

IPSO Report 2024

Highland News & Media

Covering January 1 to December 31, 2024

Produced by John Davidson, Content & Commercial Editor

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Overview of HNM

Highland News and Media Limited (HNM) is a privately-owned company that is leading the way with a strategy focused on local paid-for digital news via a subscription service that offers full access to our content via a dedicated app and series of websites.

We are also proud to continue to produce 12 weekly newspapers and e-editions covering Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, Strathspey, Moray, Banffshire and part of Aberdeenshire. All titles are printed at DC Thomson's print centre in Dundee.

HNM employs 55 people who live and work across the communities we serve, with central offices in Inverness, Elgin and Wick.

The company has more than 8000 paid subscribers, and 120,000 registered users, along with 60,000-plus newsletter sign-ups.

List of products/titles

Inverness Courier (Tuesday & Friday editions, plus a Nairnshire Tuesday edition)
Caithness Courier
John O’Groat Journal
Northern Times
Ross-shire Journal
Strathspey and Badenoch Herald
Forres Gazette
Northern Scot
The Banffshire
Huntly Express

In addition we publish a monthly bi-business magazine, Executive, which is free.

We also publish the following websites:

<https://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/>
<https://www.ross-shirejournal.co.uk/>
<https://www.northern-times.co.uk/>
<https://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/>
<https://www.strathspey-herald.co.uk/>
<https://www.forres-gazette.co.uk/>
<https://www.northern-scot.co.uk/>
<https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/>

The HNM app is available to digital subscribers and is available for Apple and Android devices.

Responsible Person

John Davidson, Content & Commercial Editor
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Code of Conduct

All of our journalists are issued with a code of conduct when they join and their contracts make it clear that they are expected to act within its guidelines. News editors and content editors are also trained to spot any stories that fall below those standards as a further check level.

News editors are instructed to initially discuss with their senior colleagues if they are in any doubt about a story and, if there is still concern, a decision would be taken at that stage whether it would be necessary to run that past an IPSO officer.

All of our journalists understand the need to have stories independently verified.

All updates to the code are communicated directly to all the relevant staff as soon as possible after they are announced, as are any guidelines.

Training

Most of our editorial staff have undertaken the introductory IPSO code of conduct training.

We regularly highlight training opportunities that arise and staff have also taken part in a number of training courses with the NUJ on various topics in the last year.

Complaints handling

All of our titles carry a panel explaining our complaints procedure and stating that if a complaint is not resolved it will be referred to IPSO. We also include web links to the code and IPSO and IPSO's telephone number. All websites also have a "How to complain" tab at the bottom of the home page containing the same information.

All of our publications, in print and online, carry the new IPSO logo.

Complaints protocol – updated January 2021

Our aim should obviously be to never let our behaviour or standards fall to a point where our professionalism or quality of work is brought into question. However, complaints are an inevitable part of our job so we need to adopt a consistent way of dealing with them.

A large number of complaints are down to a lack of understanding on the public's part – e.g. they don't realise that we have a legal right to publish details of a court case – or because they don't like a story. Not liking a story doesn't render it incorrect, unethical or unlawful, but we need to hear the complainant out.

Thankfully, legal complaints are rare, so most of the time the goal is simply to prevent the complaint escalating and reaching IPSO. It is therefore important to ascertain from the outset what the complainant wants.

If they have a legitimate reason to complain, sometimes a right to reply (in the form of a letter or a follow-up story) is enough to satisfy them.

Step-by-step guide:

- If the complaint has come in via email, a response should be sent within one working day of it being received, even if it is just a holding note, to explain that we are looking into the matter. If a complainant telephones and the issue can't be dealt with immediately, just inform them we will get back to them as soon as we have looked into it.
- Log the complaint.

- Content editors should investigate the complaint or delegate the matter to a suitably experienced colleague. John Davidson or Andy Dixon can be contacted for legal or IPSO advice.
- If the complainant will not accept your decision or offer of amends then the complaint can be reviewed by an equally or more senior colleague.
- The complainant should be informed that the matter has been passed to another senior manager who is now looking into the matter.
- If the company is satisfied the complaint has been handled fairly and properly but there is still no resolution, the complainant will be informed that their next step is to refer the matter to IPSO.

ENDS

The above complaints procedure has been distributed to senior editorial colleagues.

IPSO complaints

HNM has had no complaints upheld by IPSO in the period this report covers.