

*Minutes of the Editors' Code of Practice Committee meeting at the offices of the News Media Association, 292 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, on November 15, 2018.*

**Present:**

Chair: Neil Benson

Ian Carter, the MK Group; Christine Elliott, independent lay member; Martin Ivens, Sunday Times; David Jessel, independent lay member; Donald Martin, Newsquest Scotland; Mike Sassi, Nottingham Post; Gary Shipton, Johnston Press; Matt Tee, IPSO; Ted Young, Metro.

Attending: Jonathan Grun, Secretary

**Apologies** Apologies were received from: Chris Evans, Daily Telegraph; Gary Jones, Daily Express; Sir Alan Moses, IPSO; Kate Stone, independent lay member; Harriet Wilson, Condé Nast.

**Chair's opening remarks**

Neil Benson welcomed the appointment of Daily Express editor Gary Jones to the committee. He observed that the committee continued to review Clause 12 (Discrimination) and awaited the publication of the Home Affairs Committee's report on hate crime.

**Minutes** of the meeting on June 20, 2018 were noted, having been approved earlier by email.

**Matters arising:** There were no matters arising.

**Secretary's Report**

The secretary reported that meetings continued to be held with campaigners and a useful exchange of views had taken place with Onroad Media, an organisation that aims to improve media coverage of what it sees as misrepresented groups and issues and is currently delivering an award-winning All About Trans information campaign.

Work was continuing on proposals to publicise the work of the Code Committee.

The Editors' Codebook was being revised to reflect recent IPSO adjudications and guidance notes.

**Possible revision of Clause 11**

At a previous meeting the committee had agreed to review Clause 11 (Victims of sexual assault) because an IPSO adjudication had said it appeared to be unclear if it related to newsgathering (*Warwickshire Police v Daily Mail* <https://www.ipso.co.uk/rulings-and-resolution-statements/ruling/?id=16830-17>). The committee considered a report by the secretary, agreed that the clause should be amended and and looked forward to considering a draft revision.

**Requests for Code revisions and issues involving the Code**

**:: The Chartered Institute of Journalists** suggested amending the Code to highlight situations where journalists facing intimidation might be excused from identifying themselves under the terms of Clause 3 (Harassment). The committee concluded that the requirement for journalists to identify themselves when requested is an important feature of Clause 3 and it would be a backward and unnecessary step to reduce the transparency required by the Code.

**:: The Committee on Standards in Public Life** called for the prohibition of language that "incites intimidation". The committee considered that the Editors' Code already provides protection to individuals in a range of circumstances, including discrimination, accuracy, privacy and harassment. Editors exercise discretion in their use of language and the Code specifically refers to the fundamental right to freedom of expression – "such as to inform, to be partisan, to challenge, shock, to be satirical and to entertain". This is a core value of society and goes to the heart of freedom of expression and a free Press. The committee concluded that editors cannot be responsible for the actions of others –

those who are possibly prompted to undertake online intimidation by stories that conform to the Code in every respect. It agreed that editors cannot avoid dealing with important issues – particularly when they involve those exercising the power of the state - because of the actions of these online trolls. Although intimidation is a disturbing aspect of public life the committee concluded that changing the Code would not be an appropriate or effective course of action.

#### **:: Suicide**

The committee considered an open letter about suicide <https://www.talkingsuicide.co.uk/letter> that paid tribute to advances in the reporting of mental health and suicide but asserted that journalists still revert to outdated language and stereotypes and language when reporting suicide.

The letter called on all sections of the media to replace the phrase “commit suicide” with alternatives, such as “died by suicide”.

The committee noted that the letter acknowledges that coverage of suicide has significantly evolved in recent years and the Code’s clauses covering Suicide and Intrusion into grief or shock have proved effective. The Editors’ Codebook contains links to Samaritans’ reporting guidelines and includes their advice as examples of best practice. It agreed that the next edition of the Codebook can refer to the continuing debate, including the use of the phrase “committed suicide”. It would stress that editors must be able to make their own decisions based on the details of a specific story.

**:: A member of the public** suggested revisions to Clause 6 (Children). The committee concluded that the clause provides effective protection for children and the suggestions would not strengthen the clause.

#### **:: Reach submission suggesting two changes to Clause 1 (Accuracy)**

In relation to content supplied by freelance agencies Reach suggested amending Clause 1(i) to read (suggested change in bold):

1(i) The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text **and must demonstrate that reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that content provided by third party contributors is accurate.**

The committee concluded that it was important for publishers to accept responsibility for all content, whether supplied by their own staff or agencies and that this was a strength of the Code, so no change was desirable.

The second change involved amending Clause 1ii to read (change in bold):

ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion **once accepted by the publisher** must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and — where appropriate — an apology published. In cases involving IPSO, due prominence should be as required by the regulator.

This would mean that a newspaper that defended a complaint would not be unduly sanctioned for doing so.

The committee agreed that publishers should not have an incentive to refuse to accept that a significant inaccuracy had occurred and therefore did not agree to the amendment.

#### **Kerslake Report on Manchester Arena bomb**

The committee noted with disappointment that despite requests the Kerslake inquiry into the Manchester Arena bomb had not provided more details of alleged inappropriate conduct by unidentified parts of the media to allow an investigation to take place. It noted that guidance including relevant elements from the Code and adjudications was being prepared by IPSO.