

The Chronicle Series

Congleton Chronicle – Alsager Chronicle - Biddulph Chronicle – Sandbach Chronicle

Proprietors: Heads (Congleton) Ltd.
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General information

This report covers the following titles:

Congleton Chronicle
Alsager Chronicle
Biddulph Chronicle
Sandbach Chronicle

... all published as part of the Chronicle Series, Market Square, Congleton, and hereafter just referred to as the Chronicle. The responsible person is editor/company chairman Jem Condliffe, who is writing this report.

The Chronicle is a traditional, family owned newspaper, published once a week from our offices. We have been published since 1893. We are now produced on Dropbox, with staff only recently returning to the office. A similar business has operated from our address for at least 250 years.

We publish four titles. The Congleton Chronicle is our flagship title. We also publish the Biddulph Chronicle, Sandbach Chronicle (est 1944) and the Alsager Chronicle (est 2014).

We are a traditional paper in many ways but try to be outspoken and act as a voice for the community. We cover most council meetings and all magistrates' courts. We have a strong op-ed section, including editorial.

We follow the editors' code, copies of which are circulated to staff.

We have had no adverse findings made against us this year, although we have one complaint moving to a formal hearing.

Since the creation of Ipso we have noticed a change in the complaints we get. The more serious errors – where an angle in a story is inaccurate or misleading – have largely gone because we ask ourselves: “How would Ipso rule if a complaint was made”. What we are left with are genuine mistakes, and what people perceive as mistakes. The genuine mistakes are usually silly errors, often down to fat fingers; for example, saying a charity event has raised £2,000 instead of £200. By the terms of the editor's code these would not be significant inaccuracies.

Ipso has said that all complaints should be advised of the code of conduct but – as we have pointed out to Ipso – this makes no sense when the issue is whether a summer fete raised £100 or £125. We simply acknowledge the complaint and run a correction.

Errors for the period of this report.

We have had fewer errors this year, because we furloughed the reporters and the paper was mostly written by two people, me and the deputy editor, both experienced journalists.

Notable complaints include:

- Solicitor's letter alleging defamation and demanding damages over a report on a company administration. We explained media law to solicitor.
- Very angry man threatening to parade his wife and children outside my house for reporting the annual administrator's report after his businesses collapsed.
- Letter of complaint from a young man convicted in court of repeated harassment. “I demand after speaking with my legal team that this article is to be removed, if this is not removed further legal action will be taken”.
- Woman asking for information under GDPR after we reported a court case, also claiming inaccuracy. Wrote back to say the facts were correct, and that she had pleaded guilty to them when they were presented to her. We declined to publish a retraction or apology. The case was only an adjournment, but we also had the full case, and we told her we'd take out a story and run it that week, to get it over and done with. Heard no more.
- Man whose company had gone bust accusing us of making it all up, even though it was an accurate account of a filing at Companies House. He accused us of fraud. He and the irate man above said they would set up their own newspaper “to tell the truth”.

- Businessman declared bankrupt demanding compensation. It turned out the Insolvency Service had made an error; he'd had the bankruptcy quashed after it had been made and it should not have been published in the London Gazette.
- A circus complained we'd called the whole circus a troupe. Amended the story online, reran the correctly worded story the following week.
- We have one complaint currently going to Ipso for adjudication, which is far too complicated to explain.

Ipsos asks how we would handle a story once a complaint had been made to it, but we treat all complaints seriously. We answer to our readers and we do not treat reader complaints less seriously when Ipsos is not involved. As we pointed out to one complainant, a negative ruling to Ipsos would not produce a different outcome to what we do voluntarily.

Letters

The major influence of Ipsos has been to be more rigorous in fact-checking letters. Rather than withhold letters that contain factual errors we run a factcheck underneath letters. This has proved quite popular and entertaining (and it entertains me) although some people now bandy fake news in letters and add in brackets "(editor, can you fact check that)".

Checking

All stories are checked on the page by the editor or his deputy, and any stories that do not appear fair are pulled from that page, though this is rare. We are a small company so adherence to standards is perhaps different to larger news centres. The editor (me) closely follows the news list for the week and will speak to a reporter if a possible risk can be seen. Stories are checked on the page, as stated above. The lockdown forced us to change our production process: we are now produced on Dropbox using a very simple system. This means no stories can go to page make-up without the editor seeing them.

Complaints

In theory, we have a formal complaints procedure, in practice it is never used. We had a special email for formal complaints; it was never used, and I have removed it from our information panel. We are accessible to readers, particularly via social media, and most readers communicate via email. Most of our staff live in the area. We have amicable relationships with local groups and societies.

Complaints arrive in a variety of ways: social media, the telephone, email, being stopped in the street, via family members. Any that concern factual errors or "proper" errors are recorded and investigated. Complaints are channelled according to their seriousness. Most are dealt with by the reporters and more serious ones by our deputy editor. He may consult the editor.

We have no problem printing corrections and apologies. We see apologies as a way of maintaining our standing in the community, and not as something to hide. If we make a mistake, we admit to it and people appreciate this.

We log more serious complaints, not the lesser ones. All corrections go on our letters pages, the best read part of the paper, up to eight pages a week over lockdown.

Traceability

No stories go on the web that have not been in the paper. All excerpts of hard news stories that go on social media are subbed and have been in the paper. Some community news and police alerts will go on social media before being in the paper but have full traceability.

We are a training ground for reporters and our IT was designed with this in mind. We keep copies of all stories in the raw and subbed forms. This means we have copies of everything as it goes into the system. We keep copies of all type in the original form it was emailed to us, copies after pre-subbing processing has occurred and copies of the final stories. Anything posted on social media will have its source saved.

We take on trainees who leave once they have passed the NCE. We do not have a separate training system for mistakes – training is an integral part of our system.



Jeremy Condliffe
Chairman
Responsible person

