

West Midlands Police Corporate Communications Department

News desk Service Level Statement for the media and journalists

Background

The Service Level Statement (SLS) is designed to provide West Midlands Police staff and officers with a clear framework to enable open, transparent and consistent interaction with the media whilst ensuring professional conduct and integrity. It also provides the media with guidance as to the level of service it should receive in line with:

- the [Media relations | College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice](#),
- [other](#) codes of practice, including those that protect victims, personal data and operationally-sensitive information
- British media law, including the Contempt of Court Act and Defamation Act.

West Midlands Police Newsdesk priorities

West Midlands Police is the second biggest police service in England, serving 2.9 million people across the region's diverse communities. The Newsdesk is part of the Corporate Communications Department which provides a range of communication services in support of the 12,500 officers and staff who work for West Midlands Police.

The News desk is an extremely busy function receiving nearly 10,000 calls for service each year from media. Alongside these enquiries, we have an important role supporting officers with appeals, court cases, family and victim liaison, and proactively sourcing opportunities to promote the work of the force and protect the public.

As with any news function, we must prioritise our workload. We do this in terms of safety to the public and protecting the most vulnerable. Our first priority is to focus on the incidents where communication is needed to prevent threat, risk and harm to the public. We then prioritise work that will help prevent or detect crime.

At all times we work to ensure the force is transparent and accountable. We apply our time and resources to the media and communication channels that will give us the greatest impact and operational benefit. This can mean either prioritising the channel / media that enables us to reach the most people, or sometimes it can mean focusing our attention on channels that may have smaller but very specific audiences, e.g. minority ethnic communities, students or certain age groups.

The public are at the heart of everything we do and our communications prioritise the issues which are of greatest threat, harm and risk and relevance to communities, in alignment with our force and local priorities.

We recognise the media's role in holding the police to account and that like us, the media works in the interest of the public, and on the basis of public interest.

SLS purpose

Section one explains how we provide this service, the manner in which we work and the ways journalists can gather information under our SLS.

Section two provides a quick reference about different types of enquiries under our SLS.

Section one:

How do I submit a media enquiry?

Our main channels are regularly updated with news and information that is of interest and relevance to communities across the West Midlands, so before submitting an enquiry please check these news channels:

There is a News section on the West Midlands Police website or our Facebook page @WMPolice.

For local news you should also check our Local Policing Area pages eg Walsall, Sandwell etc.

Please note that if the information you are enquiring about is already on our website or Facebook page, you will not receive a response, so it's worth checking this beforehand.

The following are our corporate WMP social media channels:

Facebook - westmidlandspolice

Twitter - @wmpolice

Web – West Midlands Police

In addition to these a number of our WMP teams and officers also choose to keep the public updated on topics that are of interest to the public or that reflect their life as an officer.

Officers use social media to engage with the public positively. Any enquiries related to information found on these accounts must be submitted in line with this SLS.

As set out above, our first priority is to focus on the incidents where communication is needed to prevent threat, risk and harm to the public. This means that we are not able to respond to all enquiries and we will prioritise those relating to the critical and routine incidents listed in section two.

If not, you can email the police newsdesk:

corporate.communications@westmidlands.police.uk

Will you respond to all media enquiries?

This SLS sets out what sort of enquiries we are able to respond to, what information your enquiry should contain and what our response is likely to consist of.

Please note that we receive hundreds of media enquiries per week, from local, regional and national media, and we are not able to respond to enquiries which fall outside the terms of this SLS.

When will I get a response?

The newsdesk is open between the hours of 7.30am and 6.00pm Monday to Friday and 8.00 to 5pm at the weekend (8.00am to 4.00pm bank holidays).

We aim to provide a response within one working day for critical queries and up to three working days for routine queries, but this is subject to officer availability and work patterns.

We will endeavour to take your deadlines into consideration.

How do I submit a media enquiry outside these hours?

Outside these hours, if your media enquiry is of a critical nature, you can request to speak to the on-call function.

This can be done by contacting the duty Inspector in the Force Control Centre on 0121 626 4040, alternatively you can direct message us @wmpolice – please note this is not monitored 24/7.

Following the initial enquiry, we will publish information on critical incidents on the police website and/or social media channels. Journalists are advised to check these channels.

The on-call function is an on-call function for force resources and critical incidents only.

If it's not a critical query then you can email your enquiry to corporate.communications@westmidlands.police.uk and it will be picked up during the next working day.

The newsdesk inbox is not monitored out of hours and that you should not expect a response by email outside office hours.

What information should I include in my enquiry?

The police systems Corporate Communications use to search for information are not predominantly set up for media enquiries. Incidents are listed by location, time and date.

If you need to enquire about an incident that is not on our website, we will need to know:

- The location of the incident
- The road or street it occurred on
- An approximate time, to within one hour and an exact date
- A rough description of the type of incident
- Where you obtained the information if this is possible to share
- The name of the victim, caller, suspect or offender if applicable
- A crime number if you have access to one – these are supplied to victims of crime and everyone who reports incidents.

Providing as much information as possible helps find an answer to your query quickly and efficiently.

I want more information. Will you provide it?

The media should work on the assumption that information published on West Midlands Police website, Twitter, Facebook and Neighbourhood Alerts reflects all the information available to the media.

How do I get updates about an incident or case?

Updates are provided proactively and regularly on our website and/or on our social media channels when there is a policing purpose in doing so.

Please make sure you check our channels in the first instance. During live critical incidents, our focus will be on providing regular updates to the public on these channels.

Responding to individual media enquiries slows this process down and diverts our resources from providing updates quickly to the public. So please monitor our website and social media channels rather than approaching the Newsdesk, particularly for updates – we are unlikely to be able to respond to individual enquiries during a live critical incident.

For incidents that have moved to an investigative stage, we will endeavour to keep the media updated by using our website and other channels. This includes arrests, criminal charges, court appearances and other key developments.

Please check our website regularly, as this is our primary channel for these updates.

Updates about court appearances should be directed to the courts. For updates about specific kinds of incidents, such as those involving fatalities, please see section two of this document.

Section Two:

This section outlines how our service-level agreement is applied to media enquiries.

The team uses a classification system for media enquiries so they are prioritised by the seriousness of the crime and threat, risk and harm to the public.

- Priority 1 response time: we will aim to answer these enquiries as quickly as possible but within six office hours.
- Priority 2 response time: we will aim to answer these enquiries within 24 hours.
- Priority 3 response time: we will aim to answer these enquiries within three days.

Enquiries that fall outside these priority categories, such as low-level crime or feature requests we will aim to respond to within seven days.

Please note that all of these response times are subject on a case-by-case basis to the agreement from the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO). Newsdesk works under the direction of the force command structure and all material relating to incidents and investigations are subject to clearance procedures. The ultimate responsibility for the media strategy associated with an investigation sits with the SIO.

Below is a short list of some of the enquiries we have categorised. It is not a definitive or exhaustive list and we will assess each request. However, if your query does not fall within these parameters you may not receive a reply.

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
As swiftly as possible/within six office hours	Within 24 hours	Within three working days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murder • Terrorism offences • Incidents formally classified as “Major Incidents” • Ongoing kidnap/abduction investigations where there is no media blackout • Attempted murder where an offender(s) is outstanding • Serious sexual assaults where an offender(s) is outstanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arson with intent to endanger life where an offender(s) is outstanding • Fatal road traffic collision within the last 24 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rape where no suspects are outstanding • Attempted murder where no suspects are outstanding • Serious sexual assaults where no suspects are outstanding • Arson with intent to endanger life where no suspects are outstanding • Robbery • Aggravated burglary

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assault • Serious injury road traffic collisions • Other wanted enquiries • Other sexual offences • Historic fatal road traffic collisions • Serious drug offences • Anti-social behaviour • Other traffic offences • Burglary • Vehicle crime • Criminal damage • Theft
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Here is a list of the most frequent requests and our SLS. It is presented in alphabetical order for quick reference.

Abduction/ Kidnapping: In cases of abduction or kidnapping where a life is genuinely thought to be at risk, the media may be asked to impose a news blackout. However, this will only be considered as a last resort and where absolutely necessary. The media will be asked not to report the incident if it is likely to make the release of the hostage more difficult. Any request for a news blackout must be endorsed by a senior officer.

Advice given by officers: Officers may sometimes resolve an incident or complaint by giving ‘words of advice’ to a member of the public instead of taking formal action. In such cases, it may be possible to confirm this outcome depending on how the information is recorded. However, no elaboration can be provided on the details of that advice.

Air support/air ambulance: Please refer to Police helicopter.

Amounts of cash stolen: Specific details of cash or securities stolen in raids on banks, building societies and post offices will not be confirmed. This is for security reasons. Quantities of cash will only be described as small/large, or simply ‘a quantity of cash’.

Arrests and charges: We publish information about arrests and charges on our website and other channels as part of the information we routinely share about an incident or investigation. If an arrest has been made or a person has been charged we will clearly state this in the relevant web copy. Journalists are advised to check these channels regularly.

How do I get updates about an incident or case? We will not routinely give updates on cases if they are not of a critical nature. If we have issued a statement on the web about a critical incident we will update our website and social media channels with any updates.

Arsons and fires: Media enquiries about fires should initially be directed to the relevant fire service. If the fire service confirms the incident is being investigated as a suspected arson we will only issue updates and information about major or critical incidents.

Media enquiries about these incidents will not be responded to, as information is provided proactively where there is a policing purpose. No information will be released about the cause of a fire until this has been established. Asking for additional information.

Naming businesses: Businesses may be routinely identified as part of police investigations, for example as part of an appeal for witnesses. In some cases, operational policing reasons may prevent businesses being identified – for example where it could impact upon an investigation. The need to protect private information may also prevent businesses being identified, e.g. in circumstances where identifying a business might indirectly identify a suspect. We will publish this information proactively where it supports a policing purpose.

Cautioning: We will not release the identity of anyone cautioned. If asked about a specific case, the force can confirm the fact that a person was cautioned.

Collisions and major traffic disruption: We are not able to respond to media enquiries about minor collisions. If there is a policing purpose, such as to appeal for witnesses or to notify motorists of major disruption, we have systems in place to identify this and we will share this information proactively on our channels. Please check these channels, as enquiries about collisions will not be responded to.

Information relating to serious and fatal collisions will be published on our website.

Complaints against the police: Information may be provided in response to media enquiries about complaints against the police. However, it may not be appropriate to publicise full details of the incident, as this may unduly affect the outcome of an investigation.

Condition checks: We may carry out condition checks where there is a specific policing purpose. If this information is available, it will be published proactively online, by way of update or addition. The media therefore do not need to ask for this, and are advised instead to monitor our channels.

We will not be able to carry out condition checks at the request of the media. These enquiries need to be directed to the relevant organisation.

Deaths and bereaved families: We will release the identity of people who have died only where there is an operational policing purpose in doing so. We may identify people who have died in suspicious circumstances, providing it supports a policing purpose. This will be done following completion of the proper identification procedures, and consultation with the deceased's next of kin. We will publish this information proactively, using our channels, and the media should monitor these rather than approaching newsdesk.

We do not routinely identify people who have died in non-suspicious circumstances. This includes suspected suicides, medical episodes and most collisions. Identity queries should ordinarily be directed to the coroners' offices.

Family tributes or photographs: Will be provided proactively in line with the wishes of a bereaved family.

Deaths in police custody: Following a death in police custody an initial statement will be prepared by us and authorised by a member of the force executive team.

It will normally include: • Confirmation that a death has occurred • Details of the deceased, subject to next of kin having been informed • Confirmation of the cause of death, subject to

the agreement of the coroner, and • Confirmation that the matter has been referred to the IOPC

Identifying people and businesses Please see 'deaths and bereaved families', 'deaths in police custody', 'businesses', 'naming suspects/defendants due in court', 'wanted people' and 'victims and witnesses'

Details of **incidents** that are shared via our local appeals process. Media enquiries about these incidents will not be responded to, as information is provided proactively where there is a policing purpose.

Major incidents: 'Major incident' is a specific categorisation of incident – not every big police incident is a major incident. If a major incident is declared, we will be collaborating with the other emergency services and the agency with primacy will be confirmed.

We will work closely with the other agencies to co-ordinate our messages to provide key messages to the public. If urgent messages need to be delivered to the public we will prioritise the use of social media channels and our neighbourhood alert system.

Please note that during major incidents, our communication channels are used to proactively share available information and this is our priority. The media should refrain from submitting individual enquiries, as we are unlikely to have the capacity to deal with them and all available information will be provided online.

Misconduct: The force follows the College of Policing's authorised professional practice which can be found at [Media relations | College of Policing](#)

We will publish information about public misconduct or special case hearings and all misconduct hearing outcomes on our website. Details of any upcoming misconduct hearings to be held in public, including details of how to attend, are published on the force's website.

Missing people: We share details with the media in some missing people cases, usually due to concerns about their welfare. Appeals are reserved for the most urgent cases. Due to the sensitivity of these cases, information provided will not be expanded upon. Updates will be provided to the media when there is specific new information that is relevant to the investigation or when the appeal is no longer active – the media should check our website and Facebook pages for these updates rather than approaching newsdesk. Newsdesk will only respond to media enquiries about the missing people appeals it has published.

Media officers are linked in closely with Locate the missing persons team and check in regularly for updates.

Naming a suspect/defendant due at court: We follow the College of Policing's authorised professional practice regarding naming suspects. We will neither confirm nor deny names put to them and will not provide guidance. Suspects may be named by us if they are wanted by police, and on arrest the name of the suspect will be reiterated to enable the media to identify and close the appeal.

The name of a defendant who is due at court may be provided to the media to aid court reporting. This is for guidance only and is not intended for publication, as it could contravene current or future reporting restrictions.

Naming a victim or witness: Refer to Victims

Photographs – custody: Where available, custody images held by us can be provided on verdict and/or sentencing following a risk assessment that will be completed by a senior

officer or officer in charge of the case. It is the media's responsibility to check whether any reporting restrictions apply that prevent the defendant from being identified - these can only be released contemporaneously following a verdict or sentencing.

We have the right to refuse issuing a custody photograph and we will explain the reason if we do not release the image. We have a comprehensive process in place to approve the release of photos which takes into account the needs of the victim, the family of the defendant and others who need to be considered. We may decline to release a custody photograph. This decision will be made by the officer leading the case or by the Head of News.

To enable us to locate a custody image, please provide:

- Name of the defendant
- Date of birth or age of the defendant
- Address of the defendant
- What they were convicted of, including date of the offence
- What sentence they received
- The court at which they were sentenced

Photographs/video footage: Photographs or moving images relating to ongoing investigations will be provided proactively on our channels, if the officer leading the case determines this is appropriate, devoid of operational sensitives, does not compromise an investigation or justice outcome and has a policing purpose.

A package will be provided proactively if available, so journalists are advised to check our channels. Media can approach to ask but we will make an appropriate assessment of videos Photographs/video footage – evidence shown in court cases The CPS has a protocol for releasing evidential images used in court which we also try to honour. If you require CCTV or footage contact the newsdesk and your request will be considered.

This will include liaising with the CPS press office and the Investigating Officer before a decision is made.

Traffic disruption/road closures: Refer to Collisions and traffic disruption

Police helicopter: We will not deal with queries around why is the helicopter over an area or location. Air support for policing operations is provided by National Police Air Service (NPAS). If NPAS has directed you to us regarding a media enquiry, we will require the following information to find details of an incident:

- The town/city it happened in/near
- The road or street it occurred on
- An approximate time, to within one hour and a date
- A rough description of the type of incident or log number

Assuming your enquiry falls within the terms of our SLS, we will provide the details available via our channels. Please note that we cannot begin to search for information about an incident without all the information above.

Social media posts by officers: If you would like more information about something an officer or policing team has published on local force/team social media accounts, please

note the Newsdesk will not be able to provide additional information and will not be in a position to respond to these enquiries.

Suicide: Refer to Deaths and bereaved families

Statistics/FOIs: Newsdesk does not hold the force's statistical information but may be able to assist in obtaining some forms of statistical data. However, this may take several days and is done as a courtesy to the media. If information is not available in this way, journalists may wish to submit a Freedom of Information request.

Details of how to submit an FOI request can be found on our website - [Freedom of Information - West Midlands Police \(west-midlands.police.uk\)](https://www.west-midlands.police.uk)

Tributes and photographs of deceased: Refer to Deaths and bereaved families.

Victims and witnesses: We follow codes of practice to protect victims, witnesses and their families. Surviving victims of, or witnesses to a crime will not be identified under any circumstances, even if this information was provided in court.

Wanted people: We use an appeal process to trace people who are wanted on bail or warrant in connection with a criminal matter. This information is supplied proactively, when there is a clear and legitimate policing purpose. Before we release a wanted person's details we have a comprehensive process in place to ensure that all checks have taken place.

Updates will be provided to the media when an appeal is no longer active, so that the details and related images can be removed from media channels at the earliest opportunity for legal purposes. As this communication process is carried out proactively by the police, reporters do not need to do spot-checks for updates but should carefully monitor the police channels.