

Mrs G M Woolley v Pick Me Up

Clauses noted: 1

Mrs G M Woolley of Northumberland complained to the Press Complaints Commission that an article headlined "Sins of the cloth" published in Pick Me Up magazine on 17 February 2005 contained inaccuracies in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

The article was an account of her relationship with the vicar who had conducted her son's funeral. The complainant said that there were numerous inaccuracies in the piece and that the time-scale of the story had been presented in a misleading manner.

The magazine provided copies of its reporter's notes and argued that the published story was told in the same order as the complainant's verbal account. It said that articles of this type were often not time-specific. Moreover, the final edited version of the story was read back to the complainant before publication, although the complainant disputed this and said that she had been read a different version.

Adjudication

The two parties to the complaint disagreed about whether the magazine had put the correct version of the article to the complainant in advance of publication. However, there was other evidence in the form of the reporter's notes. While they broadly confirmed the gist of the story, they did not entirely support the magazine's position. In particular, the notes made no reference to the complainant starting a relationship with the vicar before her estranged husband had died. The problem appeared to have arisen because the magazine had substantially condensed the time-scale during which the events took place. While this approach to editing real life stories would not normally lead to a breach of the Code, in this case the result was that a significant inaccuracy had been published. It had not been corrected, resulting in a breach of Clause 1.

The complainant also raised concerns about the use of photographs to illustrate the piece. Although her name had been changed as requested, she said that assurances that her face would be pixelated had not been honoured. In addition, pictures of her family supplied to the magazine had been used without permission.

The magazine said that it would not run a story without photographs unless there are legal reasons for doing so. The complainant had posed for a photo shoot and no assurance was made that her face would be pixelated. The photographs of her family had been given willingly.

The Commission was not in a position to determine whether or not the complainant had been assured that the photographs – which had been taken with her consent – would either be pixelated or not used. It made no finding on this point. However, as the complainant appeared to have given the journalist photographs of her family, there was no breach of the Code in publishing them.

Adjudication issued 2005