

Mrs Pruw Boswell-Harper v Daily Express

Clauses noted: 1

Mrs Pruw Boswell-Harper, Mayor of Totnes, complained to the Press Complaints Commission that an article published in the Daily Express on 11 January 2007 headlined "Council axes Christian prayers after 600 years. You guessed it...in case it offends other faiths" was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

The article said that council prayers had been 'scrapped to allay fears they may offend other religions', and that the complainant had herself ordered the prayers to be replaced. Following an investigation by the PCC, the newspaper offered to publish an apology making clear that the decision to change the format of prayers had not been taken because of fears over causing offence to other faiths, and that it had been taken by the Council as a whole, and not just by the mayor.

The complainant accepted the apology as a means of resolving her complaint, provided that it was published with due prominence. The newspaper said it would indicate in advance of publication where the apology was to appear. However, it then published the text, without prior notification, on page 33 of the 2 May edition (the original article had appeared on page 5).

The complainant did not consider that this constituted due prominence, as required by the Code. She asked the Commission to adjudicate the matter on that basis.

Adjudication

Publishing the agreed apology on page 33 when the original article was on page 5 was a breach of the Code's requirement that 'a significant inaccuracy... must be corrected promptly and with due prominence'. Furthermore, the newspaper had not – as it had undertaken – informed the Commission in advance of publication where it would appear. The apology related to a significant part of the story as well as the thrust of the headline, and the complainant was entitled to expect it to appear more prominently – not least because the apology was not published until four months after the original article. This was an unfortunate example of bad practice at a time when the industry generally has improved its record in relation to the location and promptness of corrections and apologies. The Commission trusts it will prove to be an isolated incident.

Adjudication issued 14/06/2007