

A woman v Luton News

Clauses noted: 9

A woman complained to the Press Complaints Commission, through Arani & Co. solicitors, that an article published in the Luton News on 31 March 2004 headlined 'Homes raided in hunt for terrorists', identified her as a relative of someone being investigated by police in breach of Clause 10 (Reporting of crime) of the previous Code of Practice.

The complaint was rejected.

The investigation into this complaint was delayed by several months while the complainant was abroad.

The article reported on a series of police raids that had taken place at addresses throughout Luton on the previous day. It noted that the police had been searching for suspected terrorists. The complainant's property was one of those raided. She said that by identifying her house the newspaper had identified her in breach of the old Clause 10 (Reporting of Crime). Indeed, it had made her a potential target of local people who might believe she was a terrorist. She said that nobody at her address had been arrested or charged.

The newspaper said it would be happy to clarify that nobody from the complainant's home had been arrested or charged following the police raid. It emphasised, however, that it had simply reported an important and public event.

When the complainant indicated that she wanted no further publicity, the editor of the newspaper sought to resolve the complaint by sending a personal letter to her – as she had requested – in which he apologised for any distress caused to innocent people at her property. The complainant rejected the editor's apology since, she said, everyone who lived at her home was innocent. Moreover, the editor had not admitted that he had erred.

Adjudication

The Commission noted that the complainant had not been named in the article, which had not claimed that anyone living at her address had been arrested during the police raid there. Clause 10 of the old Code was designed to prevent the innocent relatives of those accused or convicted of crime from being identified without their consent in the absence of a public interest. In this case, nobody had even been identified as being accused of crime. There was clearly no breach of this Clause of the old Code.

On the broader point that the complainant had made about the alleged intrusion into her privacy, the Commission noted that the article had concerned a significant local event, at which the police's presence would have been obvious and therefore well known locally. The newspaper was entitled to cover the story and to take a photograph of the scene. Such coverage did not, in the Commission's view, show a lack of respect for the complainant's private life in breach of the Code. She was, after all, not even mentioned in the piece. The complaint was rejected.

Adjudication issued 2005