

Sunday World Annual Statement 2019

My name is Richard Sullivan I am Northern Editor of the Sunday World based in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The Sunday World is an all-Ireland publication with separate north and south editions. The northern edition started in March 1973 and was the first red top tabloid indigenous to the region.

We are the biggest selling newspaper title in the North and our reputation is staked wholly on investigative journalism, we report on crime and have a long history in exposing paramilitary organisations.

Our reporters carry out their jobs at no little risk. The first editor of the Sunday World Jim Campbell survived a murder attempt by the Ulster Volunteer Force. He was shot five times at the door of his home in 1984 and still has a bullet lodged in his back.

Martin O'Hagan, a crime reporter with the Sunday World was shot and killed in 2001 by the Loyalist Volunteer Force because of his work exposing that terrorist organisation.

My predecessor as Northern Editor Jim McDowell was subjected to numerous death threats which required enhanced security at his home. He was physically assaulted by a UVF gang in Belfast city centre.

We have had a bomb planted at our office and our office has been firebombed.

Staff received numerous death threats from both republican and loyalist paramilitary groups over the years.

The Sunday World is owned by Independent News and Media which is based in Dublin but which also owns Belfast based titles the Sunday Life and Belfast Telegraph.

The company also publishes the Dublin based Independent, Sunday Independent and Evening Herald.

Our online platform is independent.ie

The publisher's approach to editorial standards is set out in the company Code of Conduct. Editorial staff are expected to adhere to the highest standards of responsible journalism.

Stories are verified in the normal fashion, by way of fact checking and the cultivation of reliable sources.

The Sunday World has received a number of complaints in the course of the year, details of which have been attached.

We have had to seek guidance from IPSO because of an unusual set of circumstances.

We have received a number of complaints issued on behalf of known organised crime figures and paramilitary leaders.

Our concern is they are using the Code to keep us quiet, to stop us writing about them and investigating their activities.

It is a situation that is unique to the North of Ireland, these are individuals we have been writing about for some years and we feel this is an abuse of the Code.

It was important for us to give context to IPSO. We met with IPSO in London in January and in a very constructive meeting we explained the abuse of the Code.

In return we received extremely constructive advice on how to confront the situation.

The issue has been compounded by the issue of threats against journalists in the Sunday World from loyalist paramilitary organisations including the threat of planting an under car booby trap device.

Details of a blanket threat and a specific threat to a staff member have been communicated to IPSO.

At the meeting we agreed to set up a training day in Belfast for the Sunday World, Sunday Life and Belfast Telegraph. Unfortunately it had to be cancelled because of the pandemic.

We are keen to arrange a suitable date when it is safe to do so.

Our staff are aware of their responsibilities under the Code, company solicitors host regular refresher courses on the law and the parameters set out by IPSO.

We also hold regular 'refresher' days with our company lawyer which not only include libel, privacy, data protection but also our responsibilities under the Code.

Regards

Richard Sullivan

Steps taken in response to upheld complaint – 08064-18

John Gordon filed a complaint against the Sunday World in December 18.

The story at issue dealt with an enforced eviction in Co Roscommon in which Mr Gordon's company was involved.

The incident turned violent with a number of people being injured, property damaged and Mr Gordon's dog being put down because of injuries it suffered.

The Sunday World defended its position and stood over the story as the complaint went through the normal processes set out by IPSO.

Mr Gordon contended we had breached the Code in terms of privacy and accuracy.

After the exchange of a number of correspondence we accepted we had been inaccurate in our description of his dog had died and we also accepted that we could not stand over our claim Mr Gordon's company had been involved in the removal of material from a contentious bonfire in Belfast.

We were happy to agree and publish a clarification.

Every complaint filed whether successfully defended or not presents issues for discussion. In the case of Mr Gordon we alerted Sunday World staff to the importance of being able to stand over every thing we print.

Source information and the protection of sources is central to everything we do but in the wake of the Gordon case we discussed with staff our ability to defend our position.

The Sunday World is constantly reviewing our practices when it comes to news and information gathering in tandem with our responsibilities under the Code.

As referenced earlier we had a very useful meeting with IPSO in London in January, and with an eye on the Gordon case and subsequent complaints we had arranged a training day with IPSO to help us refine our practices.

Unfortunately Covid has resulted in that being put on the long finger, but we continue to monitor and refine our practices.