

■ Introduction:

The Barnsley Chronicle is a weekly newspaper that has covered the geographical and municipal borough of Barnsley since 1858.

It is owned and operated by the Hewitt family and is part of the wider Acredula Group which has business interests in book publishing, magazine production, public relations, graphic design and social media management.

The Chronicle is the largest-circulating weekly newspaper in Yorkshire and remains one of the biggest-selling weeklies in the UK.

The paper covers local news for the Barnsley audience - there is no regional content for South Yorkshire or the wider region.

■ Our editorial standards:

The Barnsley Chronicle sets out to be an authoritative, trustworthy journal and takes an independent position on the material it carries.

Stories are verified as much as possible by the editorial team before publication. Over the last few years, the newspaper has substantially increased its audiences on social media (the Facebook page has more than 52,000 followers and we have more than 20,000 followers on Twitter) by posting daily links to stories on our website.

We use these extensive online connections to search out story ideas, follow up leads and make contact with people.

However, we have a strict policy that we do not publish a story obtained from social media sources without first checking its accuracy and authenticity - we do not copy and paste comments made on Facebook/Twitter and insist on speaking to the person who made the post over the phone or in person.

When we follow up a story garnered from social media, our general procedure is to contact the original source and ask for their co-operation - if it is not granted, we don't use their information and instead seek to make the story 'stand up' via alternative sources such as councillors, police contacts or others.

We do not share content or re-tweet posts where we are unable to confirm authenticity - this is the responsible stance to take and do not envisage this changing.

In simple terms, our policy is to treat social media leads as nothing more than tip-offs that may or not turn out to be true - much like the traditional 'overheard conversation in a pub' - as much speculation, especially when it's police-related, turns out to be false.

Dealing with social media - particularly users' comments - has proved one of the most time-consuming aspects of the editorial department's out-of-hours role in the last few years as we attract a large following and often use debate-worthy stories online.

IPSO has issued and updated its guidance on dealing with social media and this has proved particularly helpful. It has given us something tangible to refer to and our reporters feel much more confident in dealing with complaints about social media than they did a couple of years ago.

■ Our responsible person(s):

As editor, the paper's nominated responsible person for IPSO compliance is Andrew Harrod. In the event of his absence, this responsibility would pass to the deputy editor, Josh Timlin.

Our complaints handling process:

Any minor complaints will generally be dealt with initially by the reporter involved in preparing the original story. Our editorial staff are instructed not to shy away from making a correction where it is warranted and to discuss any issues with the complainant.

Occasionally, a complainant may make contact via phone or in person and ask to speak to someone 'in charge'. These calls would initially be dealt

with by the newsdesk and the deputy editor who works on the newsdesk will often assess the seriousness of the complaint and whether it should be escalated to the editor.

If it can be resolved promptly and amicably then we draft and arrange publication of a suitable correction.

It is our aim to keep the complaints process as simple as possible so occasionally, a complainant may insist on speaking to the editor - bypassing the reporter and newsdesk - and our staff are not instructed to put anyone off contacting me directly via phone or email.

My phone number and direct email address are both on our website and if readers contact the switchboard, they are readily put through to me.

A copy of our complaints procedure is on the website and also appears regularly in the newspaper on the letters page.

The IPSO compliance artwork features both in print and online. The wording for such is:

At the Barnsley Chronicle, we try to get things right but occasionally, we make mistakes.

If you have a complaint about a story featured in our newspaper or on our website, please contact the news desk on Barnsley 734262 or email editorial@barnsley-chronicle.co.uk.

If we are unable to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, the matter can be referred to the Independent Press Standards Organisation of which we are a member.

We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice as demanded by IPSO.

For details on the code and what you should do should you be unsatisfied with the way we handle your complaint, please visit their website www.ipsoc.co.uk.

We accept complaints in most formats - phone, letter, email or in person. By virtue of its public nature, if a complaint is posted on one of our social media channels, we would normally request direct contact details so we can investigate the matter further.

■ Our training process:

All staff have been briefed on our policy regarding complaints handling. A copy of the Code of Editors has been included in the handbook given to all members of the editorial team on their first day.

A copy is posted on the office notice board and a fresh copy is distributed to every member of the team when they join the company. All copies of IPSO guidance booklets such as recent ones covering social media and dealing with children in the news are retained in the office and readily available for staff to refer to.

We now have quite an inexperienced team of journalists - although they have or are in the process of completing NCTJ-approved training courses. Consequently, they already have a good understanding of the 'theory' of media law, privacy and ethics, but we work with them constantly to ensure they quickly grasp how all this theory translates into the working world. This will only improve over time.

Any legal advice we receive from bodies such as the NMA is shared with colleagues, as are updated versions to the Editors' Code.

Secure cabinets are provided where reporters' notebooks and any other relevant material can be stored for reference and are used solely for that purpose.

■ Transparency:

As part of our general recruitment and conduct guidelines, all editorial staff are asked to divulge any involvement with external organisations which could compromise their integrity and impartiality. Since introducing this policy, no-one has declared any interests which, in my opinion, could expose our newspapers to any conflict in this regard.

In the period relevant to this report, we have not had cause to seek pre-publication guidance from IPSO advisors. However, all staff are aware that such guidance is available.

I would normally expect that approach to IPSO to be made by either myself or the deputy editor although reporting staff would not be discouraged from making such an approach themselves if it was felt necessary.

■ Summary:

IPSO case reference number: **15390-23B.**

IPSO's judgement was to uphold the complaint on the grounds of a breach of clause one (accuracy).

Following the decision, I did speak with the editorial team as a whole and ask them to be more mindful of the potential for seemingly innocent stories to be hijacked for political gain in the weeks running up to elections.

Just as importantly, I reminded them of the basic need for accuracy. This complaint was, I believe, a result of a lack of experience rather than any recklessness or intention to stir up political argument.

With a keenly-contested local election period in the Spring of 2024, I also instructed the news desk to be more alert to any attempts to use local issue stories for political gain in the pre-election period.

I also recirculated the Editors' Code as a timely reminder. The reporter who wrote the original story had already left our employment - indeed the journalism industry - by the time Mr Archer submitted his complaint so I it was not appropriate to raise the matter with her.