

Independent Press Standards Organisation: Annual Statement of CN Group Limited for the period January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016.

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Introduction

CN Group is a multi-media business serving local communities in the Cumbria, Northumbria and south-west Scotland.

The group's titles are politically independent, and do not support any one political party.

The group's publishing division comprises daily titles News & Star and North West Evening Mail; weekly paid-for titles The Cumberland News, Eskdale & Liddesdale Advertiser, Hexham Courant, Times & Star and Whitehaven News; the free weekly Advertiser; and a magazines division that publishes the paid-for titles Cumbria Life, Dumfries & Galloway Life and Carlisle Living. All paid-for titles have associated websites.

IPSO Responsible Person: Colin Tapping, Editor, Hexham Courant, Beaumont Street, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3NA. Tel. 01434 602351, email colin.tapping@cnmedia.co.uk

Our Editorial Standards

CN Group has adopted company wide IPSO Standard Operating Procedures to which all its journalists adhere. The procedures are available to all staff via the company's intranet site.

A requirement to adhere to and understand the Editors' Code is set out in the Terms and Conditions of Employment of all journalists in the company.

Annual IPSO and other legal refresher training is made available to all editorial staff as part of their individual annual personal development reviews. The need for legal training including dedicated training about IPSO is kept under review by editors.

The company has adopted a Complaints Protocol which is published, along with the Editors' Code, on the company intranet site.

The Complaints Protocol includes details of the company's policy regarding verification of content prior to publication. This explains that content is subject to legal and ethical checks by senior editors who may also seek advice from media lawyers and IPSO.

The protocol also requires senior editorial executives and journalists to maintain a full audit trail when it is felt an article being considered for publication in the public interest may include a potential breach of the Editors' Code. This will include a record of any meetings held to discuss the article and a copy of any authorisation signed by the editor or senior executive.

The operating procedures draw attention to the IPSO journalists' whistle blower hotline with full contact information.

The procedures note IPSO's offer of pre-publication advice to members of the public and to alert publications to any concerns about alleged harassment by journalists in breach of the Editors' Code.

Our Complaints Handling Process

All CN Group titles carry prominent complaints panels that include Editorial and IPSO contact details, in print and online.

The company's Complaints Protocol has been agreed by all editors and is published and available to staff from all departments on the company intranet site.

The protocol includes advice about pre-publication verification and the requirement for a full audit trail if articles considered for publication may be in potential breach of the Editors' Code.

The company will accept complaints by telephone, email or letter and all complainants will receive an acknowledgement from an editor, deputy

editor or senior editorial executive within 24 hours of a complaint being received.

The editor will be kept informed of all correspondence and progress throughout the complaints process.

Complainants who appear to raise potential issues under the Editors' Code are informed of the code even it is not cited officially as part of the complaint. They are informed that the publication is regulated by IPSO and are provided with contact details.

The company aims to have all complaints resolved within 14 days.

All complaints that allege a breach of the Editors' Code or which request remedial action are logged and a record is taken of follow-up action. The complaints log is reviewed on a regular basis by senior editorial executives.

CN Group journalists must keep all source documentation including shorthand notes for 12 months.

The protocol includes details of recommended remedial action which includes the removal of contentious online content while investigations are taking place.

Complaints directly addressed by IPSO are notified by editors to the company's chief executive.

IPSO resolutions are recorded and published as per IPSO guidance specific to the case.

Our Training Process

Annual IPSO and other legal refresher training are made available to all editorial staff as part of their individual annual personal development reviews. The need for legal training including dedicated training about IPSO is kept under review by editors. In addition, editors brief members of the editorial staff as necessary on legal updates and IPSO rulings.

Our record of compliance

The following provides information, by title, about IPSO compliance for the period January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016.

Times & Star

- CN Group/IPSO Standard Operating Procedures and the latest Editors' Code of Practice have been communicated to all editorial staff. Every staff member is issued with their own copy and one is always displayed on the notice board.
- Editorial team briefings underline standards and complaints monitoring. Updates on rulings and guidance received by email from trade organisations are forwarded to staff.
- Complaints by telephone are usually initially answered by newsdesk (chief reporter) and either dealt with immediately, if straightforward, with corrections/clarifications offered and agreed if necessary - and an electronic note sent to editor to keep on record - or passed on to head of content and editor if more serious or complicated. Complaints in writing usually go straight to editor. An initial acknowledgement is sent by return and we aim to respond fully, following internal investigation, within one week. Hard copies of all complaints are kept on file indefinitely and all electronic correspondence is printed out and added to the file.
- All trainees undergo a rigorous in-house training programme following the NCTJ NQJ procedures. No formal further training scheduled for seniors.
- IPSO information and complaints procedure is published prominently in every print edition and also on the website.
- No pre-publication verification was sought during the period.
- IPSO reference 08837-16 from [REDACTED] about an article dated [REDACTED] 2016 in the Times & Star headlined "[REDACTED]" which listed numerous charges, some of which were in summarised form. After an initial review, IPSO determined that the complaint fell within its remit and raised a possible breach of the Editors' Code of Practice. Editor responded directly to complainant as requested, offering clarification of the full charges rather than the summarised version which was the subject of the complaint. The article was also immediately removed from the website while the matter was being investigated. Two attempts have been made to offer publication of corrections/clarifications, but the complainant has never responded. The charges which [REDACTED] was facing have now been dealt with in court and the case closed. The Times & Star has not yet received notification of ruling by IPSO's complaints committee.

Whitehaven News

- CN Group/IPSO Standard Operating Procedures and the latest Editors' Code of Practice have been communicated to all editorial staff. Every staff member is issued with their own copy and one is always displayed on the notice board.
- Editorial team briefings underline standards and complaints monitoring. Updates on rulings and guidance received by email from trade organisations are forwarded to staff.
- Complaints by telephone are usually initially answered by newsdesk (chief reporter) and either dealt with immediately, if straightforward, with corrections/clarifications offered and agreed if necessary - and an electronic note sent to editor to keep on record - or passed on to head of content and editor if more serious or complicated. Complaints in writing usually go straight to editor. An initial acknowledgement is sent by return and we aim to respond fully, following internal investigation, within one week. Hard copies of all complaints are kept on file indefinitely and all electronic correspondence is printed out and added to the file.
- IPSO information and complaints procedure is published prominently in every print edition and also on the website.
- All trainees undergo a rigorous in-house training programme following the NCTJ NQJ procedures. No formal further training scheduled for seniors.
- No pre-publication verification was sought during the period.
- No complaints relating to alleged breach of the Editors' Code were received during the period.

The Cumberland News, News & Star, Eskdale & Liddesdale Advertiser

- CN Group IPSO Standard Operating Procedures have been communicated.
- The latest Editors' Code has been made available to all editorial staff online and by hard copy.
- Editorial team briefings rigorously underline standards and complaints monitoring as laid down.
- All reports are thoroughly checked before publication.
- General complaints are referred to the news desk and recorded in an electronic comments book. IPSO complaints are dealt with by the Editor or duty editor, with records kept by the Editor's PA electronically and in hard copy.
- No pre-publication verification was sought during the period.
- IPSO ref: 08640-16: Complaint from the [REDACTED] about coverage of a court case involving their son. No breach was found.

North West Evening Mail (including The Advertiser)

- CN Group IPSO Standard Operating Procedures have been communicated.
- All members of staff issued with a version of the latest Editors' Code
- Editorial team briefings underline standards and complaints monitoring.
- Items of potentially problematic nature are assessed by Head of Content and Editor ahead of publication, with relevant advice sought.
- Complaints are handled by the Editor or Head of Content and actions taken as per company procedures, and the aim is to resolve complaints within seven days.
- File copies are kept of all IPSO and legal correspondence.
- No pre-publication verification was sought during the period.
- No complaints relating to alleged breach of the Editors' Code were received during the period.

Hexham Courant

- CN Group IPSO Standard Operating Procedures have been communicated to all members of editorial staff.
- The latest Editors' Code has been made available to all editorial staff.
- Editorial team briefings underline standards and complaints monitoring.
- The Editor, or Head of Content, is informed of all complaints and a record of all complaints and resolutions is kept. There is a formal acknowledgement of a complaint within 24 hours and a full response within seven days.
- No pre-publication verification was sought during the period.
- No complaints relating to alleged breach of the Editors' Code were received during the period.

Magazines Division (including Cumbria Life, Dumfries & Galloway Life, and Carlisle Living)

- CN Group IPSO Standard Operating Procedures have been communicated to all members of editorial staff.
- The latest Editors' Code has been made available to all editorial staff.
- Editorial team briefings underline standards and complaints monitoring.
- No pre-publication verification was sought during the period.
- No complaints relating to alleged breach of the Editors' Code were received during the period.

Appendix

1. Copy of most recent Editors' Code circulated to all editorial staff and available on the company's intranet.
2. Copy of CN Group IPSO Standard Operating Procedures available to all staff.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), as regulator, is charged with enforcing the following Code of Practice, which was framed by the Editors' Code of Practice Committee and is enshrined in the contractual agreement between IPSO and newspaper, magazine and electronic news publishers.

Preamble

The Code – including this preamble and the public interest exceptions below – sets the framework for the highest professional standards that members of the press subscribing to the Independent Press Standards Organisation have undertaken to maintain. It is the cornerstone of the system of voluntary self-regulation to which they have made a binding contractual commitment. It balances both the rights of the individual and the public's right to know.

To achieve that balance, it is essential that an agreed Code be honoured not only to the letter, but in the full spirit. It should be interpreted neither so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect the rights of the individual, nor so broadly that it infringes the fundamental right to freedom of expression – such as to inform, to be partisan, to challenge, shock, be satirical and to entertain – or prevents publication in the public interest.

It is the responsibility of editors and publishers to apply the Code to editorial material in both printed and online versions of their publications. They should take care to ensure it is observed rigorously by all editorial staff and external contributors, including non-journalists.

Editors must maintain in-house procedures to resolve complaints swiftly and, where required to do so, cooperate with IPSO. A publication subject to an adverse adjudication must publish it in full and with due prominence, as required by IPSO.

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.
- iii) A fair opportunity to reply to significant inaccuracies should be given, when reasonably called for.
- iv) The Press, while free to editorialise and campaign, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.
- v) A publication must report fairly and accurately the outcome of an action for defamation to which it has been a party, unless an agreed settlement states otherwise, or an agreed statement is published.

2. *Privacy

- i) Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence, including digital communications.
- ii) Editors will be expected to justify intrusions into any individual's private life without consent. Account will be taken of the complainant's own public disclosures of information.
- iii) It is unacceptable to photograph individuals, without their consent, in public or private places where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy.

3. *Harassment

- i) Journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit.
- ii) They must not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist; nor remain on property when asked to leave and must not follow them. If requested, they must identify themselves and whom they represent.
- iii) Editors must ensure these principles are observed by those working for them and take care not to use non-compliant material from other sources.

4. Intrusion into grief or shock

In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively. These provisions should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.

5. *Reporting suicide

When reporting suicide, to prevent simulative acts care should be taken to avoid excessive detail of the method used, while taking into account the media's right to report legal proceedings.

6. *Children

- i) All pupils should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion.
- ii) They must not be approached or photographed at school without permission of the school authorities.
- iii) Children under 16 must not be interviewed or photographed on issues involving their own or another child's welfare unless a custodial parent or similarly responsible adult consents.
- iv) Children under 16 must not be paid for material involving their welfare, nor parents or guardians for material about their children or wards, unless it is clearly in the child's interest.
- v) Editors must not use the fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life.

7. *Children in sex cases

1. The press must not, even if legally free to do so, identify children under 16 who are victims or witnesses in cases involving sex offences.
2. In any press report of a case involving a sexual offence against a child –
 - i) The child must not be identified.
 - ii) The adult may be identified.
 - iii) The word "incest" must not be used where a child victim might be identified.
- iv) Care must be taken that nothing in the report implies the relationship between the accused and the child.

8. *Hospitals

- i) Journalists must identify themselves and obtain permission from a responsible executive before entering non-public areas of hospitals or similar institutions to pursue enquiries.
- ii) The restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to enquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions.

9. *Reporting of Crime

- i) Relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime should not generally be identified without their consent, unless they are genuinely relevant to the story.
- ii) Particular regard should be paid to the potentially vulnerable position of children who witness, or are victims of, crime. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.

10. *Clandestine devices and subterfuge

- i) The press must not seek to obtain or publish material acquired by using hidden cameras or clandestine listening devices; or by intercepting private or mobile telephone calls, messages or emails; or by the unauthorised removal of documents or photographs; or by accessing digitally-held information without consent.
- ii) Engaging in misrepresentation or subterfuge, including by agents or intermediaries, can generally be justified only in the public interest and then only when the material cannot be obtained by other means.

11. Victims of sexual assault

The press must not identify victims of sexual assault or publish material likely to contribute to such identification unless there is adequate justification and they are legally free to do so.

12. Discrimination

- i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's, race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.
- ii) Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

13. Financial journalism

- i) Even where the law does not prohibit it, journalists must not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication, nor should they pass such information to others.
- ii) They must not write about shares or securities in whose performance they know that they or their close families have a significant financial interest without disclosing the interest to the editor or financial editor.
- iii) They must not buy or sell, either directly or through nominees or agents, shares or securities about which they have written recently or about which they intend to write in the near future.

14. Confidential sources

Journalists have a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information.

15. Witness payments in criminal trials

- i) No payment or offer of payment to a witness – or any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness – should be made in any case once proceedings are active as defined by the Contempt of Court Act 1981. This prohibition lasts until the suspect has been freed unconditionally by police without charge or bail or the proceedings are otherwise discontinued; or has entered a guilty plea to the court; or, in the event of a not guilty plea, the court has announced its verdict.
 - *ii) Where proceedings are not yet active but are likely and foreseeable, editors must not make or offer payment to any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness, unless the information concerned ought demonstrably to be published in the public interest and there is an over-riding need to make or promise payment for this to be done; and all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure no financial dealings influence the evidence those witnesses give. In no circumstances should such payment be conditional on the outcome of a trial.
 - *iii) Any payment or offer of payment made to a person later cited to give evidence in proceedings must be disclosed to the prosecution and defence. The witness must be advised of this requirement.

16. *Payment to criminals

- i) Payment or offers of payment for stories, pictures or information which seek to exploit a particular crime or to glorify or glamorise crime in general, must not be made directly or via agents to convicted or confessed criminals or to their associates – who may include family, friends and colleagues.
- ii) Editors invoking the public interest to justify payment or offers would need to demonstrate that there was good reason to believe the public interest would be served. If, despite payment, no public interest emerged, then the material should not be published.

The public interest

There may be exceptions to the clauses marked * where they can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

1. The public interest includes, but is not confined to:
 - i. Detecting or exposing crime, or the threat of crime, or serious impropriety.
 - ii. Protecting public health or safety.
 - iii. Protecting the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.
 - iv. Disclosing a person or organisation's failure or likely failure to comply with any obligation to which they are subject.
 - v. Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.
 - vi. Raising or contributing to a matter of public debate, including serious cases of impropriety, unethical conduct or incompetence concerning the public.
 - vii. Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.
2. There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself.
3. The regulator will consider the extent to which material is already in the public domain or will or will become so.
4. Editors invoking the public interest will need to demonstrate that they reasonably believed publication – or journalistic activity taken with a view to publication – would both serve, and be proportionate to, the public interest and explain how they reached that decision at the time.
5. An exceptional public interest would need to be demonstrated to over-ride the normally paramount interests of children under 16.

CN GROUP

IPSO STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

1. All CN Group titles carry prominent complaints panels including Editorial and IPSO contact details, in print and online.
2. All our editorial staff are inducted into accepting and understanding the requirements of the Editors' Code and adherence to IPSO. This is communicated via the company handbook, individual Terms and Conditions, job descriptions and inductions.
3. We draw attention to the IPSO journalists' whistle blower hotline. Any journalist who feels they are being pressured to act in a way not in line with the Editor's Code, and who would like to register concern or seek advice, can call IPSO on 0300 213 2220 and speak in confidence to a member of IPSO staff or contact IPSO Chief Executive Matt Tee via matt.tee@ipso.co.uk
4. We note IPSO harassment policy, whereby IPSO may offer pre-publication advice to members of the public and alert publications to any concerns about alleged harassment by journalists in breach of the Editors' Code.
5. Annual IPSO and other legal refresher training is made available to all editorial staff.
6. Our Editors supply information for an annual company statement which is then compiled by one responsible person for submission to IPSO and subsequent publication on both CN Group and News Media Association websites.
7. The company has adopted a clear and consistent Complaints Protocol which is followed across all titles, as follows:

Complaints Protocol:

- (a) Verification of content prior to publication – potentially contentious content is subject to legal and ethical checks via senior editors who may also seek advice from News Media Association or other newspaper lawyers.
- (b) Editors ensure that senior editorial executives and journalists maintain and keep a full audit trail when it is felt that a story being considered for publication in the public interest may potentially breach the code. This will include a record of any meetings that discuss the reasons for publication and a copy of authorisation signed by the editor or senior executive.
- (c) All complainants receive an acknowledgement from an editor, deputy editor or senior editorial executive appointed by the editor within 24 hours of a complaint

being received. The Editor is kept informed of all correspondence and progress throughout the complaints process.

(d) Complainants who raise concerns that appear to raise a potential issue under the Editors' Code are informed of the code even if it is not cited within the initial complaint. They are informed that our publications are regulated by IPSO and are provided with full contact details.

(e) We strive to have all complaints resolved within 14 days.

(f) All complaints that either allege a breach of the Editors' code or request other remedial action are recorded in the company's Complaints log, with a record taken of follow-up action. The log is subject to regular review by senior editorial executives across all titles.

(g) Our journalists keep all source documentation including shorthand notes for 12 months in line with IPSO requirements. Storage space for documents may be requested from a line manager.

(h) Offers of remedial action for complainants in the first instance include clarifications and apologies, balancing follow-up articles and letters to be published in the next available print edition. Contentious online content will be removed while investigations are taking place.

(i) Complaints which are directly addressed by IPSO are notified by Editors to the Managing Director, and any complaints that may require legal support are also notified to the group Finance Director. Potential libel claims are also notified as a matter of course to the Finance Director.

(j) All IPSO resolutions are recorded and published by our titles as per IPSO guidance specific to that case.

Updated 30.06.15