local processes.

Reporters face challenges in verifying information appearing in real time on social media and the relationship between the media and the police will prove ever more crucial in establishing the truth. Forces must understand the need to move quickly to respond with guidance in the face of speculation, misinformation and live videos posted by witnesses.

Sharing of information and content

The police service has a duty to safeguard the confidentiality and integrity of the information it holds and the rights of individuals to privacy. This duty must be balanced against the need to be open and transparent.

Requesting information about an incident: When contacting a police force press office enquiring about an incident, a journalist should provide, as a minimum, the location of the incident (with road name, where possible), the date and approximate time the incident occurred, a brief overview of what they believe the incident to be and, where possible, an incident number (which is provided to every victim of reported crime). The greater detail that can be provided, the faster the response from the communications team is likely to be.

Releasing information on arrest: When someone is arrested, communications officers can release the person's gender, the person's age, the place where they live (for example, the town or city), the nature, date and general location of the alleged offence, the date of the arrest, whether they are in custody, have been bailed, released under investigation (RUI) or with no further action (NFA), any subsequent bail date, the outcome of the investigation.

Police may consider disclosing the nationality and/or ethnicity of the suspect on arrest (where known or recorded) in high-profile or sensitive investigations. Police should consider whether there is: a policing purpose for doing so; related risk or impact on public safety, leading to rising community tension at a local, regional or national level; misinformation, disinformation or malinformation leading to community tension; a significant level of media or social media interest.

In situations where releasing some information would confirm the identity of an individual, this information should not be released. Instead, forces should consider

releasing information with fewer specific details. To receive any information in response to an enquiry about an arrest, the media need to provide sufficient details to allow that arrest or incident to be traced, including location, date and type of offence. If confirming that an arrest has been made, communications officers should state that they are not confirming the identity of the arrested person. Providing the name of the suspect alone is not sufficient and often results in forces being unable to answer the query. Press officers should be able to make their own reasoned judgements in individual cases when confirming details of investigations.

Naming on charge: Individuals charged with an offence, including those who receive a summons to court, should be named on charge. If there is an exceptional and legitimate policing purpose or if reporting restrictions apply, individuals should not be named on charge. A decision not to name an individual who has been charged should be taken in consultation with the CPS.

When information is released on charge, police should release the following information: name; age; address; details of the charge; date and location of court appearance; custody or bail status. Other information that may be released includes: the person's occupation if relevant, such as where a teacher is charged with the assault of a pupil at the school where they work.

Police should confirm the nationality and/or ethnicity of the person (where known or recorded) on charge in high-profile or sensitive investigations using the same guidance as on arrest. This information will be provided only on a contemporaneous basis.

Charging information should be given as soon as possible at the point of charge.

Magistrates' court dates: Police will endeavour to provide journalists with advance notice of cases to allow them to attend the defendant's first appearance at magistrates' courts. Public court lists are available online or in hard copy in court and tribunal buildings. HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) has published a [Media Protocol on sharing court lists, registers and documents](#).

Information during criminal proceedings: The release of material during criminal proceedings is set out in the CPS [Media Protocol](#). The release of evidential material should be agreed by the CPS and can be released by the police. Press officers will endeavour to release pictures and video material shown in court on the same day as shown to the jury throughout a prosecution. Releasing images, CCTV, body-worn video (BWV) or other material from the case such as images of the weapon or exhibits heightens the chance of publication. If the material in a case will not be provided, an explanation should be provided to the media in advance so that the media can consider whether to make representations.

Information at the end of criminal proceedings: Where practicable and proportionate, press offices

should be prepared to release the image of a person found guilty on the day of conviction where there is a policing purpose or at the request of the media. This is unless there is a court order or other legitimate reason not to do so. Press offices should release images on all custodial sentences at the request of the media unless exceptional reasons exist. Approval and verification processes for the release of images should be agreed locally. If there are legitimate reasons not to issue the image, the senior investigating officer (SIO) or the officer in the case (OIC) must provide a rationale, which will be logged by the Corporate Communications department (CCD). This reason should be explained to any requesting media.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of potential exceptional reasons:

- A risk assessment has been completed and release of the image will put the person, their family or their friends at risk of harm.
- Reporting restrictions are in place that prevent the person's identity from being released.
- Releasing the image could interfere with other ongoing proceedings, because identity is an issue.
- The individual is a juvenile and reporting restrictions have not been lifted.
- The individual is a vulnerable adult.

No further action: When forces discontinue an investigation or release a suspect with no further action, this will normally be confirmed.

Other cases: Police and press officers should be able to discuss all crimes, regardless of seriousness. Identities of people dealt with by out-of-court disposals – such as cautions, speeding fines and other fixed penalties – should not be released or confirmed. Communications officers should say that an individual has been dealt with and only release general details of the offence, or individual, in line with the principles set out in the 'Releasing information on arrest' section.

BWV footage: In recent times there have been cases where members of the public have posted footage from arrests and police searches which has led to highly critical commentary of the officers involved. Forces should consider providing more guidance about the circumstances of incidents and/or the release of police body-worn footage to ensure that the public has a balanced view of what happened. Release of BWV to the media or to the public should follow the [NPCC Body-Worn Video Guidance 2024](#).

Where to find guidance

The College's [Media and communications APP](#) provides specific guidance on the following areas:

- [Police and the media](#)
- [Arrests, charges and judicial outcomes](#)
- [Information about a police investigation or on-going operation](#)
- [Information at the end of criminal proceedings](#)
- [Major incidents](#)
- [Documentaries](#)

Police under investigation: Allegations of misconduct or crimes by police officers are a matter of considerable and legitimate public interest.

There should be a presumption of openness and transparency in police misconduct cases held in public, in line with the principles of open justice.

If officers are charged with or summonsed for a criminal offence committed on duty, their details should be proactively released.

Public statements should also be proactively released if officers are charged in relation to off-duty activities that involve serious criminality (sexual offences, serious assaults, fraud or corruption) or matters that could seriously damage trust and confidence in the police service or call its integrity into question.

Information about the time and location of misconduct proceedings will be published on the force website. At the conclusion of a misconduct hearing, there is a requirement that the outcome of a case is published within a predetermined timeframe.

The misconduct and discipline system for police staff is conducted separately from that for officers and is not subject to the same statutory regulation. Forces should still be prepared to answer questions about such cases.

Further information is available in the College's [Media and communications APP](#).

Annexe

The police and the media: Repairing the relationship

The following recommendations are from the [The police and media: Repairing the relationship report](#), published in June 2024.

Summary of recommendations

1. Police forces should advertise their press office phone number and email address clearly on their website, including any out-of-hours provision if applicable.
2. All forces should be prepared to answer the phone to respond to press queries.
3. Press officers should identify themselves by name on the phone so that professional relationships can be forged with the media.
4. Press officers should be empowered to provide as much guidance as possible to reporters. There should be provision in the APP to allow press officers to make their own 'reasoned judgements in individual cases' when confirming details of investigations.
5. Forces should continue to use emailed press releases as a primary form of communication with the media rather than simply placing information online.
6. Consideration should be given to a mechanism for informing the national media about stories, whether this is a simple contact email list or software that can deliver email alerts.
7. Police should consider providing guidance in major incidents (on a reportable and non-reportable basis) to prevent panic caused by social media speculation, misinformation and rumour.
8. Police should be able to discuss case details where people have been dealt with by cautions, fines, out-of-court disposals, single justice procedure and other fixed penalties.
9. The NPCC, College of Policing and staff organisations need to work together on training for all ranks to promote a better professional relationship between police and the media.
10. The police and press must work together to ensure that officers feel more confident and comfortable speaking to the media.
11. The current College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidelines around countercorruption are damaging officers' perception of the media and are in urgent need of revision.
12. Police must be prepared to act when threats are made to journalists' safety including online threats and in-person stalking.
13. It is essential that press conferences are for accredited media only.
14. Officers should seek to have a trusted dialogue with journalists and aim to provide regular updates in major investigations providing both reportable and non-reportable background briefings.
15. Forces should endeavour to provide the media with charge details as soon as possible. The media should be afforded advance notice of cases to allow them to attend the defendant's first appearance at magistrate courts.
16. Forces should consider pre-trial or pre-verdict briefings to help the media to understand a prosecution and inform reporting at the end of the case.
17. Press offices should endeavour to release pictures and video material shown in court on the same day as shown to the jury throughout a prosecution.
18. Press releases containing mugshots and other relevant information should be sent out as soon as possible on the day of the verdict, not after a sentence.
19. Police should release mugshots for all custodial sentences. Forces should be aware that releasing mugshots, CCTV, body worn video or other picture material from the case, such as images of the weapon or exhibits, heightens the chance of publication. Without images, some stories won't be published.
20. The CRA, MLA and Society of Editors would like to work with the NPCC and the College of Policing to understand how we could improve the handling of media approaches to victims and relatives.
21. It should always be the choice of the victim or relatives whether to speak to the media. If families do wish to speak to the media, providing as much information and photographs as possible can increase the prominence of reporting about their case and provide opportunities for follow-ups which may be useful publicity in cases such as a missing person or a manhunt. If families do want to speak, don't wait for sentencing.
22. Interviews by police press officers of witnesses and victims should be discouraged, they are no substitute for an independent interview by an accredited member of the media.
23. Policing needs to consider a robust strategy to tackle some of the risks to investigations posed by social media.
24. Reporters face challenges in verifying information appearing in real time on social media and we anticipate that the relationship with the police will prove ever more crucial in establishing the truth. Forces must understand the need to move quickly to respond with guidance in the face of speculation, misinformation and correct information posted by witnesses.
25. In recent times there has been a series of cases where members of the public have posted footage from arrests and police searches which have led to highly critical commentary of the officers involved. Forces should consider providing more guidance about the circumstances of incidents and/or the release of police body worn footage to ensure that the public has a balanced view of what happened.
26. We would like to work together with the College of Policing and the NPCC in a review of the Authorised Professional Practice to reflect the recommendations above.