

A couple v Loughborough Echo

Clauses noted: 3

A couple from Shepshed complained to the Press Complaints Commission that an article published in the Loughborough Echo on 22nd August 2008 headlined "Home's interior badly damaged" was intrusive in breach of Clause 3 (Privacy) of the Code.

The complaint was upheld.

The article reported a local couple's concern that their home had been damaged by a building developer. Its last paragraph contained the mobile phone number of the husband.

The complainants argued that the story was intrusive. They had given no consent for the story to be published, and strongly objected to the publication of a private telephone number. They had subsequently received numerous crank calls, and were concerned about personal security.

The newspaper accepted that it had made a serious error regarding the phone number. The reporter had left it in the copy (several carriage returns down the page) to enable anyone to contact the complainant in his absence on holiday. It should have been posted in the comments box on the copy system, and the subeditor should have removed it in any case. The editor apologised unreservedly for this mistake, and offered to publish an apology in the paper. Regarding the story as a whole, the newspaper explained that it had been approached by a local councillor, and said that the complainants had never indicated that they did not want to be named in the piece.

Adjudication

This was a case where the newspaper had made an obvious and unfortunate error. The publication of the man's mobile telephone number, which was not accessible to the public, without consent was undoubtedly intrusive. The Commission welcomed the fact that the editor had sought to respond quickly to the complaint, and had apologised unreservedly. This was the right thing to do in the circumstances. There was however a breach of the Code and the complaint was upheld.

The rest of story, in the Commission's view, raised no breach of the Code. There was a dispute between the newspaper and complainants about what had been agreed in advance of publication, but the Commission noted that the story was about problems apparently caused by a building developer, and had appeared following an approach by the local councillor to talk about the matter and the council's attempts to sort it out. In these circumstances, the information was not private, and publication of the piece (other than the phone number) was not intrusive in breach of the Code.

Adjudication issued 02/01/2009