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# **Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire**

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## **Media Protocol**

between the Police and Crime  
Commissioner for Bedfordshire and  
Bedfordshire Police

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January 2013

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## **Media Communications Protocol**

### **Media communications protocol between the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Bedfordshire Police Force.**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire and Bedfordshire Police recognise that good liaison between their respective communications teams is essential to ensure a co-ordinated and informed approach to media and public relations activity.
- 1.2 Equally, to prevent confusion on parameters and areas of responsibility it is necessary to consider the key roles of the respective parties.
- 1.3 It is also necessary to acknowledge that these are hitherto untested roles, without previous guidance or best practice to follow. Therefore it is sensible to expect a necessary degree of flexibility in relation to this protocol and have measures in place to facilitate this.

#### **2. Role of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Bedfordshire**

- 2.1 The Police and Crime Commissioner will have a wide range of responsibilities which will include local community safety issues and crime reduction as well as policing. To achieve this, the Commissioner will commission services from organisations such as community safety partnerships and criminal justice agencies.
- 2.2 Other key duties include:
  - Control of the local budget for policing and community safety;
  - Setting the amount of locally-raised council tax that goes towards policing;
  - Producing a Police and Crime Plan which includes local and national priorities;
  - Promoting joint working between police and community safety partners;
  - Holding the Chief Constable to account for performance on behalf of local people;
  - Appointing (and if required dismissing) the Chief Constable;
  - Publishing an annual report to keep people informed;
  - Ensuring that public priorities are acted upon, victims are consulted and that the most vulnerable individuals are not overlooked;
  - Addressing national issues as well as local concerns.

### **3. Role of the Chief Constable**

- 3.1 It is expected that there will be a close working relationship between the PCC and the Chief Constable of Bedfordshire Police but the PCC must not restrict the operational independence of Bedfordshire Police or its Chief Constable.
- 3.2 The Chief Constable's responsibilities include:
- Direction and control over the force's officers and staff;
  - Day to day responsibility for operational policing in the county;
  - Supporting the PCC in the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan;
  - Tackling national threats such as terrorism, public disorder, cyber-incidents and organised crime;
  - Managing complaints against the force, officers and staff except the Chief Constable;
  - Day to day responsibility for the financial management of the force;
  - Reviewing opportunities to work with other police forces and organisations.

### **4. Purpose of the Protocol**

- 4.1 It is important to recognise and accept the spirit in which this protocol is written, which is intended to ensure transparency, clarity and timeliness when matters concerning both parties are, or are deemed likely to be, of public/press interest.
- 4.2 It seeks to make the areas of responsibility and subsequent working practices clear, in order that both parties can provide an informed response to public/press interest.
- 4.3 The protocol is also designed to ensure a good working relationship between the two parties, with particular emphasis on the respective communications leads and matters that have a significant impact on the image and reputation of either function as well as the county as a whole.
- 4.4 It seeks to maximise the opportunity to promote and enhance awareness of shared messages on crime reduction, performance and community reassurance.
- 4.5 It is also sensible to reduce the potential for conflicting or contradictory messages to be given to the public due to lack of communication between the two organisations.

- 4.6 It does not, under any circumstances, seek to place restrictions on, or influence the message of, either party.

## **5. Objectives**

- To enhance the transparency, quality and accuracy of public information
- To promote a close working relationship between the PCC and Bedfordshire Police, sharing information on matters that have a significant impact on the image and reputation of either organisation as well as the county as a whole.
- To promote and enhance awareness of shared messages on crime reduction, performance and community reassurance.
- To reduce the possibility of conflicting messages issued due to lack of advance communication between the parties.
- To ensure that where there are matters of sensitivity both parties are aware of any conflicting or potentially damaging views.

## **6. Areas of responsibility**

- 6.1 The PCC's role is to be the voice of the people and to hold Bedfordshire Police to account for the totality of policing in the county. As such the PCC will be required to review, and on occasions challenge, the Force's use of resources, performance delivery and anti-crime strategies.
- 6.2 However, fundamentally the relationship between the PCC and the Chief Constable is expected to be one of support as both parties share the same long-term goal – to cut crime and improve the safety of the public.
- 6.3 As such, there will be opportunities for proactive, confidence-raising, public relations activity to be linked in order to achieve the overall desired outcome – namely improved public confidence and increased reassurance.
- 6.4 In the age of 24 x 7 media, all varieties of media communications activity from traditional printed and broadcast vehicles - including interviews and opinion pieces - to social and new media, can have an impact in terms of reputation and the public's feelings of safety. It is expected that each party will utilise the most effective channels and collateral at all times, while wider dissemination is likely to occur organically.

- 6.5 It is accepted that the priority area of activity for the PCC will be promoting issues relating to priorities, performance, budget accountability to the public and matters relating to the overall effectiveness and the efficiency of the Force.
- 6.6 Therefore, one of the prime functions of the PCC's PR activity will be to support and promote any decisions that seek to deliver local community priorities and to communicate the objectives and success of the Police and Crime Plan, for which he will be judged by the electorate.
- 6.7 The Force is more likely to focus its efforts on operational matters, appeals and feedback, and responding to serious incidents including homicide, firearms incidents and serious breaches of public order. Another key area is the provision of appropriate support to the Command Team and Divisional Commanders as well as fielding enquiries from journalists on subjects that could be deemed controversial or sensitive.
- 6.8 This protocol is intended to cover both proactive and reactive media communications activity by the PCC and Bedfordshire Police.
- 6.9 It is anticipated that on occasions issues will surface which combine elements of performance and operational activity, raising wider questions of effectiveness and efficiency. In that event discussions will take place as required between the PCC's communications team and the Force Media Department (FMD) to agree the appropriate strategy. This will include which department will be the main press contact from where any enquiries will be handled.
- 6.10 Agreement will also be reached at this stage over the content of information issued and who will undertake its dispatch and follow-up. Wherever practicable, associated press releases should be shared with each party prior to despatch – at the very least a copy should be lodged immediately with the other department for information purposes. Should a press conference be required the format of this will similarly be a matter for agreement between the two parties.
- 6.11 It is important to note that:
- In the event of a difference of opinion as to responsibility this will be referred to the PCC (or nominee) and the Deputy Chief Constable (or nominee) for discussion and resolution.
  - All press releases must be copied to each media office at the time of dispatch by e-mail.

## 7. Principles

- 7.1 It is important to recognise that the PCC and the Force are independent of each other and have their own distinct functions, services and priorities. The former, in particular, will reasonably seek to establish a specific public profile via their media communications.
- 7.2 The PCC also has a statutory duty and electoral mandate to hold the Force to account on behalf of the public and undertake an important scrutiny function whereas the Chief Constable is accountable to the PCC.
- 7.3 However, it should be accepted that a co-ordinated approach where possible with regards to media communications will benefit both organisations on their shared vision and objective – which is to promote and enhance public safety.
- 7.4 The public, and the media, have a right to information about what each organisation does, a right extended by the Freedom of Information Act. Working together – and being seen to work together – can enhance the quality, consistency and reliability of information released to the media, and also the individual reputation of each organisation.
- 7.5 It is accepted that there are occasions when each organisation will have different views and direction or when a statement or message contains potentially conflicting information, and in such circumstances both communications teams will keep each other informed in advance, if possible, to allow preparation of a balancing comment or response.
- 7.6 Similarly, there may also be occasions when comments are made to the press that cause surprise/consternation to both organisations. Again, in such circumstances, it is agreed the media representatives will keep each other informed of both comment and response in a timely fashion.
- 7.7 It is acknowledged that the unforeseen does happen, and equally upon occasion, the best laid plans go awry. The aim will always be to maintain a quality information service to the public by working together in a timely manner.

## **8. Aims**

8.1 The protocol aims to:

- Identify media and communications activity as defined in this protocol and, where necessary, promote a joint approach to managing these activities.
- Promote a shared vision in relation to tackling crime and providing community reassurance messages.
- Engender a positive reputation for both the PCC and the Force, and increase public confidence in policing and the safety of our communities.
- Reduce the risk of tension between the PCC and the Force, or criticism/contradiction of one organisation by another.
- Increase dialogue between the two organisations at a media communications level.

## **9. Definitions of Communications**

9.1 This protocol defines media communications as:

- Press releases and written statements given to the print and broadcast media.
- Interviews and opinion pieces given to the print and broadcast press
- Briefings, interviews, verbal statements and press conferences
- Media information, blogs and commentary released across each organisation's social media websites
- Broadcast interviews, documentaries and public interest programmes.
- Information published on each organisation's website

9.2 Other forms of communication to be taken into account include:

- Statutory information (e.g. Police and Crime Plan, Annual Report)
- Public Campaigns
- Internal communications
- Leaflets, public information posters etc.

## **10. Operation of the protocol**

### 10.1 For purposes of clarity:

- Communications professionals in each organisation shall undertake to inform each other at the earliest opportunity of likely or actual relevant media communications activity, as defined in this protocol.
- Communications professionals in each organisation shall manage the activity in the most appropriate way, being mindful of issues of confidentiality. This could take one of many forms, from sharing key messages or deciding on a joint statement, briefing or press conference to an agreement that one organisation is the lead partner – and even to a reasonable acceptance that one organisation disagrees with the other’s position or proposed course of action.
- Material issued by either party, which relates to the activities or work of the other party, will be shared, in advance where possible, with the relevant communications team.
- Material issued by both parties will be placed on their respective websites, and shared electronically with a named individual in the respective communications teams.
- An archive of material issued will be maintained.
- Communications professionals in each organisation shall meet regularly to discuss strategies to achieve long-term aims of reassuring the public, to develop joint key messages and to discuss challenges to ensure early consideration of the issues.
- In instances of sensitive, or conflicting, positions communications professionals representing each organisation undertake to keep each other informed on a ‘no surprises’ basis. Any confidentiality or embargo relating to this information will naturally be upheld.
- Communications professionals in both organisations agree to respond to requests for information or other support in a timely fashion, with a minimum of acknowledgment of that request within one working day.
- Contact details will be provided for requirements outside normal working hours.

## **11. Review**

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- The protocol should be reviewed six months after its implementation date.

## 12. Key Contacts

### Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner

#### Communications Lead:

- Sallie Blair
- 01283 821012 / 07702 541401
- [sal@bettert看times.co.uk](mailto:sal@bettert看times.co.uk)

#### Chief Executive:

- Name
- Tel
- Email

#### Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire.

- Name
- Tel
- Email

Other useful contacts.....

### Bedfordshire Police

#### Media Relations Manager:

- Jo Hobbs
- 01234 842028
- [jo.hobbs@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:jo.hobbs@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk)

#### Chief Responsible Officer:

- Name
- Tel
- Email

Other useful contacts.....

**Signed on Behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner for  
Bedfordshire**

Signature

Print

Position

Date

**Signed on Behalf of Bedfordshire Police**

Signature

Print

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