

I am very grateful to Colette for joining us today. She takes over as chairman of the ACPO communications advisory committee from Andy Trotter who became a regular and valued contributor to our debates and mutual concerns.

Now, those concerns and the debates about how to resolve them are more urgent than ever.

As you will have read in these conference programmes, Colette has an impressive track record in the Met and now she is Chief Constable in Bedfordshire where I know she is developing a strong and open relationship with the media.

Many of you will have seen the series of fly on the wall documentaries throwing welcome illumination on what goes on in police custody suites. In addition to the sometimes amusing and sometimes sad scenes of day to day, 24 hour policing, Colette's officers are seen - warts and all - dealing with offenders and discussing cases with humanity, sometimes with humour and sometimes the understandable frustrations and political incorrectness that editors often find in newsrooms.

They key message has been that this Chief Constable was not afraid to open the doors to the media in order to inform the public.

I think the programmes may well have the impact of the Thames Valley series back in the 1970s that brought about welcome changes in the way police nationally dealt with rape and other sexual offenders.

Bedfordshire police clearly appreciate that the interest of the public is not simply prurient. The public interest is in seeing just how difficult a job the police face day in day out, night-in-night out doing necessary mundane and sometimes distasteful work well away from the headlines of terrorism, murder, mayhem all those pesky journalists going about their jobs searching for stories.

I don't need to dwell too long on the latter. We have already discussed and we are likely to hear more later about RIPA - and especially questionable use of the Act.

I must say this though. I was there when RIPA was being introduced. There is no doubt in my mind or aging memory that the government and parliament intended RIPA as a tool to help with terrorism and major organised crime.

Along with the Newspaper Society and Media Lawyers' Association we warned how it was inadequately drafted and was ripe for misuse.

I know Colette your Chief Constable colleagues have justified its use based on their activities being lawful under the Act. I am sure they would not deliberately break the law. But the law only works in the long-term if it is used sensibly and in the way it was intended.

It is now turning into a Dangerous Dogs Act. The importance of journalists' sources and contacts is widely recognised in the courts and more. Journalists are not generally criminals and in the most celebrated of cases - Plebgate - I don't think that the journalist was suspected of any crime.

Moreover, some justification I have heard for searching Tom Newton Dunn's phone records was that major crime was suspected - a conspiracy to bring down a cabinet minister.

I couldn't help smiling. Embarrassing a Cabinet minister is not treason, it is not even a crime. It is the sworn duty of Politicians to do it all their time to their opponents and their own!

Plebgate was not high treason. You could almost see the cogs turning in Scotland Yard to make sure they were seen to take action because of the political row rather than crime.

Today we are hearing from Press Gazette that ACPO has advised justifying the lack of replies to RIPA activities regarding journalists on grounds of national security. Come on let us be open and honest. This is too important for both of us for a smoke and smog.

Whatever, we all have to live with politics.

What really concerns me is when police chiefs - and for that matter the security services - say they need more power to delve into our phone records and our internet usage.

They clearly have a difficult job and we are all sympathetic about the difficulties they face in combatting nihilistic terrorism but that is not an excuse for demanding more power to do what they want with our phone records and other private information. Without extremely good reason journalists are too often accused of going on fishing expeditions. Surely the police should have real evidence, serious suspicion when they decide to interfere with journalists records.

As one MP put it the other day, when you are looking for a needle in haystack it can be a waste of time looking at every blade. What you need is a better magnet, ie. a more sophisticated response.

I am afraid Colette that some of your colleagues are sending mixed messages - first you demand MORE powers to fight terrorism and within days now even hours you arrest suspected terrorists.

Someone mentioned the relationships in the regions and locally. Another issue that is taxing minds now is that of extended police bail - I mean for people other than journalists - it is extremely worrying that people's lives can be disrupted for years being unable to travel, have problems with bank accounts while the police try to see if there is case against them.

Put problems like this alongside questions that are asked about the police over Hillsborough, Rotherham, and more recently in Surrey for example, are worrying for all of us - and must be difficult for the police.

Just as we ask people to recognise the vital role of the media in providing news and stimulating debate I don't think anyone in this room would dispute the police are a vital part of our democracy. And we recognise that British police

are the best in the world - without a nasty CRS and with comparatively little corruption.

I cut my teeth in journalism by exposing police corruption, including sacking a chief constable which remains a peculiarly difficult task. Nevertheless I have maintained a huge respect for the police and, along with everyone here, we want them to restore and maintain the respect of the public.

Colette you have already shown your belief in openness. What we hope is that you may devote your efforts now to persuading your colleagues.

It is not so much a media policy you need but a policy of informing the public using the media as a powerful conduit to that and it is not in the public and policy interests for the police and media to be at loggerheads.

We need to get back to talking seriously about media guidelines - a few years ago we so nearly achieved really sensible advice acceptable to both sides re naming people who had been arrested for example. Let's try again.

There is of course a balance to be struck between privacy and freedom of the media and the public's right to know. It strikes me that the European Convention on Human Rights was written by British judges after the Second World War to

counteract totalitarian states and the most powerful weapon of dictators - a secret police force. Now it seems we are dancing slowly towards a state that curtails the media, invades individual privacy more than the media has ever done and reduces the public's ability to receive information.

After Leveson this is not a time to close doors as some seem to think. We are not in the business of the ridiculous idea that journalists flirt with police officers.

Now is the time for police officers and journalists to talk more, formally and yes informally, and appropriately.

That will be good for the police, good for the media And good for the public.