

Minutes of the Editors' Code of Practice Committee meeting, held on Wednesday, November 8, 2023.

Present:

Chairman: Neil Benson

David Clegg, The Courier; Ian Carter, Iliffe Media; Sarah de Gay, independent lay member; Charlotte Dewar, CEO, IPSO; Christine Elliott, independent lay member; Chris Evans, Telegraph; Lord Faulks, Chair, IPSO; Gary Jones, Daily Express; Tina Sany-Davies, Bauer Media; Gary Shipton, National World; Kate Stone, independent lay member; Ben Taylor, Sunday Times; Ted Verity, Daily Mail.

Apologies: Maria Breslin, Liverpool Echo.

Attending: Jonathan Grun, secretary; Jay Stone; Steven Vaughan.

Chairman's introduction

The chairman welcomed Jay Stone and Steven Vaughan, the new independent lay members, who were attending the meeting as observers before officially joining the committee on January 1, 2024. The chairman noted that it would be his final meeting and that independent lay members Christine Elliott and Kate Stone would also be leaving, having served their full terms.

Update by IPSO

Lord Faulks, chair of IPSO, updated the committee on the recent work of the regulator.

Privacy concern over planning applications for children's homes

The committee considered a submission requesting that details of planning applications for children's homes should not be published.

The committee acknowledged that the location of children's homes might in some circumstances be sensitive and noted that Clause 2 (Privacy) and Clause 6 (Children) could be applied and individual stories might result in a complaint, depending on the circumstances. Editors would be aware that all stories involving children require care.

It noted that planning applications are considered in a process that is made public. Sometimes applications may be the subject of public debate and campaigns in local communities and the press should be able to report that, while taking into account the requirements of the Code.

The committee concluded it would be unduly restrictive to prevent publication of information that is freely available as part of an official planning process, which is intended to inform local communities of developments in their area.

Code Review

The committee discussed the submissions to the triennial Code review and agreed that the secretary should prepare a final report.

The committee noted that some of the submissions resulted in a positive exchange of views and would lead to greater understanding, including a clearer perception of the role of a free press.

In some cases, the review would lead to continuing engagement and discussion with experts and campaigners. Although in individual cases the review process might not lead to a change in the Code – because suggested amendments may not work in practice or might unduly restrict freedom of expression – it could inform and influence the way that editors approach stories in future.

Consideration of points raised had also led to examples of best practice being featured in the revised Editors' Codebook, the handbook to the Code and how it is interpreted by IPSO. The committee concluded that stories have to be treated on their merits, so imposing unduly restrictive changes to the Code is not practical, whereas highlighting non-binding best practice can be a real assistance to editors and can be reflected in coverage.

Any other business

The committee paid tribute to the departing chair Neil Benson and independent lay members Christine Elliott and Kate Stone.