

A man v The Voice

Clauses noted: 1

A man complained to the Press Complaints Commission that an article published in The Voice in the 24 – 30 October edition, headlined “Gang of 19 rape teen” was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

The front page article reported the alleged rape of a fourteen-year-old black girl by 19 men in an Asian-owned shop. The complainant said that the headline was misleading as it stated as fact that a rape had taken place. The word “alleged” was only used once on the front page – the article otherwise reported the rape claim as fact. There had been rioting in Birmingham following reports of a rape – something for which, the complainant said, the newspaper had to bear some responsibility because of its inaccurate reporting.

The newspaper said that the front page story had consisted of five short paragraphs, the first of which included the phrase “the alleged gang rape”. The story was covered in greater depth on inside pages, where a page 4 headline read “Black girl 14 is allegedly gang raped by 19 Asian men”, and the text referred to the “alleged gang rape” and the “alleged attack”. A headline on page 5 referred to the “alleged sex attack”, as had the text in the article. It had also quoted a local businessmen, warning people to be wary of accepting rumours as facts. The newspaper rejected suggestions that it could be responsible for inciting the rioting, as the unrest had occurred before the newspaper went on sale. It also pointed to the fact that the following edition of the paper contained six pages on the story, including extensive coverage of all viewpoints.

Adjudication

The Commission did not consider that sufficient care had been taken to present the story accurately. The facts of matter had not been established, but the headline and parts of the front page article had unequivocally stated that there had been an attack. In the Commission’s opinion, there was insufficient qualification to enable people reading the front page article to realise that the story related only to allegations of an attack. There was therefore a failure to distinguish between comment, conjecture and fact in breach of Clause 1 of the Code, something that the Commission did not consider was mitigated by the coverage on inside pages.

Adjudication issued 2006