

## **“The Chronicle Series”**

**Congleton Chronicle – Alsager Chronicle - Biddulph Chronicle – Sandbach Chronicle**

Proprietors: Heads (Congleton) Ltd.

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### **Ips0 Annual report, May 2024.**

**From: Jem Condliffe, chairman and editor, and responsible person in terms of Ips0.**

#### **Complaints in the year**

The chief source of complaints this year has been court cases, which we are diligent in running.

One, a man accused of rape, contacted Ips0. Clearly if he is – as he claims – wrongly accused, he is in a terrible plight, having lost his job and having a bail condition that bans him from town, but only a jury can decide that. We just report the cases.

A woman complained that she did not escape a driving ban under totting-up because of a shortage of people in her field – as the court register stated – but said the magistrates made it up and wanted an apology.

A woman complained [REDACTED] [REDACTED] that her ex’s address was given in court when she had nothing to do with him; clearly, she does even if to a minor extent, as his court letters are sent to that address, and he knew when to attend court. (We said, as we always do in such cases, that we would report it “care of” an address on that road when he appeared again. People only have to ask nicely).

We ran a story on the death of a man who had recently been convicted of being drunk in charge of a vehicle; several people contacted us as they variously felt sorry for him and were concerned about his drinking. We did not name him or give his address other than the general area (of maybe 500+ homes) but his [REDACTED] [REDACTED] complained that the story caused distress and that was an intrusion into their privacy. We apologised but it was not accepted.

Other mistakes will be familiar to all weeklies:

- We said a regular photographer had taken some photos but he had not – we should have guessed, as he was in one of them;

- We said participants on a cancer charity walk had had their costs covered by sponsors when they funded their own places;
- We ran a story about Avanti trains but used a photo of TransPennine Express trains, to the delight of local trainspotters, and ran a feature of our local hospital (100 years old this year) with a 101-year-old photo of the wrong building as the site of the previous cottage hospital;
- We said a cadet was a member of the Air Training Squadron when she was a (Scout) Ranger;
- We called a flood victim Mrs when she is no such thing; and
- We called Dinas Bran, the castellated ruins perched on a hill, Diana's Bran ("Mae'n ddrwg gennym am y camgymeriad hwn" wrote our Welsh speaking deputy editor).

As this statement was being written, a man threatened to go to Ipso if we **did not** publish his letter. As he repetitively and confrontationally writes about same sex marriage ("gays will all burn in hell"), Israel (can do no wrong) and the Bible (lengthy quotes, then complains when they are cut), he was on thin ice anyway, but threatening sanctions if we do not print a letter is clearly a step too far.

Although we do not alert every complainant to the existence of the editor's code, if we received a complaint that was a possible breach, we would.

Ips0 asks how we would handle a story once a complaint had been made to it. The answer as always is: no differently to how we would handle a story once a complaint had been made by a reader. We answer to our readers, and we do not treat reader complaints less seriously because Ips0 is not involved.

As we pointed out to one complainant, a negative ruling to Ips0 would not produce a different outcome to what we do voluntarily.

## **Letters**

I have continued to be rigorous in fact-checking letters. Rather than withhold letters that contain factual errors I factcheck underneath them, giving letter writers the option of expressing commonly held but erroneous opinions. This has proved popular and entertaining (and it entertains me). The current Israeli situation has proved difficult as letters can be hugely one-sided and misleading but factually correct. I am gearing up for some election fact-checking. People also regularly write "but the editor can factcheck this".

## **The company**

We are a family-owned paid-for weekly whose titles date back to 1893. In an earlier form we go back further, and 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 2012).

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

### **Standards**

We adhere to the editor's code of conduct. All our stories are verified. We speak to both sides of any story. The only times this fails is with new trainees, when they are learning on the job. We have a standard footnote for stories for which we have not received a comment: "X was contacted for a comment but had not replied by the time we went to press". We do sometimes get complaints from people who comment at 3pm on a Wednesday – we aim to have the paper done by around 5pm – and whose comments do not go in. In these cases, we offer them a follow-up story the following week.

### **Checking**

All stories are checked on the page by myself my 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. I closely follow 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.

Complaints In theory, we have a formal complaints procedure, in practice it is rarely used. We had a complaints system, as stated in an information panel we print every week, which was not been used since Ipso required these reports and I have since abandoned. 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 me.

As the old and now politically incorrect saying has it: "The man who never made a mistake never made anything"; mistakes go with the job. 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.

Complaints where we have made a factual error, or error of judgement that warrants an apology, are logged. Emailed / Facebooked complaints are saved digitally. We investigate the causes and if appropriate, issue a clarification / apology / correction, depending on the circumstance. If the error is more than a simple mistake, we will consult the staff member who is responsible, to avoid the mistake happening again.

## **Traceability**

No stories go on the web that have not been in the paper, although few stories go on the web. Any 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 was to allow reporters to access copies of their original stories and subbed stories for their logbooks, but it 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.

Training: 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.

## **Positioning**

All corrections go on the letters page. We have noted Ipso rulings on letters pages, but our letters pages are the best-read part of the paper, so we are in no sense “burying” corrections. If the complaint was about a front-page story (or any other prominent page lead) the correction would go there if we/the complainant felt this was necessary.

Jem Condliffe

Chairman

Responsible person.