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Press Complaints Commission

From the Director

Fergus Reid, Esq.,
Clerk to the Committee,
Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport,
7 Millbank,
London,
SW1P 3JA

22nd May 2003

Chairman
Sir Christopher Meyer

Members of the Commission
Matti Alderson
Roger Alton
Professor The Lord Chan
Edmund Curran
Paul Dacre
Jane Ennis
Mary Francis
Dr. Arthur Hearnden
Vivien Hepworth
Paul Horrocks
Professor Robert Pinker
David Pollington
Dianne Thompson
The Right Rev. John Waine *kcvd*
Neil Wallis

Director
Guy Black

Dear Fergus,

Inevitably, I'm afraid, another note about some of the most obvious inaccuracies from members of the Committee in the evidence session yesterday.

1. "Proactivity"

Mr Bryant alleged – astonishingly – that Sir Christopher's reference to the PCC's actions in places like Dunblane, Soham, Omagh, Paddington and others was "the first the Committee had heard" of such proactivity.

Point one, as Sir Christopher Meyer made clear all this information is in our Submission which I assume Mr Bryant has read. If not he should turn to pages 38-40.

Point two, both Les Hinton and I did in fact mention such examples during our evidence session at which Mr Bryant was present. I quote from your record:

Guy Black:

Disasters, whether at a local or national level, do attract large amounts of media attention. At the time of the Paddington rail disaster, for instance, we had special leaflets printed which Westminster Council and Reading Council and so forth could give out explaining how people could deal with the press, the numbers they could ring to get a certain amount of expert advice about it, and as this war goes on we will be making sure that all those who might be put in a terrible situation of having lost somebody do know that there is somebody to turn to, and that is the sort of proactivity which I place great store by.

Les Hinton:

When there have in the past been major disasters - the Dunblane shooting is one - through the auspices and good offices of the Press Complaints Commission the press has

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willingly and instantly withdrawn from those areas to avoid the intrusion that you are so concerned about. It is interesting too to say that we are able, because of the manner in which the Code is communicated to editors and the way in which relations between the PCC and editors exists, to achieve that in a way that broadcasters have so far been unable to do.

Secondly on this issue, Mr Bryant falsely claimed that the only example of proactivity raised by the PCC in its evidence session related to Prince William. Prince William was not mentioned during our evidence session, as a search of the minutes will prove.

I suppose it is a forlorn hope to think that Mr Bryant might like to correct these points on the record.

2. Appointments procedures

By far the most damaging inaccuracy at the meeting was the false allegation by Mr Kaufman that Vivien Hepworth had said that she was only on the Commission because I had asked her to. This is totally false. Again I quote from the Committee's own transcript of the session which makes the point crystal clear:

Vivien Hepworth

I was asked by Mr Guy Black, whom I have known for many years, whether I had an interest in the PCC, and I said yes, I did. A long time later, six or nine months later - I cannot remember how long - I was asked to submit a CV, and it was made perfectly clear to me that my CV was one of a number. I was called to an interview with the then Chairman of the PCC, Lord Wakeham, and I was interviewed by him. It was repeated to me at that point that I was a candidate. There is an independent appointments group, quite separate, with a lay majority, and they take a view. Subsequently, I was invited to join it. That is how it happened. Can I make one extra point? I should say, I was told that one of the reasons they were interested in me was because they have a particular interest in areas like the NHS.

There can be no suggestion, therefore, that Ms Hepworth is only a member of the PCC "because I asked her." I am the Secretary of the Appointments Commission and responsible for – among other things – finding out whether people are interested in membership before the independent Appointments Commission considers matters. It is that Commission which decides, not me or anyone else. This is a straightforward, simple and transparent process – and Mr Kaufman was quite wrong mischievously to allege otherwise.

Finally, on one minor point Mr Wyatt claimed, if I recall rightly, that the Mail on Sunday has more complaints than any other newspaper. This is incorrect. I am sure the Mail on Sunday will take this point up separately.

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I hope this is helpful. Perhaps you could – as always – ensure that it is placed on the record.

With kind regards.

*Yvonne Lee,
Director*