



## PROTOCOL ON MEDIA RELATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this protocol is to ensure effective and professional management of all media relations by the Authority and to maintain the integrity and reputation of the Authority.
2. The protocol complements the Authority's Code of Conduct for Members whilst providing support and guidance for those involved in contact with the media.
3. The protocol conforms with the Publicity Code, issued under section 4(1) of the Local Government Act 1986, which includes police authorities, and provides that a local authority shall not publish, or assist others to publish, material which in whole or part appears designed to affect public support for a political party.
4. Section 6(4) of the Act defines publicity as 'any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public'. The Code covers all public relations activity including paid advertising, leaflet campaigns, exhibitions and conferences as well as offering assistance to others to issue publicity.

### AIMS

5. The Authority will be open and honest in dealing with the media and work pro-actively to:-
  - increase public understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Authority;
  - highlight information or decisions which are in the public interest; and
  - communicate a balanced point of view which represents the view of the Authority as a whole.

### KEY MESSAGES

6. In broad terms, the Authority will provide information to the public via the media about:-
  - The role of the Authority
  - Confidence in and satisfaction with policing services
  - Policing priorities
  - Budget and council tax precepts for policing
  - Constabulary performance and use of resources
  - Investment and development activity
  - Public meetings and other opportunities for the public to get involved in influencing the delivery of policing services
  - Complaints
  - Diversity: race, age, gender, disability, faith and sexual orientation

- Stop and search
  - Neighbourhood policing and public reassurance
  - Independent custody visitors
  - Serious and major crime
  - Preventing violent extremism
7. Media relations about operational policing matters will be managed by the Constabulary Corporate Communications Department. Members who are contacted by the media in relation to operational policing matters should refer them to the Engagement Manager for logging and referral to the Constabulary.
  8. Press releases resulting from Authority papers (which are in the public domain) will be issued in a timely manner following the meeting and circulated to all Members.
  9. Media 'exclusives' will not be disclosed prior to the meeting or before recommendations have been considered or decisions have been taken.
  10. In cases where Members of the Authority abstain from the decision making process or wish to express a disagreement with an Authority decision through the media, support will be provided through Authority media relations processes with the agreement of the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Authority.

#### SPOKESPEOPLE

11. In most cases, the Chairman of the Authority will be the spokesperson quoted in printed material and who will be required to be available for interview including print, radio, television and electronic media outlets.
12. Lead Members for specific subject areas may be quoted and will act as spokesperson, for example, Police Question Time meeting or Committee/Panel Chairmen.
13. If a Member of the Authority is identified with another organisation that is known to the media, it is important that Members make it clear that they are speaking as a representative of the Authority as a whole and not for an external organisation, as an individual or for a political party. The views expressed should reflect the Authority's position on the issue under discussion.

#### PRO-ACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

14. The decision to pro-actively communicate with the public via the media will be made by the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Authority.
15. Content of the publicity will be approved by the Chief Executive, Chairman and/or designated spokesperson prior to release.
16. In the interest of public accountability, it is appropriate to publicise the views or activities of the Authority. Any quotes will reflect approved decisions or resolutions of the Authority and not the personal views of individuals or for a political party.

17. Publicity material will be disseminated through established channels, which are reviewed at least annually. All approved material is published on the Authority's website and circulated to all Members for information.
18. Follow-up enquiries and arrangements for interview will be managed by the Engagement Manager.

#### RE-ACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

19. Members are encouraged to communicate agreed key messages through the media. However, media enquiries made directly to Members should be notified to the Engagement Manager to be logged and to highlight emerging "angles" or lines of enquiry.
20. All media enquiries will be handled responsively taking copy deadlines into consideration. However, accuracy should not be compromised by timescales and the Engagement Manager should be notified to negotiate deadline extensions.
21. A statement or response will always be provided to an enquiry. "No comment" will only be used in cases of sub judice or confidentiality. There should be no breach of confidentiality relating to an individual, member of the public or employee. Where a comment cannot be provided, the reason for this should be clearly explained, such as in the case of sub judice or confidentiality.
22. There is an established protocol between the Chief Constable and the Police Authority on critical incidents which states that the Chief Executive and the Chief Constable will agree a media strategy for the Authority, in order to:-
  - provide community reassurance that the Constabulary and Authority had plans in place to deal with such an incident and that the plans were in accordance with national guidelines;
  - maintain public confidence in the police;
  - provide accountability to the public; and
  - preserve the reputation of the Constabulary and Authority.
23. A media strategy will be developed by the Constabulary and Authority and may include:-
  - a press release or holding statement to respond to media enquiries;
  - key messages;
  - Q&A and 'if asked' media lines;
  - nominated spokespersons;
  - whether to publish relevant and appropriate material on website;
  - notify key stakeholders (staff, MPs, partner agencies, councils) and
  - a method of logging media response.
24. Any Member who is contacted by the media should inform the Engagement Manager of the name of the media, journalist contact details and questions posed. The details will be forwarded to Corporate Communications, the Gold Group (if established) and the Chief Executive to formulate an agreed response.

## PRE ELECTION RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLICITY

25. The Code of Recommended Practice is statutory guidance issued under Section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986 and was amended in April 2001. Local authorities have a statutory obligation to have regard to the Code when making decisions on publicity. A key paragraph of the Code states that:

“The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in certain circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority’s control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election”.

26. In considering whether publicity should be undertaken, the key questions to be addressed are:-

- Is there a general reason why the activity must take place now rather than after the election?
- Could we demonstrate to a reasonable outside observer that its purpose is not that of pre-election publicity?

27. If the answer to either of these questions is ‘no’, then alternative and more suitable arrangements will be made.

28. During the period between the notice of an election and the election, the following facilities will not be available:-

- Publicity (including photography) on matters other than those coming before the full Authority, Committees and Panels.
- Assistance with preparation and processing of press statements issued by, or on behalf of, named Members in any capacity – except where there is a genuine need for a political response to an important event outside the Authority’s control.

## MEDIA MONITORING

29. Evaluation of the media coverage will be conducted by the Engagement Manager and reported to Engagement Committee.

Mark Sellwood  
Chief Executive