

*Minutes of the Editors' Code of Practice Committee meeting at the offices of the Independent Press Standards Organisation, Gate House, 1 Farringdon Street, London EC4M 7LG
December 10, 2019*

Present:

Chair: Neil Benson

Ian Carter, The KM Group; Christine Elliott, independent lay member; Chris Evans, Daily Telegraph; Martin Ivens, Sunday Times; David Jessel, independent lay member; Gary Jones, Daily Express; Donald Martin, Newsquest Scotland; Sir Alan Moses, Chairman, IPSO; Mike Sassi, Nottingham Post; Gary Shipton, JPIMedia; Kate Stone, independent lay member; Matt Tee, CEO, IPSO; Harriet Wilson, Condé Nast Publications; Ted Young, Metro.

Attending: Jonathan Grun, Secretary

Chair's opening remarks

Neil Benson observed that the meeting would feature a discussion on IPSO's guidance note on reporting Islam and it would be a good forum for the exchange of views.

He reported that since the last meeting the chairman and secretary had met with several of the people most concerned with the Code at a number of titles and the discussions underlined how the industry was committed to observing the Code also how the individuals concerned fought for the freedom of the press.

Suggestions for Code revisions

:: The committee considered but did not agree to a change to Clause 1 (Accuracy) in relation to headlines. The committee noted that Clause 1 already covered headlines effectively and said the press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted headlines not supported by the text. The committee noted that the Editors' Codebook says that eye-catching headlines won't necessarily summarise everything in the story beneath, but Clause 1 (i) requires any claim made in the headline to be supported by the text of the article

:: The committee considered but did not agree to a request for parameters to set the definition of the word "significant" in relation to inaccuracy in Clause 1(ii). The committee concluded that not closely defining "significant" in 1(ii) enables complaints under the Code to be decided fairly and in the spirit of the Code. Having considered all the circumstances the complaints committee can decide the significance of an inaccuracy and whether a prompt correction or apology was required.

:: The committee considered but did not agree to a change to Clause 7 (Children in sex cases) to ban the use of the wording child pornography or child porn. The committee concluded that editors are free to use discretion in describing such abuse.

:: The committee considered but did not agree to a change to Clause 11 (Victims of sexual assault) to extend anonymity to victims of harassment and stalking. The committee concluded that the law does not provide such protection and it is best left to editors to exercise discretion in such cases.

:: The committee considered but did not agree to a ban on political editorialising on the front page of newspapers during elections. The committee noted that the Code specifically provides for the press to be partisan whilst also stating that: "The press, while free to editorialise and campaign, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact."

Committee membership

The Code committee's constitution requires that members, other than the chair and CEO of IPSO, serve an initial period of five years, which can be renewed by a vote of the committee for a further

three years. The committee voted to extend the membership of Christine Elliott, Chris Evans, Mike Sassi, Kate Stone and Harriet Wilson. Independent lay member David Jessel indicated that he will stand down after his initial term of office. It was agreed that in due course a successor would be appointed. The chairman thanked David Jessel for his contribution to the work of the committee.

Consultation on Editors' Code of Practice

The committee noted that a triennial consultation on the Code would be conducted during 2020, with the closing date for submissions being Friday, March 27. All of the submissions would be published on the committee's website unless anonymity had been requested.

A review of Clause 12 (Discrimination) was announced at a meeting of the Home Affairs Committee's inquiry on hate speech in 2018. This would now be included in the consultation.

30th anniversary of Editors' Code of Practice

The committee agreed to consider ways of marking the 30th anniversary of the Editors' Code of Practice, which was drawn up during the course of 1990 and came into effect on January 1, 1991 as the Press Complaints Commission opened for business.

IPSO guidance note on reporting Islam

The committee discussed a draft of IPSO's guidance note on reporting Muslims and Islam. It was agreed that further submissions would be made to IPSO as part of its consultation and it was noted that further discussions were scheduled to take place in 2020.

Any other business

The chairman noted that this would be final appearance at the committee of IPSO chairman Sir Alan Moses, who was due to retire. The chairman paid tribute to Sir Alan for his leadership and fierce independence, which had established IPSO as a respected regulator.