

Witness Name: Andrew Thomas

Appendix:

PCS media guidance

Date:

23 April 2012

LEVESON PUBLIC INQUIRY

Witness Statement of Public and Commercial Services union

I, **Andrew Thomas**, will say as follows:

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your inquiry, I trust my witness statement will assist you.

In responding I have felt it best to answer the numbered points in order. I also attach as an appendix the media guidance that we issue to our PCS reps. While minor amendments have been made to this guidance from time to time, it has not changed significantly, but we do not keep earlier versions.

If there is anything further you feel PCS can assist with, please do not hesitate to contact us.

1. My name is Andrew Thomas. I am a PCS full-time officer with responsibility for members in the Met Police Service. I have been a full-time officer with the union for 7 years and 8 months (the last 2 years and 2 months in my current role), and prior to that was a lay official of PCS and one of its predecessor unions for over 18 years.

2. PCS is a trade union, affiliated to the TUC, and our principle role and function is to negotiate and campaign collectively on behalf of our members. We engage with employers in regular discussions and negotiations about terms and conditions for staff, often alongside other unions who represent members at the same employer. We also have a wider interest in general government policy, such that it affects our members and the public they serve, as well as social issues, such as equality and social justice.

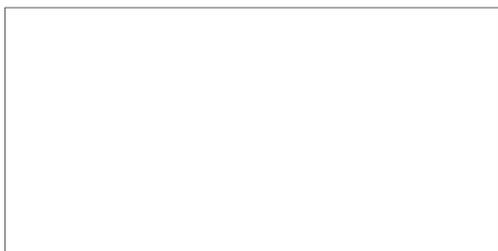
3. I am a PCS industrial officer, employed directly by the union, with responsibility for members in the Met Police Service, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPC), Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Interserve (MPS contract) and John Laing (MPS contract). In relation to Met Police members I act as secretary to an elected executive committee, lead negotiations with the MPS on terms and conditions matters and offer advice and support as required.

4. Civil and public servants who work in central government departments and its related agencies, as well as staff who work for private companies who provide outsourced services to the government – such as facilities management, IT and security.
5. According to our records, as at 18 April 2012 we have 8,857 members employed in the Metropolitan Police Service and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.
6. Enquiries have been made and it has been established from our records, we have no members in any other police force outside the MPS.
7. The ACPO guidance is useful, and we welcome the association's efforts to make the relationship between the media and the police more transparent and based on shared understanding.
8. We are not sure to what extent this will assist the inquiry, as the guidance we issue to our members (see appendix) relates solely to their dealings with the media in a PCS capacity. Most civil servants, including MPS staff, are restricted from speaking to the media, with the exception of elected union representatives who have a bona fide role in acting as a PCS spokesperson on behalf of their colleagues. You will see from the guidance that we make this clear and advise that they ensure journalists they speak to are made aware of it. In terms of any contact with the media in their capacity as MPS staff we would expect our members to comply with MPS policy. The guidance in this form was first written on 2 August 2010 by PCS's national press officer. It is issued as part of a campaigns pack sent to the union's representatives – generally around national strikes/events – and on request, and used as a handout in campaigns and media training.
9. Yes, occasionally, in relation to matters pertaining to PCS.
10. As referred to above, we offer media training and guidance to union representatives to help them fulfil their PCS role – in this sense 'appropriate contact' means talking about the union's issues on behalf of their members. In terms of their MPS staff roles we believe that training is generally adequate *per se*, however in our view police community support officers in particular (unlike police officer colleagues) do not receive appropriate training in relation to possible interaction with the press while performing official duties. In particular, we would highlight the increasing role PCSOs are playing at incident scenes, on cordons, where journalists may turn up unaccompanied by MPS press officers.
11. See answer 10.
12. See answer 10.
13. We believe that the MPS should be better resourced to offer adequate and appropriate training offered to all staff as required, in order to ensure that staff are able to meet their obligations.

14. We have no direct evidence or experience of such interaction.
15. As stated above, we have no direct experience of this, but we recognise that there may be a genuine public interest in it at times. The guidance we issue to reps states that, until a relationship has been established, it is wise to assume there is no such thing as 'off the record'.
16. See the guidance attached as an appendix and referred to above.
17. Again, appropriate advice is given in respect of any media interaction in a PCS capacity only. We have no record of any such advice being sought from members in their capacity as MPS employees.
18. We believe that the same standards should apply to police officers and police staff to ensure consistency and clarity of approach.
19. We are not aware of any such cases.
20. The culture is poor, with a tendency towards an inconsistent/incomplete approach. We would echo the concerns of the public as expressed by the Filkin report.
21. We are not in a position to comment.
22. We have no direct experience of this, but we share the concerns of the general public in light of allegations raised in the media and by your inquiry.
23. We have no direct experience of this.
24. See answers 14 and 23.
25. We have no direct experience of this, but believe that it is very difficult to set an absolute level of 'acceptability' in relation to this matter other than nil.
26. We agree with the recommendations in the report which relate to risk management, clear boundaries and training and are consistent with our views. The recommendations put forward should improve the working relationship between the media and police.
27. We agree with the Filkin recommendations and are pleased that the MPS is adopting these in full.
28. We believe that a more 'businesslike', consistent approach should be adopted, consistent with the Filkin report, and that proper resources and training should be provided to ensure that this is sustainable.
29. We believe that the principles of accountability, transparency, consistency and integrity should be the bedrock of all policies and procedures

in this regard, and that such principles largely inform the definition of 'public interest' in the context of interaction with the press.

30. We believe that our role is to seek to ensure that our members abide by PCS and MPS policy and guidance as appropriate, and to engage with the MPS to seek to ensure that the organisation is properly resourced and delivers proper training.



Andrew Thomas
Industrial officer
Public and Commercial Services union

Appendix

Dealing with the media

Journalists are an important link for us to help us communicate our concerns, campaigns and issues to a wider audience.

Remember that they also view you with similar importance because, as well as being a valuable source of information and stories, you are the all-important 'expert' who can be called on to comment on issues/stories that arise.

Journalists are always looking to nurture good contacts. Here are few pointers that should help you get the best out of these relationships, including some guidance as a PCS rep.

If you have any questions, or are unsure or unhappy about anything you are asked to do either by PCS or the media, contact national press officer Richard Simcox on

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- 1) Most civil servants are only safely able to comment in their capacity as a PCS rep. This should be explained to journalists to avoid confusion. While views differ from employer to employer, it is best to err on the side of caution and take advice if you are unsure.
 - 2) Always assume your comments are 'on the record' – meaning they can be quoted or attributed to you. It is sensible to assume there is no such thing as 'off the record' until you have established a relationship with the journalist and you know you can trust them.
 - 3) If you are unsure about speaking freely, it is an acceptable – by agreement – to email a quote, or ask that they read back what they intend to quote you on. This reduces the possibility of confusion or being misquoted.
 - 4) Trust is the key to the relationship, on both sides. You need to know that a journalist will not deliberately distort what you say, and they need to know you will be a reliable contact who will not give them misleading information or let them down at the last minute. This takes time to develop, but is worth doing. Maintaining semi-regular contact by phone, or meeting for a coffee, will help to establish the relationship.
 - 5) If you have been contacted by a journalist you don't know, don't feel intimidated into commenting immediately if you don't have the full facts or are not confident enough to comment on the issues.
 - 6) Journalists will be prepared to wait for a good comment, but it is important to check if they are working to a deadline and ask when the latest is you can call back. This also shows you understand the way they work and are prepared to help them to meet their work deadlines, as you would want people to help you to meet yours.
 - 7) Make a note of some basic information about the journalist – who they are, which publication/station they work for, when the story is likely appear and who else they are seeking comments or contributions from.

8) If you don't know the answer to a question, don't bluff it. It's perfectly acceptable to say you don't know – but assure the journalist you will find out, or will put them in touch with someone who does.

9) You don't always have to give a quote. If the story isn't relevant to us, or if you feel it would be more damaging to give a comment, it is OK to decline a request for a comment. This doesn't mean not commenting on stories that might be potentially damaging to the union. For advice in these (rare) circumstances, contact the national press officer.

10) Don't react to an aggressive journalist with aggression. If they are offensive or abusive you are entitled to end the call - and say why you are doing so. And don't take any criticism in the media personally.