

IPSO report: the Jewish Chronicle



5/10/2019

Fifth annual statement

An overview of editorial policies and procedures and the company's approach to press regulation

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1. OVERVIEW

Titles covered by this statement:

The Jewish Chronicle

www.thejc.com

Related magazines and advertiser supplements

2. EDITORIAL STANDARDS

Who the JC is, what it does and the people behind it

3. THE STORY-GATHERING PROCESS

How reporters work, the guidelines used to verify the accuracy of stories and the editorial decision-making process

4. COMPLIANCE

The steps taken to ensure readers' views are heard and the actions taken as a result

5. ADVERSE ADJUDICATIONS

There was only one in the year covered by this report. A summary is contained below.

6. THE TRAINING PROCESS

Advice given to editorial staff and how the company has an ongoing commitment to ensure they are fully in step with their ethical and legal responsibilities

7. APPENDIX

Samples of in-paper corrections

The online route to complain

News-flow process and the legal safeguards

1. Editorial standards explained

The JC is a London-based weekly newspaper and the leading authority on matters relevant to the Jewish community in Britain, the diaspora and Israel's role in the Middle East. Its coverage of all matters that affect Jews abroad is extensive, thanks to its network of correspondents around the world. At home, it attracts some of Fleet Street's leading voices and enjoys access to key players in politics, entertainment, sport and the Arts.

Its senior executive pool have a long track record in national newspapers, particularly at the quality end of the market, and all of the middle management (section editors) have worked within the Jewish Community for between 10 and 30+ years.

A benefit of that is its proven track record of producing often controversial exclusives based on agenda-setting investigations.

The editorial philosophy is to make sense of - and help readers to navigate - an often confusing world, particularly as many of the issues important to them are widely covered elsewhere by media with varied social and political agendas. Trust is, therefore, key. To underpin that philosophy, there is an assumption that a reader may follow an issue close to the Community's heart elsewhere but rely on the JC to put it into context.

That is no better illustrated than in the circulation surges it has experienced during times of conflict in the Middle East or when antisemitism has been high on the news agenda.

This year, subjects such as Labour's continuing internal issues with antisemitism have proved controversial and, at times, challenging as the paper campaigned to ensure the issue had the prominence it deserved. As a result, it faced attacks on its content, particularly from the far right and was forced to defend itself on numerous occasions.

The news cycle adopts a web-first philosophy. Its website, www.thejc.com, updates six days a week with breaking news, allowing the newspaper to present a more reflective and analytical tone. There are also regular emails sent out under the name JCDaily which provides subscribers with bulletin-style news updates.

2. The story-gathering and approval process

The editor holds an open editorial conference on Monday mornings at which reporters pitch stories via their section editors. The editor may question the provenance of a story or give guidance about how the team should approach certain subjects.

This is followed by a planning meeting of senior staff where further guidelines may be issued (ie: the editor may stipulate where he thinks the boundaries should be placed in terms of privacy).

Progress meetings take place at various points leading to the Wednesday evening deadline. The editor leads these and all senior staff present throughout. All may raise legal or ethical questions. Some of these may be answered by asking a writer in to discuss directly. On other occasions, they may involve a conversation with the in-house lawyer or the Reader's Editor.

On a general level, JC staff are immersed in the community they serve and have knowledge and experience of many of the issues they encounter. Senior staff, in particular, have a wealth of contacts in all areas and there is a substantial knowledge base on which to call when needed.

This often proves useful when testing the veracity of information supplied. The JC's expertise in this area is widely recognised throughout the media as a whole and it is often called upon to add its expertise to other media outlets. The editor, for example, is a widely respected commentator on matters concerning the UK Jewish community and the Middle East.

In general terms, there is a rule of thumb expectation that information is only regarded as 'safe' when supplied by authorised spokesmen from recognised organisations or those regarded as official for the purposes of attracting qualified privilege in the legal sense.

Otherwise, the JC follows some basic rules which, broadly, encompass traditional journalistic best practice. They can be summarised thus:

- Multiple sources are better than one.
- Always attribute, never assume.
- Anything that cannot be verified as fact must not be presented as such.
- When in doubt, leave out.

The team are also conversant with the general level of reader expectation regarding moving stories published online by reputable news outlets and have been quick to add qualifiers highlighting changes/challenges to them.

The Jewish Chronicle is aware that IPSO are able to offer pre-publication advice. It has taken advantage of this on specific and general levels. It has also used case officers as a sounding board when dealing with sensitive issues on several occasions as well as interpretations of the Editor's Code of Practice. These have proved extremely useful and the practice will continue.

Otherwise, stories are assigned to pages according to the editor's briefing and edited by section editors. They are then proof-read by a sub editor and handed to the editor for sign off.

Legal cover includes the provision of pre-publication advice from the libel specialists, Simon Gallant and Chris Hutchins of Hamblins LLP of Marylebone.

They have remote access to the newspaper's production system and are able to monitor in real time stories as they are produced.

On occasions, a particularly sensitive story may be edited by the editor himself (possibly, in conjunction with the lawyer) before being handed back to the author for comment.

Finally, on press night, colour proofs of all approved pages are placed in a transparent folder which is presented to the duty lawyer for final review before the edition is closed. This usually takes place in person where the lawyer is able to confer directly with all involved.

3. The complaints process

The JC is aware that, as a campaigning newspaper, it will attract both praise and condemnation. It has an editorial independence it protects rigorously but understands its credibility can be damaged when it gets something wrong. It therefore encourages readers to point out errors and acts on them swiftly.

Recent examples have included addressing simple errors such as a wrong job title or altering a headline to remove an ambiguity or updating a story when new details are forwarded that change its perspective. A picture, for example, accepted in good faith was removed when it was told of the source.

It also understands that not all complaints are legitimate and merely made in order to prevent something being published or to have something removed later. The JC reserves the right to investigate these before agreeing to act and, where appropriate, the Readers Editor will confer with the complainant to see if a solution can be found.

The website www.thejc.com has a permanent link titled *How to Complain*. It sets out a simple step-by-step process, explaining how to do it, gives examples of the sort of issues that will and will not be considered and links to the Editor's Code of Practice and the IPSO home page. There is a link to a dedicated Complaints inbox. There is also a reference to this in the newspaper's comment page.

The Complaints inbox receives all correspondence via the weblink. That is monitored daily and responses are either given immediately or an email is sent explaining it has been forwarded elsewhere.

Complaints, either via this route or others, are copied into the Readers' Editor (for IPSO purposes, the *Responsible Person*) who has freedom to investigate fully. That may involve speaking directly - and often separately - to anyone involved in an issue, asking to see emails, shorthand notes and examining any corroborative evidence. It is also not unusual to seek corroborative 'evidence' from third parties such as freelancers or those quoted within stories.

The JC has a policy of trying to offer responses to all complaints, however minor (see examples in appendix) in keeping with its remit as a community newspaper. It prides itself on its even-handed approach to complaints and has proved willing to amend or clarify when the need arises, even when defending substantive points. Recent ipso rulings that have gone to Committee stage have noted this.

In each week's issue, the letters page template is produced at the start of the design process with a dedicated slot reserved for minor corrections and amendments. This is called *For the Record*, a title picked out in a red font in 14pt caps. Entries vary from one-sentence clarifications to more detailed explanations when appropriate.

The IPSO logo appears on this page along with a brief explanation of the JC's commitment to regulation and the IPSO phone number:

Readers with differences of opinion are regularly invited to state their case on the letters page, although we reserve the right to edit in line with good publishing practice.

A link to a recent article explaining the paper's philosophy is attached:

<https://www.thejc.com/a-word-about-scrutiny-of-us-you-and-them-ipso-independent-press-standards-organisation-1.479122>

The Company Handbook has been amended to include the following assertion:

13.6 Press Regulation

The JC is a member of the newspaper industry's new regulatory body, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). All journalists who write regularly for the newspaper (staff and retained correspondents) are expected to be aware of the IPSO rules and, in particular, the Editor's Code of Practice, as stipulated in the contract between IPSO and the JC. All are required to sign a disclosure that they have read and understood the Code and agree to comply with its conditions.

A copy of the code can be downloaded from the IPSO website or directly via this link:

<https://www.ipso.co.uk/IPSO/cop.html>

There were several reader complaints made either directly to the newspaper or via IPSO in the period covered by this statement. In every case, the newspaper did its best to react in a timely manner and was able to rectify in a way acceptable to the complainant.

4. Adverse Adjudications

There was only one adverse ruling in the period covered by this statement. Thomas Suárez complained that The JC breached Clause 1 (Accuracy) in articles headlined "Board halt Israel hate author talk", published online on May 8, 2017, and "Quakers row as venue is rented out to anti-Zionist", in print on 20 April 2018.

The 2018 article claimed the Friends Meeting House had cancelled his appearance because it was “not in line with Quaker values” but did not make clear that this was a comment made by the President of the Board of Deputies, thereby failing to distinguish between comment, conjecture and fact.

The Committee also ruled that the JC had not provided any basis for the article’s claim that the Friends Meeting House had “banned” him.

The paper had provided evidence to support claims that Mr Suarez had said Zionist leaders had “encouraged antisemitism in Germany to force Jews to move to Palestine” but not provided a basis for claiming he had referred to Germany, or that he had adopted this claim as his own; giving rise to a significantly misleading impression of his views. A correction was needed to make clear that the complainant had been referring to someone else’s views.

Several other points of dispute were dismissed as not having breached the code and the paper had offered prominent corrections on the points that were. However, while they were deemed suitable, they were not deemed to have been offered promptly enough.

5. The training process

All editorial staff are given a copy of the current Editor’s Code on joining. All recipients have to agree to sign and return a declaration that they had read and understood it - and are willing to comply with its terms.

Training updates are scheduled twice-yearly and supplemented with ad-hoc sessions when deemed necessary. The most recent took place on February 28, 2019. Copies of the revised code were circulated and significant cases were examined to analyse current rulings and how they should impact on working practices.

In previous years’ seminars, actual adjudications from local, regional and national newspapers were used as the basis for practical workshops. Newsroom staff were tested on their knowledge of the code by putting varied and anonymised complaint samples under scrutiny and testing their responses against expert advice. I deemed these unnecessary this year, given the higher levels of awareness shown in the newsroom, but did examine in detail our one adverse adjudication, given that it was complex and gave rise to questions of nuance reporters should be aware of.

This was two-phased; with senior staff before the ruling but immediately after the final submission to Committee had been made, and briefly during the training update in February.

Otherwise, on a day-to-day basis, the editorial team relies exclusively on the Editor’s Code of Practice as the basis for policing the JC’s ethical approach. Emails may occasionally be sent to newsroom staff to reinforce points when it is felt necessary and individual staff are encouraged to seek the advice of the Readers Editor when in doubt about how to approach a story.

They also follow basic problem-reporting guidelines when faced with complaints. These are outlined in dotted lines on the graphic below which details the news-flow process.

As indicated, there are several points along the publishing route where issues can be dealt with and the expected responses are clearly defined.

Provision is also made for stories to be suspended or even expunged from the editorial database in extreme circumstances.

6. Appendix

For the record section - how it appears in print

FOR THE RECORD
The *JC* seeks to correct errors quickly.

- In a January 10 article about the Muslim advocacy group Mend, we stated that Prof Salman Sayyid heads the research section of the IHRC. This was incorrect and Prof Sayyid does not work for IHRC in any capacity and we apologise for the error.

Please note: we normally only accept letters by email. Individual letters cannot be acknowledged. Letters may be edited. Email address for correspondence is: letters@thejc.com. Please supply postal address.

● The *JC* is regulated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation and, as such, we take all complaints seriously. If you have an issue you'd like to raise, [ipso can be contacted on 0300 1232220](mailto:letters@thejc.com).

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- The article headlined *The young must engage* (*JC*, March 15), about a trip to concentration camps organised by the Holocaust Educational Trust, contained several errors. Harry Balsam's mother, sister and younger brother were taken to Belzec, not Bergen Belsen. Mr Balsam's brother was called Sanek, not Sanie. When Sanek was shot dead by an SS officer, it was not "through the head". Contrary to a quote attributed to Natalie Meltzer, Mr Balsam was very open about his Holocaust experiences.

The How to Complain link (how it appears online)

9.

How do I make an editorial complaint?

If we have reported something you disagree with, have made a factual error or you simply wish to rectify something you have seen in print or online, please feel free to let us know. We will do our best to rectify matters if at all possible.

This page describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about our service standards and what you can expect from us.

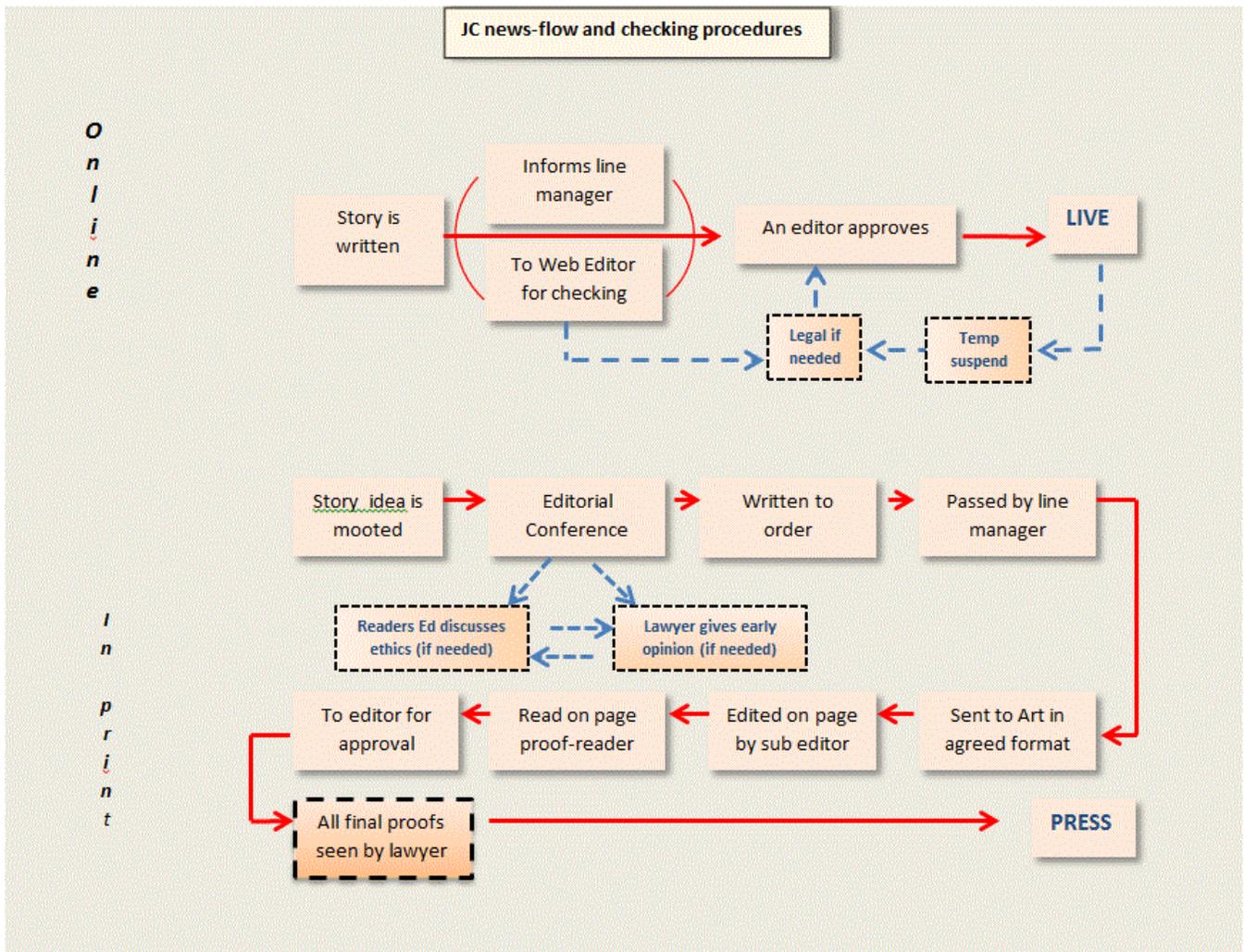
How do we view complaints?

We are here to serve the community. This does not mean pleasing everyone all the time. But it does mean we try to conduct our business honestly, openly and in good faith. While we have a public duty to report matters that are in the public interest, we try to do so in accordance with the Editor's code of Conduct, as stipulated by the Press Standards Board of Finance. That means we take them extremely seriously.

What can I complain about?

The full text can be seen by following this link:

<https://www.thejc.com/faqs#11>



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 May 2019