



Scottish Biometrics
Commissioner
Coimiseanair
Biometrics na h-Alba

Media Management Policy

September 2024 – Version 1



Safeguarding our biometric future



Document Control

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Introduction

The Scottish Biometrics Commissioner places a high value on quality media coverage and engagement. The purpose of this document is to set out our media policy and to provide guidance for staff on how to deal with approaches from the media as well as using the media to gain positive coverage for the work of our organisation. Guidance on social media is also provided.

As a public body, the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner is committed to transparency and accountability which is reflected in our values. We engage with the media on an ongoing basis both proactively and reactively to raise awareness of the law and Code of Practice surrounding the acquisition, use, retention and destruction of biometric material within the criminal justice community, to inform the public and our stakeholder network, as well as growing and enhancing our reputation. With such a remit, it is right and proper we are under public and media scrutiny. It is important that we maintain good working relations with the media, ensuring our messages are consistent and timely and that they reflect our corporate image. To be able to do this we need to take a coordinated approach to media activity.

SBC policy is that we will always respond to media enquiries that relate directly to our function, we may respond if they are in some way connected to our function, but we will not make media statements or respond if not related or connected to our function, other than to respond saying that the matter is beyond our jurisdiction.

This policy is supported by a clear decision-making tool, a process chart for inbound media enquiries at [Appendix A](#) and an example-based collaboration between relevant stakeholder's guide at [Appendix B](#).

The aim of this policy is to ensure that there is a clear framework in place in order that:

- Staff understand when we should engage with the media reactively and proactively
- Staff are aware of roles and responsibilities when handling routine, or sensitive media enquiries
- Staff are aware of obligations on them to record what has been agreed for release or communicated to media
- Guidance to staff on defining 'speaking terms' to the media
- Guidance to staff on both corporate and personal use of social media

This policy applies to all staff employed by the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner and those on secondment.

Roles and responsibilities

To ensure a consistent, fair and sensitive approach to media matters, it is important that all SBC staff understand their responsibilities in relation to this policy:

- The Commissioner has overall responsibility for approval of this policy
- The Director/Commissioner is responsible for development, dissemination and implementation of this policy. As a rule, the Director/Commissioner are executive lead and first point of decision whether incoming requests are of a routine or sensitive nature. The Director/Commissioner are responsible for sensitive or strategic requests which means carrying out engagement with relevant stakeholder(s); ensuring agreement of communications and key messages prior to finalising any SBC response.



- The Operations Manager and Corporate Services Manager are responsible for preparing responses, within their relevant area of business, which are considered by the Commissioner/Director to be routine or business as usual.
- The Business Support Officer is responsible for identification of incoming requests for information from the media and forwarding to the Commissioner/Director for progression. They are also responsible for transmission of finalised response to relevant requestor, filing of any communication transmitted in formulation or agreements made, with requestor and/or relevant stakeholder of the prepared response. This ensures there is a full audit trail of what is published by the media, what was prepared and communicated by SBC staff, should any discrepancies arise.

We are committed to any training and support needs of all staff members involved in managing and implementing this policy.

General Media Guidance

As a simple rule, SBC staff should ask, 'Is there an organisational purpose for communicating about this issue and am I the person responsible for doing so?' If the answer to both parts of this question is 'yes', they can communicate with the media.

Defining 'speaking terms'

All parties should understand in advance the terms on which a briefing or conversation with the media is taking place. Avoid the term 'off the record' as the basis for a conversation, as it can create ambiguity over how information is to be used and can risk the perception of inappropriate or confidential information disclosure. Always assume that a conversation is reportable unless expressly agreed otherwise in advance. The following terms may be helpful.

- **Reportable Information** - all that is said may be reported, quoted and attributed, at the media's discretion. All communications should be on this basis unless exceptional circumstances apply. A quote in a media release should be attributed to a named SBC spokesperson where appropriate and possible
- **Non-reportable information** - is provided to the media on the basis (by prior agreement) that it is for guidance only and not for publication or broadcast. It can be used to provide further context around a statement. This enables us to have a dialogue with the media about serious or sensitive biometric issues without generating publicity about them. Properly used, this may be a valuable resource in the context of an established, trusting, and professional relationship. Where non-reportable information is shared, it is good practice where appropriate, to work with the media to find a way to allow it to be reported. A record of the subject or subjects discussed should be kept. This record should include a note of why it is non-reportable. This record should be the retention of the email stored within eRDM.
- **Embargoed information** - is shared on the understanding it is not to be published or broadcast until after a specified event or time. This is often used when the media are briefed in advance of a formal publication pre-empting anticipated requests for comment and setting of our key messages to be highlighted. A decision to set an embargo should be recorded. This record should be the retention of the email stored within eRDM.



Recording contact with the media

It is recommended that all communication with media is done via email, an email trail of agreed response(s)/embargo decision(s) should be forwarded to the BSO for filing within eRDM. This record should be made publicly available, if requested under Freedom of Information. A brief record that the conversation has taken place and of its subject matter is sufficient. Informal or chance meetings where work-related issues are not discussed need not be recorded.

On occasion, journalists conducting feature articles can ask for in person interviews (which can also be by telephone/video conference) with the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner. Such requests will be considered. If there are potential benefits to the organisation in support or promotion of our ongoing work, they will be granted in the knowledge that they will likely be video/audio recorded and edited by the requesting organisation.

Managing inaccurate or misleading media coverage

Inaccurate or misleading media coverage can be extremely damaging to an organisation or an individual. Establishing a professional relationship with media and journalists should prevent this from occurring. Any inaccuracies or misleading coverage involving an SBC media response should be communicated to the Director/Commissioner for progression. The Director/Commissioner will be responsible for seeking a resolution with the relevant media outlet – any negotiated correction should be shared or publicised through the SBC's own social media channels. If no mutually agreeable outcome is negotiated, the suggested escalation route is through a regulatory body such as the Independent Press Standards Organisation (UK print and digital news).

Media Responses

Reactive Media

We regularly receive ad hoc media enquiries and interview requests, and these can produce great opportunities to get our news and messages across. If you receive a request for information or interview, please follow the process chart at [Appendix A](#).

Reactive media handling can range from looking for our opinion on a news story to looking for a response to a criticism of our work, or key stakeholders work. These requests require careful handling and are the sole responsibility of the Director, working in conjunction with Commissioner, to coordinate any engagement required with affected stakeholders prior to finalising any response. The Director/Commissioner are required to 'sign off' all formal response(s) to the media and they are also responsible for deciding who within the organisation are to act as named spokesperson on a case-by-case basis.

Sometimes a media enquiry directed to the SBC may also straddle the legal jurisdiction of another oversight body. For example, an enquiry about DNA to the Commissioner might also relate to the oversight of the SPA Forensic Services by HMICS. Similarly, an enquiry about biometric data retention might also relate to questions of adherence to UK data protection law within the statutory functions of the UK Information Commissioner (ICO). In such circumstances, SBC staff should always make 'best efforts' to contact the other relevant oversight body and where possible, agree a joint response to the subject matter.



Proactive Media

Proactive media engagement has a role to play in publicising the positive work of the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner. For the public and our key stakeholders to ‘hear’ our messages we use a broad range of tools and channels to communicate these (see our [Communications & Engagement Strategy](#)). Mainstream media is a key channel due to its high-profile nature and the value placed on it by the public, politicians and our stakeholders. Each piece of our published operational work has specific objectives. On commencement, or completion of such work, communications objectives should also be aligned to these with key messages agreed as part of this process:

- we will mainly adopt a proactive media stance in relation to published reports that we lay before the Parliament (Assurance Reviews, Annual Report & Accounts and serious breach of the Code). In doing so, our key media lines will mirror the key facts, key findings and recommendations from the report in question. We will discuss any media strategy as part of the clearing process for such reports at Monthly Management Meetings
- where the Director/Commissioner considers it necessary, we may engage the services of a media professional to assist with the development of a media strategy around the publication in question
- if the publication is a joint report (for example with the SPA or Scottish Government) we will jointly agree a media strategy and may utilise the services of our partner communications team

We need to communicate our recommendations, high-level findings or insights, to the public and we want to see these appearing in the media, or across social media.

Updates to the Code of Practice and publications e.g. our Assurance Reviews, Strategic Plans, Annual Report and Accounts and other strategic documents should always be considered for proactive media release by the Commissioner/Director. In addition, the Commissioner/Director will also deal with any specialist media e.g. FutureScot, Holyrood Magazine and dedicated Criminal Justice correspondents looking for another level of engagement. This is mainly around our day-to-day work and particularly around technology changes and innovation. Routine or business as usual updates re our ongoing work or stakeholder engagement, should be considered by the Operations Manager. Events, competitions, awards, publications, consultations etc provide good opportunity to do this.

Identification of key targets, messages and campaigns to highlight through the media should be identified at weekly team meetings and Monthly Management Meetings. Where agreement on relevant areas of work for preparation of press releases and other collateral such as social media posts are made.

All staff should seek the support of the Director/Commissioner with proactive media engagement.

Freedom of Information requests from the media

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities, including the SBC (subject to conditions and exemptions). Every request for information should be assessed on its own specific facts. If a member of the media requests information that is readily available but is not on the SBC website, it should be handled in accordance with our [Information Governance Handbook](#).



Social media guidance

Corporate use of social media

This policy relates to the professional use of social media within the SBC.

‘Social media’ refers to websites and networks where users share photos, videos, opinions or reviews. Blogs, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are all examples. Social media offers opportunities for us to engage with stakeholders and the public. The misuse of social networks carries significant reputational, technical and legal risks. This policy is to provide clear advice and guidance to staff on the use of social media in a professional capacity to allow the organisation to realise the benefits of social media whilst ensuring we assess and manage the risks. It covers the professional use of social media within the SBC. It does not cover what you discuss, comment on or publish in your own time on your own personal profile.

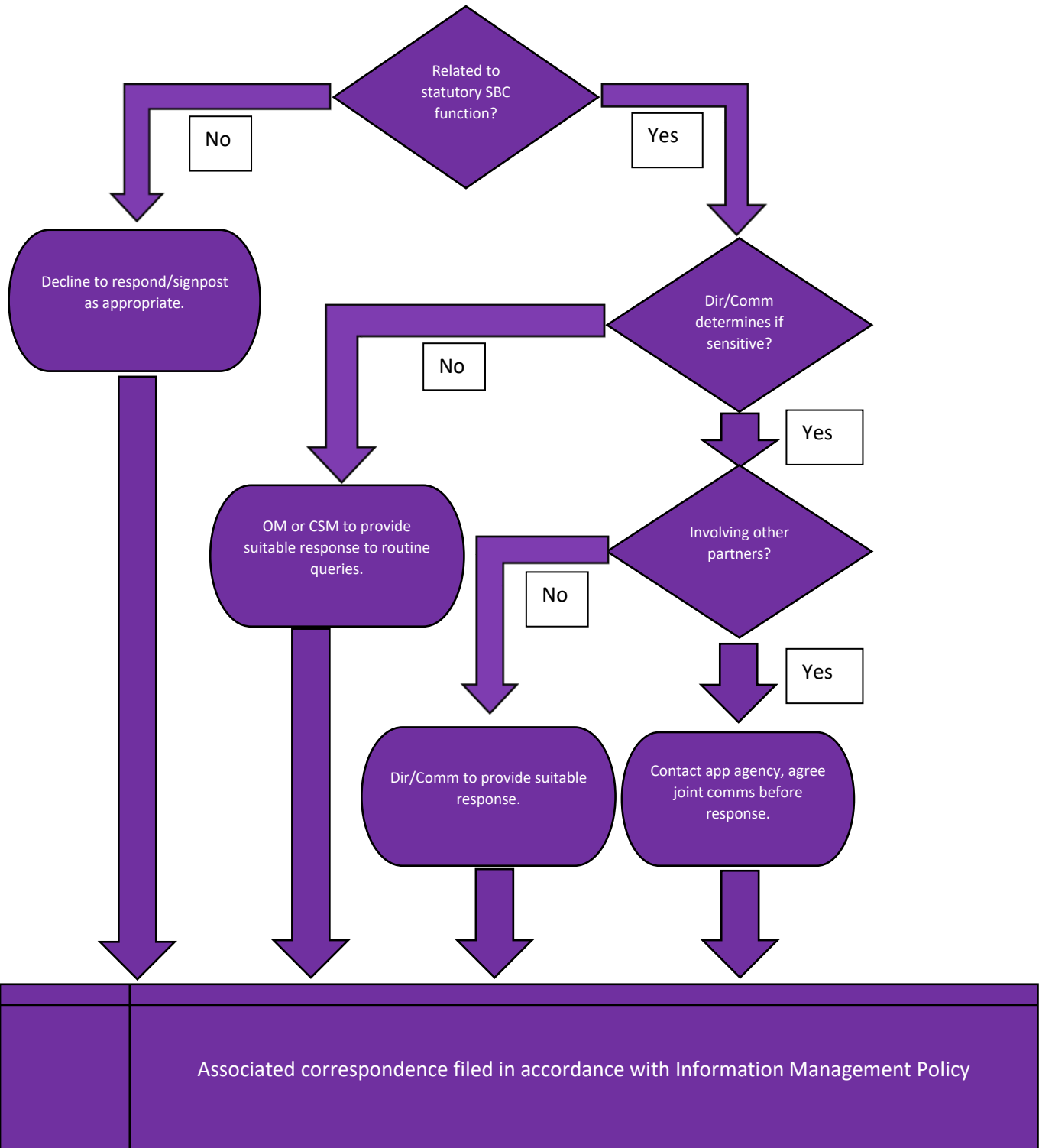
The policy of the SBC is that social media is only to be used for business purposes.

Personal use of social media

Please refer to the Shared Service – Information & Communications Technology (ICT) Handbook and in particular Annex 2 – Communications and Social Media.



APPENDIX A: Process chart for in-bound media enquiries





APPENDIX B: Framework for collaboration between relevant stakeholders

Query pertaining to a key stakeholder over which we have no statutory oversight	Decline to comment, signpost appropriate oversight agency and notify relevant stakeholder of request for comment to us, maintaining transparency and professional relations with all parties.
Query pertaining to any reports/work we have collaborated on with a key stakeholder	Contact relevant key stakeholder, agree if joint or separate responses required, and agreement on key messages in either case prior to prepared response.
Query pertaining to a key stakeholder area of business over which we have statutory oversight	Contact relevant stakeholder as courtesy for awareness, maintain transparency and independence by issuing single agency response but ensure liaison maintained to protect organisational reputation(s) and maintenance of public confidence. Re iterate previous SBC published material/policy position/messages re Code of Practice/compliance assessments, or discharge of recommendations to ensure balance, fairness and impartiality.