

Barnsley Chronicle Ltd Annual IPSO report May 2019

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 and social media management.

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 regional 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 40,000 likes while it has 16,000 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However, we have a strict policy that we do not publish a story obtained from social media sources without first checking its accuracy and authenticity.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 not 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 2018, 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.

In simple terms, our policy is to treat social media leads as nothing more than tip-offs that may or not turn out to be true – much like the traditional ‘overheard conversation in a pub.’

Dealing with social media – particularly users’ comments – has proved one of the most challenging aspects of the editorial department’s role in the last couple of years and this continued throughout 2018. Indeed, the highest percentage of complaints we receive actually relate to users’ comments rather than the accuracy of the story.

Since last year’s report, we have also noticed a small

but rising number of requests from people wanting to exercise their right to be forgotten and we now have a procedure in place to look at these requests regarding our online content.

However, public understanding of this entire process is still quite limited and already so far, we have received some requests which have not, in our opinion, been justified and have, therefore, been rejected.

The Chronicle continues to cover things such as council meetings and public meetings in the traditional way – i.e. a reporter in attendance.

If the issues being discussed are contentious, it would be expected that our reporters would contact 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 compliance is Andrew Harrod. In the event of his absence, this responsibility would pass to the deputy editor, Mike Cotton. Please note this structure has changed since last year's report was compiled due to the departure of former deputy, Steph Daley.

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 he is empowered to draft and arrange publication of 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 wording for such 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 when they join the company. Last year, we recruited four relatively inexperienced new recruits who are in need of more guidance than their predecessors but so far, their understanding of the code seems very satisfactory.

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. We work in an open plan office and 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 prepublication 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.