

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST – MEDIA BRIEFING

I am writing to confirm that the Home Office has now completed its search for the information you requested on 6th February 2007. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

I can confirm that we hold information relevant to your request as follows:

1. *Details of all media organisations, specifying the newspaper, journal, magazine, radio station or television channel, with whom the Home Secretary's political advisers between Tuesday 30th January and Thursday 1st February 2007 inclusive, discussed the alleged plot by Islamist extremists to kidnap one or more members of the armed forces, and the police's investigation or impending investigation into the alleged plot, and/or who was briefed in relation to the same between the same dates, and/or to whom information, in whatever form, in relation to the same was provided by them between the same dates.*

Information Held. We have interpreted this as requesting any contacts with media organisations about this operation during the period in question by anyone within the Home Office (special advisers, press officers or officials).

We hold call logs showing which journalists and media organisations have contacted the Home Office Press Office News Desk. We have conducted a search for 30th January to 1st February inclusive for the subject matter you state. Copies of the relevant parts of the call log search are enclosed. The call log only records calls dealt with by the Press Office news desk, not special advisers or other Press Office staff. Where the names and contact details of press officers or other individuals appear, these names have been redacted on the grounds that they are not relevant to your request. All these calls were made after news of the police operation had broken and the arrests in the early hours of 31 January had been confirmed by West Midlands police.

In addition, one of the Home Office Special Advisers and a number of Home Office Press Office personnel who are not located on the central News Desk responded to enquiries from the media relating to this subject on 31st January. All these calls took place after news of the police operation had broken and the arrests in the early hours of 31 January had been confirmed by West Midlands police. There is no recorded information held about these conversations to which the Freedom of Information Act would apply. For the avoidance of doubt (and recognising that in this instance we are going beyond our obligations under the Act), however, everyone identified as having had these conversations has confirmed that the conversations made it clear that this was an operational matter, the detail of which could not be discussed, or related to the practical arrangements for the Home Secretary's media statement on 31st January calling for restraint or reminded the media of the Home Secretary and Attorney General's request not to speculate on the case.

You will of course be aware of the Home Secretary's letter to you of 9 February (in response to your letter of 6 February) in which he stated: "I share the anxieties you raised. That is why on the morning of the operations I twice appealed to the media to stop speculating about the nature of the alleged plot. It is why I can also assure you that my special advisers did not brief the media on operational matters on or off the record; and that it is not their practice to do so."

2. *In relation to each such media organisation (specifying as above) the date and time of each contact and the manner in which it was made.*

Information Held. See (1) above.

3. *Details of any policy operated by the Home Office on briefing the media on sensitive police and security operations including, where such policy provides for it:*

(a) Who should authorise such briefing;

(b) Who should conduct it;

(c) Whether it should be done on or off the record;

(d) Whether records are kept of such briefings;

(e) Whether the police are consulted about any such briefings before they are conducted;

(f) Whether there are any Chinese walls between the Home Office and political staff to protect sensitive material.

Information Held. I enclose copies of two letters which outline the policy on this issue: a letter dated 8 February 2007 from Sir David Normington to the Rt Hon. David Davis MP and a letter dated 19 March 2007 from the Home Secretary to Dominic Grieve MP. These documents are already in the public domain. Given that these two letters both post-date your request, we are not obliged to release them under the Freedom of Information Act. However, we have decided to provide you with this information outside of the Act in the interests of transparency.