

North Wales Police Corporate Communications –

Media Engagement Policy

Oct 2021



This document sets out how North Wales Police will work with the media.

Background

North Wales Police believes in open, honest, transparent, and consistent dealings with the media and we recognise and welcome the key role the media plays in helping with appeals, public reassurance and holding the force to account.

We actively engage with our communities to promote legitimacy and transparency, achieve operational and investigative benefits, and improve satisfaction and confidence and the media can play a key role in this. Effective engagement with the public, both through traditional and digital channels, feeds straight into the force's vision – making north Wales the safest place in the UK.

This Media Engagement Policy is designed to provide North Wales Police staff and officers with a clear framework to enable interaction with the media whilst ensuring professional conduct and integrity. It also provides the media with clear guidance as to the level of service it should receive from us.

The News Desk Team – who we are and what we do

North Wales Police News Desk Team is made up of qualified communications professionals with years of experience in media management, public relations, journalism, and internal and external communications. The team provides all levels of communications support for crimes, incidents, trials and major events, corporate issues, and strategic planning.

We work in line with the College of Policing's Media relations Authorised Professional Practice

[Media relations \(college.police.uk\)](https://college.police.uk)

The News Desk team's work includes, but is not limited to:

- Devising communications strategies
- Writing and publishing press releases
- Providing a 24/7 media support service to the force
- Answering media enquiries
- Creating and publishing digital social media content
- Managing the media at incidents
- Responding to major/critical incidents
- Managing communications at major court trials
- Developing content to support investigations, incidents and court trials
- Organising press conferences and briefings
- Training officers and staff in media law, media engagement and interview techniques
- Supporting victims and families of victims with media engagement
- Supporting the promotion of the force's campaigns

Our work and priorities

Our work with the traditional media and across our digital channels is vital and enables the force to engage with the public to provide timely and accurate information about policing in north Wales, and ultimately to promote legitimacy and public confidence. It is also critical as part of our efforts to warn and inform our communities during an emergency.

The News Desk team works under the direction of the force command structure and is primarily tasked by the organisation to support officers with appeals, court cases and family and victim liaison. As well as supporting the media, we also proactively source opportunities to promote the work of the force and to protect the public.

In particular, the News Desk team will deal with incidents including, but not limited to:

- Homicide, serious assault, fatal or serious injury RTCs, high risk missing people, critical/major incidents, aggravated burglary, reputational issues, and professional standards matters.

We apply our time and resources to the media and communication channels that will give us the greatest impact and bring the greatest 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 team answers thousands of enquiries from the media every year and therefore, just like in a newsroom, it must prioritise its workload. We do this by focussing on communication which is needed to prevent threat, risk and harm to the public or to prevent or detect crime.

Media enquiries will be prioritised by News Desk officers using their professional judgement and based on conversations with the journalist re deadlines, the angle of the story and its prominence, potential reputational impact as well as the seriousness of the crime and threat, risk and harm to the public. This approach will help to better manage the expectations of the media so they can plan their workload.

The release of information is always for a policing purpose and is always within the GDPR framework. The ultimate responsibility for the media strategy associated with an investigation sits with the Officer in the Case or the Senior Investigating Officer and all material that is released relating to incidents and investigations is subject to clearance procedures by them.

What we will not respond to

The News Desk team are not able to respond to enquiries which do not have a policing purpose and meet the priorities set out earlier in this document.

We closely follow the College of Policing Guidance and legislation on the right to a private life and while we appreciate some incidents may be of interest to the media/public this is not the same as in the public interest and they do not necessarily warrant a police response and cannot take precedence over other work.

Whilst we are a public body, often the matters we are dealing with happen in a private space with no wider public interest that outweighs an individual's right to privacy.

We will take these considerations into account in determining the information we are able to provide in response to certain media enquiries.

For clarity, we also cannot respond to:

- Damage only and minor injury RTCs unless there is significant disruption or other extenuating circumstances e.g. the vehicle is stolen.
- Speculative enquiries about why police are in a certain area without other information being provided.
- Enquiries relating to fires where the fire service has not been spoken to first and only then when they have confirmed it is suspicious. The exception to this is fires involving a fatality or where there is significant disruption/road closures/evacuations.

Part 1

This section explains how and when to submit media enquiries, how we work and the service we offer the media

What is a media enquiry?

An enquiry from a trained, professional journalist who is working on behalf of a recognised media outlet. As a recognised media outlet, the organisation you work for will be regulated by a recognised code of ethics for print, online or broadcast media.

How do I make a media enquiry?

Before submitting an enquiry, please check North Wales Police's news channels by visiting the news section of our website www.northwales.police.uk or our social media channels.

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

The following are our corporate social media channels:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/NorthWalesPolice / @NorthWalesPolice

www.facebook.com/HeddluGogleddCymru / @HeddluGogleddCymru

Twitter: @NWPolice

[@HeddluGogCymru](https://twitter.com/HeddluGogCymru)

Instagram: @northwalespolice

These force-sponsored channels are regularly updated with items of media interest, so if we have anything to say about a police incident or a criminal case, it is likely to be on there already. If not, you can email the North Wales Police news desk on press&pr@nthwales.pnn.police.uk

Alongside the corporate account local policing teams and some specialist teams have their own accounts which are not routinely monitored by Corporate Communications, but often issue updates on local incidents.

What will happen to my media enquiry?

Your enquiry will be dealt with by our news desk which is usually staffed by three people from 08.30 to 17.30 each weekday, excluding public holidays. This service is provided by the wider Corporate Communications Team, as one of a number of functions Corporate Communications manages. Where a response is required, we aim to provide this within one working day, subject to officer availability/shift patterns. We will take genuine deadlines into consideration.

How do I submit a media enquiry outside these hours?

Outside these hours, if your media enquiry is urgent, use our live webchat service at <https://www.northwales.police.uk/police-forces/north-wales-police/areas/live-chat/>

Please note that the webchat staff have responsibility across the whole force area and will need to prioritise your enquiry against other ongoing work.

When an on-call media officer is deployed by the Force Incident Manager, they will publish information on the North Wales Police website and/or social media channels. Journalists are advised to check these channels.

Please do **not** contact media officers individually outside of office hours.

Alternatively, you can email your enquiry to press&pr@nthwales.pnn.police.uk and it will be picked up during the next working day. Please note that the news desk inbox is not routinely 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. To help us help you please include as much information as possible. For example:

- The town, city, or village it happened in/near
- The road or street it occurred on
- An approximate time, to within one hour
- A rough description of the type of incident
- Providing an incident number is preferable – these are supplied to victims of crime and everyone who reports incidents.

I want more information. Will you provide it?

We always aim to provide as much information as possible, as quickly as possible.

Journalists should work on the assumption that information published by our news desk reflects all the information available to the media. If we haven't published it, we are not in a position to share that information. This includes photographs. We will therefore not respond to these enquiries.

If you wish to report police involvement in public meetings, please be aware that news desk cannot clarify or expand on comments – reporting should be taken from the meeting itself or the supporting documentation.

How do I get updates about an incident or case?

Updates are provided proactively and regularly on our website and social channels when there is a policing purpose in doing so. **In the first instance, please check these channels rather than contacting news desk.**

During live incidents, our focus will be on providing regular updates on these channels. Responding to individual media enquiries slows this process down and diverts our resources. So please monitor our website rather than approaching the news desk – we are unlikely to be able to respond to individual enquiries during a live incident.

For incidents that have moved to an investigative stage, we will also 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.

If a reasonable amount of time has passed since the last update, news desk may be able to source an update for the media, which we may also publish on our website.

Updates about court appearances should be directed to the courts.

For updates about specific kinds of incidents, such as those involving fatalities, please see part 2 of this document.

What systems do you have in place to ensure important information is shared with the media and public?

We have numerous systems in place that enable us to share information that supports a policing purpose. This information is regularly added to our website and social media channels. Much of this information is expanded on in Part 2 of this document.

It includes:

- Regularly updated information about significant police incidents, operations and investigations in North Wales
- A 'local appeals' process where details of lower-level incidents and appeals are shared
- Justice outcomes, including court results
- Wanted and missing people appeals
- Information about serious/fatal collisions and major disruption to our road network
- Special policing activities and campaigns covering North Wales Police's various policing priority areas
- Corporate performance and governance systems, many of which are explained on our website

This guidance is intended to help journalists understand the most effective ways they can gather information. After that point, our response will be as outlined in this document.

Part 2

This section outlines how our Media Engagement Policy is applied to media enquiries. 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'. Details of lower-level incidents are shared via our local appeals process. Media enquiries about these lower-level incidents will not be responded to, as information is provided proactively where there is a policing purpose.

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.

Please see Part 1: How do I get updates about an incident or case? and Part 2: Naming a suspect/defendant due at court for further information.

Arsons and fires

Media enquiries about fires should initially be directed to NWFRS. If the fire service confirms the incident is being investigated as a suspected arson, North Wales Police may publish details about the incident.

Details of lower-level incidents are shared via our local appeals process. Media enquiries about these lower-level 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

Please see Part 1 (above)

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. North Wales Police will publish this information proactively where it supports a policing purpose.

Cautioning

North Wales Police does 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 collisions. Most collisions on the thousands of miles of road we police are minor and do not involve serious injury or major disruption.

If there is a policing purpose, such as to appeal for witnesses or to notify motorists of major disruption, the police 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 unless they relate to incidents we have publicised.

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

North Wales Police may carry out condition checks where there is a 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.

North Wales Police is not able to carry out condition checks at the request of the media. These enquiries need to be directed to the relevant hospital.

Deaths and bereaved families

The news desk 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 news desk.

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.

North Wales Police does not approach families of the deceased on behalf of the media.

Family tributes or photographs will be provided proactively in line with the wishes of a bereaved family. As such, news desk will not be able to respond to enquiries about whether these will be provided.

Deaths in police custody

Following a death in police custody an initial statement will be prepared by news desk and authorised by an officer of ACC rank or higher. 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'

Incidents: Lower-level

North Wales Police uses a 'Local Appeals' process to support officers investigating lower-level crimes including theft and burglary, lower-level assaults or disturbances, anti-social behaviour and criminal damage. Despite being on the lower end of the criminal scale, it is important that these offences are thoroughly investigated, and information is published if it supports a policing purpose. So, during every investigation of this nature, an officer considers whether a Local Appeal is necessary

to support a police investigation, prevent crime or reassure the public. This information is then provided proactively on our website and / or social channels.

Therefore, if your enquiry relates to an incident of this nature, please check our website. It contains all the information we can provide about these incidents as we will not be in a position to respond to each enquiry individually. To determine whether a media enquiry is 'lower-level', news desk will apply the same criteria as police officers follow to determine whether an incident is covered by the Local Appeals process.

Incidents: Higher-level

A higher-level incident may include (but is not limited to) a serious assault or sexual assault, murder or attempted murder, a siege, high-value theft, high-level drugs activity, high-value fraud and other matters that are typically dealt with as indictable offences. North Wales Police will usually provide details of incidents proactively on its channels, to support a policing purpose. This will typically include details of when an incident happened, where it happened, the type of incident, arrests and other actions taken, injuries if applicable and appeal information. The media are encouraged to check our channels before making enquiries.

Please see Part 1: What information should I include in my enquiry? for further information.

See also Major incidents (below).

Injuries

When releasing details of an incident involving injuries, North Wales Police will try to give an indication of the level of injury if this information is available. This will be done proactively so we would encourage the media to use our channels to get this information – if we haven't published this information, the media should work on the premise that it is not available from North Wales Police. Specific details about injuries, treatment received, or hospitals attended will not be provided by North Wales Police and should be directed to the appropriate medical organisation.

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, North Wales Police 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. 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.

Medical information: Refer to Condition checks; Refer to 'Incidents: Higher level'.

Minor incidents: Refer to Incidents: Lower-level.

Misconduct

The force follows the College of Policing's authorised professional practice which can be found at www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/engagementand-communication/media-relations

North Wales Police publishes information about public misconduct or special case hearings and all misconduct hearing outcomes on its 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 for these updates rather than approaching news desk. Newsdesk will only respond to media enquiries about the missing people appeals it has published.

Naming a suspect/defendant due at court

The force follows the College of Policing's authorised professional practice regarding naming suspects.

As such, North Wales Police will neither confirm or deny names put to them and will not provide guidance.

Suspects may be named proactively by North Wales Police 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. For more information about this process, please see 'wanted people'.

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 North Wales Police will be provided on sentence. It is the media's responsibility to check whether any reporting restrictions apply that prevent the defendant from being identified. Custody photographs remain the property of North Wales Police and are supplied for single use only, to illustrate a court report. They should not be archived by media organisations. Credit should read: North Wales Police, and they should be published with our watermark. These can only be released contemporaneously following a sentencing.

In certain cases, where there is a substantial risk to the defendant's life or safety, or in sexual offence cases where the victim is familial, North Wales Police may decline to release a custody photograph. This decision will be made by the officer leading the case.

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 – investigations

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 sensitivities, does not compromise an investigation or justice outcome and has a policing purpose. The media do not need to ask for this, as it is provided proactively if available, so journalists are advised to check our channels.

Photographs/video footage – evidence shown in court cases

The CPS has a protocol for releasing evidential images used in court. Enquiries of this nature should be directed to the CPS in the first instance.

Traffic disruption/road closures

Refer to Collisions and traffic disruption

Public meetings

If you wish to report police involvement in public meetings, please be aware that news desk cannot clarify or expand on comments – reporting should be taken from the meeting itself or the supporting documentation, as this is covered by the appropriate levels of legal privilege.

Police helicopter

Air support for policing operations is provided by National Police Air Service (NPAS). If NPAS has directed you to North Wales Police regarding a media enquiry, we will require the following information to find details of an incident:

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

Assuming your enquiry falls within the terms of our MEP, 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.

Enquiries about deployment of the air ambulance or medical airlifts should be directed to the Wales Air Ambulance Service.

Social media posts by officers

If you would like more information about something an officer or policing team has published on social media, contact the account holder directly. 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. Visit our website for more details

Tributes and photographs of deceased

Refer to Deaths and bereaved families

Updates

See part 1 of this document

Victims and witnesses

North Wales Police follows 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, and requests to approach victims on behalf of the media will not be responded to.

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.

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.