

Editors' Code of Practice Committee

Minutes of the Editors' Code of Practice Committee meeting at the offices of the News Media Association, 292 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, on 13 May 2015.

Present:

National newspapers

Chairman: Paul Dacre (Daily Mail)

John Witherow (The Times); Chris Evans (Daily Telegraph); Hugh Whittow (Daily Express).

Regional newspapers

Neil Benson (Trinity Mirror Regionals); Mike Sassi (Nottingham Evening Post); Hannah Walker (South London Press).

Scottish press: Damian Bates (Press & Journal, Aberdeen).

Magazines: Harriet Wilson (Conde Nast Publications).

Lay members (ex officio):

Sir Alan Moses (Chairman, IPSO); Matt Tee (CEO IPSO).

Independent lay members:

Christine Elliott; David Jessel; Kate Stone.

Attending: Ian Beales (Secretary).

Apologies were received from Ian Murray (Southern Daily Echo).

Membership: The Chairman welcomed the new independent lay members and congratulated Sir Alan Moses and Matt Tee on the successful launch of IPSO.

Minutes of the meetings in February and May 2015 were approved and signed.

Matters arising: There were no matters arising.

Chairman's introduction: Mr Dacre said last year had been tumultuous, with IPSO's launch and the establishment of new central structures for self-regulation, underpinned by the Code, which had largely escaped criticism in the Leveson Report. Its recommendations to introduce lay members and conduct a public consultation on the Code had been implemented, and the committee had further agreed to add a compliance clause and to update the Public Interest examples, embracing other models, including that of the Crown Prosecution Service.

He said the committee had last year discussed issues raised in submissions to the public consultation. It had considered changes that members believed would strengthen the Code, but had deferred decisions, pending the appointment of lay representatives. These proposals had been incorporated into the Secretary's Report on the Code Review.

Secretary's Report on the Code Review: The Secretary presented his report in hard copy format, identifying areas of principal concern. He explained how members could access the original documentation in an online version and highlighted the possible changes agreed in principle. It would be for the committee to take final decisions once members had been given the opportunity to consider the report in detail, ahead of the next meeting.

Sir Alan Moses praised the report and particularly welcomed the proposal that the public interest should be amplified in the Code – with more examples of how it might apply – without an attempt made actually to define it. There was great merit in that. Christine Elliott agreed it allowed room for flexibility, which was very beneficial.

It was agreed that, to enable sufficient time for consideration of the Report and to maximise the availability of members to discuss it, the next meeting should be held in late September.

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ICO Guidance document: The Secretary reported that the ICO's draft guidance to the media on complying with Data Protection law had been amended, following industry representations. The final document appeared to address a major concern raised in the committee's response to the ICO. This had suggested the draft guidance on the public interest was unacceptably narrow – notably understating the public interest in freedom of expression itself – and was incompatible with that of the Code.

Use of the Code by non-IPSO members: Members discussed concerns that the industry had tried to restrict use of the Code by imposing copyright restrictions. The Secretary said this was based on a misunderstanding: non-members were being asked to use the Code under free-licence and agree to accept any future changes to protect the integrity of the Code, not prevent its use. The Chairman said he favoured others using the Code, but if they had observations on it, they should let the Code Committee know. Sir Alan Moses said there had been an unfortunate failure to explain what was happening. Anyone rewriting or changing the Code could not pass it off as The Editors' Code. They would have to call it something different.

The Editors' Codebook: The Secretary reported that a start had been made on collating recent cases, so that the Codebook could be revised to reflect IPSO decisions. Ahead of publication, there would be the customary consultation with the regulator on representative cases.

Relaunch of editorscode.org.uk: The website had been restructured to improve efficiency and security, but the Secretary said the subscriber base would need to re-grow to previous levels.

Appointment of Secretary: The Chairman said Ian Beales had indicated that, after 25 years on the committee, he would resign once the current Code Review had been completed, at the next meeting. However, Jonathan Grun had been approached and fortunately was willing to take on the role, if that was the committee's wish. Members agreed Mr Grun was an excellent choice and his appointment was approved unanimously.

Any other business: Sir Alan Moses asked if there was a mechanism for calling meetings of the committee outside the normal cycle to respond to urgent issues. The Chairman said while there were no set procedures, he could not envisage a situation where, if IPSO wished the committee to discuss a pressing matter, it would not happen.

Next meeting: It was agreed to meet in late September on a date to be announced.