

BARNSELEY CHRONICLE

Registered Office: 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS

www.barnsley-chronicle.co.uk

Barnsley Chronicle Ltd Annual IPSO report February 2017

■ Introduction:

The Barnsley Chronicle is a weekly newspaper that has covered the geographical and municipal borough of Barnsley since 1858.

It is owned and operated by the Hewitt family and is part of the wider Acredula Group which has business interests in book publishing, B2B magazine production, public relations, graphic design, social media management and leisure.

The Chronicle is the largest-circulating weekly newspaper in Yorkshire and remains one of the biggest-selling weeklies in the UK.

The paper covers local news for the Barnsley audience – there is no content for South Yorkshire or the wider region.

As well as the Chronicle, the company also publishes We Are Barnsley and the Holme Valley Review which are free titles.

■ Our editorial standards:

The Barnsley Chronicle sets out to be an authoritative, trustworthy journal and takes an independent position on the material it carries.

Stories are verified as much as possible by the editorial team before publication. Over the last few years, the newspaper has built up substantial audiences on social media (the Facebook page has 35,000 likes while it has 14,500 followers on Twitter).

As with most media outlets, we use these extensive online connections to search out story ideas, follow up leads and make contact with people.

However, we have a strict policy that we do not publish a story obtained from social media sources without first checking its accuracy and authenticity.

We do no share / re-tweet posts where we are unable to confirm authenticity.

When we follow up a story garnered from social media, our general procedure is to contact the original source and ask for their co-operation.

If that is not possible, we will then take alternative steps to check accuracy. These steps might include directly contacting other people mentioned in the original post, for example.

As in my last report in 2016, I can confirm that we still refuse to carry stories emanating from social media where we have not been able to confirm their accuracy.

I believe this is the responsible stance to take and do not envisage this changing while I remain as editor.

Indeed, we have challenged some stories appearing on social media and managed to confirm they were nothing more than scare stories or fiction.

In simple terms, our policy is to treat social media leads as tip-offs that may or not turn out to be true. They are the modern-day equivalent of over-hearing a conversation in a pub.

The Chronicle continues to cover things such as council meetings and public meetings in the traditional way – ie a

reporter in attendance.

If the issues being discussed are contentious, it would be expected that our reporters would contact make with both sides to ensure a story is balanced.

If people choose not to speak to us, we always make it clear in the story that they have been offered the opportunity but chose not to take it rather than leave readers in any doubt.

■ Our responsible person(s):

As editor, the paper's nominated responsible person for IPSO obligations is Andrew Harrod. In the event of his absence, this responsibility would pass to the deputy editor, Steph Daley.

Between them, Andrew and Steph have 60 years' experience working on local newspapers. Andrew was the editor of several national magazines before returning to the Chronicle as editor five years ago.

■ Our complaints-handling process:

Any minor complaints will generally be dealt with initially by the reporter involved in preparing the original story.

Our editorial staff are instructed not to shy away from making a correction where it is warranted.

Occasionally, a complainant may make contact via phone or in person and ask to speak to someone 'in charge'.

These calls would initially be dealt with by the newsdesk and the deputy editor who works on the newsdesk will often assess the seriousness of the complaint.

If it can be resolved promptly and amicably then she is empowered to draft and publish a suitable correction.

It is our aim to keep the complaints process as simple as possible.

Occasionally, a complainant may insist on speaking to the editor – bypassing the reporter and newsdesk – and our staff are not instructed to put anyone off contacting me directly.

My phone number and direct email address is on our website and if readers contact the switchboard, they are readily put through to me.

A copy of our complaints procedure is on the website and also appears regularly in the newspaper on the letters page.

The typical wording is:

At the Barnsley Chronicle, we try to get things right but occasionally, we make mistakes.

If you have a complaint about a story featured in our newspaper or on our website, please contact the newsdesk on Barnsley 734262 or email editorial@barnsley-chronicle.co.uk.

If we are unable to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, the matter can be referred to the Independent Press Standards Organisation of which we are a member.

We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice as demanded by IPSO.

For details on the code and what you should do should you be unsatisfied with

the way we handle your complaint, please visit their website – www.ipso.co.uk.

We accept complaints in most formats – phone, letter, email or in person.

By virtue of its public nature, if a complaint is posted on one of our social media channels, we would normally request direct contact details so we can investigate the matter further.

■ Our training process:

All staff have been briefed on our policy regarding complaints handling. A copy of the Code of Editors has been included in the handbook given to all members of the editorial team on their first day.

A copy is posted on the office notice board and a fresh copy is distributed to every member of the team as and when it is updated. The most recent version was circulated to staff in January 2016.

During the period relevant to this report, we have not organised any formal training on the IPSO code but our compliance with it is often discussed in relation to stories the news team are working on.

I frequently ask reporters dealing with stories that have the potential to generate a complaint to consider the code's impact on their conduct while both preparing and then subsequently their writing of a story.

■ How we deal with pre-publication guidance:

In the period relevant to this report, we have not had cause to seek pre-publication guidance from IPSO advisors.

However, all staff are aware that such guidance is available.

I would normally expect that approach to IPSO to be made by either myself or the deputy editor although reporting staff would not be discouraged from making such an approach themselves if it was felt necessary.

■ Our record on compliance:

In the period relevant to this reporting period, we were the subject of one referral to IPSO.

The complaint related to a story originally published in August 2016 although the complaint was not submitted to IPSO until late October 2016 and adjudication was not made until January 2017.

For the sake of transparency, I have attached as a PDF the summary of the Complaints Committee.

I am pleased to say that the complaint was not upheld.

■ Additional information

Further to correspondence between our chairman, Sir Nicholoas Hewitt and Charlotte Unwin in February 2016, I can confirm our website has the facility to archive all stories whilst at the same time retaining the original version of any amended stories. This ensures compliance with Articles 3.3.4 and 3.3.8 of the Scheme Membership Agreement.

Decision of the Complaints Committee
09535-16 Cooksey v Barnsley Chronicle

Summary of complaint

1. Christine Cooksey complained to the Independent Press Standards Organisation that the Barnsley Chronicle breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice in an article headlined "Nursery turf out tot following Mum's feedback", published in print on 19 August 2016, "Mum hits out at town centre nursery", published online on 19 August 2016.
2. The article reported that a mother was left without childcare when a nurse terminated the contract for the care of her two-year-old son. It said that the child had attended the nursery for 15 months before his mother, worried about a number of issues at the nursery, gave four-weeks notice of her intention to remove him from the nursery. It said that when she provided feedback on request from the nursery about her decision to remove her son, she received an email saying that it was a "conflict of interest" for her son to attend the nursery because of her "negative and hostile comments". It said that the mother then asked the nursery whether her son's learning documents could be posted out, or collected by her husband. However, when she did not receive a reply to this request, she contacted Ofsted.
3. The article went on to outline the mother's other concerns with the nursery, including her son being handed over to her by a new member of staff without checking who she was, having to change his nappy in reception because it was wet, and not being updated on his progress. The article also included a summary of the nursery's most recent Ofsted inspection, as well as the nursery's response to the article's central claim.
4. The online article was an edited version of the article that appeared in print.
5. The complainant, the co-owner of the nursery with her husband, said that the headline was misleading as the mother had already resigned her son's place at the nursery. She said that it was inaccurate to report that the mother had been left without childcare as she said the mother had already secured a place for her son at a different nursery. She said that while the reporter from the newspaper had contacted the nursery the day before the article went to print, the reporter had only revealed that she was in possession of the email the nursery had sent to the mother, and did not mention details of any of the other claims the mother was making. She said that the reporter was antagonistic towards her, and because she had no experience of reporters and believed the reporter was trying to "catch her out", she stopped the conversation and said that she would seek legal advice. She said that because she had not been made aware of the full content of the article, the nursery did not have the opportunity to deny a number of the claims made by the mother in the article, which she said were inaccurate.
6. The newspaper said that it had been contacted by the mother about the decision to stop her son attending the nursery. It said that after contacting the nursery before publishing the article, it received a call back from the complainant which it described as "short" and "abrupt". It said that the journalist explained that she had spoken to the mother, and seen emails exchanged between her and the nursery. She said that the complainant interrupted to say "you can't do that", and said she would be unable to comment because of data protection issues around pupils. It said that the complainant said that she would have to consult her lawyers, and did not at any point ask exactly what the mother had said. It said that, overall, its reporter had made reasonable efforts to put the claims to the complainant, but had been greeted by a "brick wall". It said that it was

not the newspaper's normal policy to seek responses from parties by email, and that they always tried to make personal contact in such circumstances.

7. The newspaper said that it received a statement later that day from the complainant's husband which outlined the nursery's position, and was included in the article. It also disputed that the complainant had no experience of dealing with the press, and provided details of previous articles where she had been interviewed.

Relevant Code Provisions

8. Clause 1 (Accuracy)

- i) The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.
- ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion 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.

Findings of the Committee

9. While the mother had made the decision remove her son from the nursery, she had provided four-weeks notice of her intention to do so. However, on receiving the mother's feedback, the nursery decided to terminate the arrangement with immediate effect, all of which was explained in the article. In the circumstances, it was not inaccurate of the newspaper to characterise this as the nursery 'turfing out' the boy. Nor was it inaccurate for the article to report that the mother had been left without childcare when she had expected her childcare to continue at the complainant's nursery until the end of the four-week-notice period. There was no breach of Clause 1.
10. The complainant had not been asked directly about a number of the mother's claims reported in the article, including concerns about the high turnover of staff, her son being handed over to her without checks by a new member of staff and having to change her son's nappy on collecting him from the nursery. The Committee noted the newspaper's position that it felt unable to put these points to the complainant over the telephone; nonetheless, it expressed some concern that it did not follow up on these points by another means. However, where the complainant was made aware of the article's central claim that the nursery had 'turfed out' the boy, and the nursery's response to this claim had been published in full in the article, the Committee did not consider, on balance, that the failure to put these claims to the complainant by another means breached Clause 1(i).

Conclusions

11. The complaint was not upheld.

Remedial Action Required

N/A