

PCC upholds complaint after material obtained under FOI was reported out of context

The Press Complaints Commission has upheld a complaint against the Castle Point Echo after it overstated the severity of a hygiene inspector's concern with a local restaurant.

Mrs Shirley Knox, owner of 'Dave's Plaice' fish and chip restaurant, said that environmental health inspectors had visited her business shortly after she had taken it over - nine months before the newspaper's report. She argued that it was misleading to describe the inspection as "the latest food safety report". Moreover, the inspectors' report did not back up the newspaper's claims that the restaurant was "filthy" and had been "slammed". The inspectors had referred to one dirty blade on a heavy can opener and yet the article reported a "stash of dirty equipment".

The newspaper said that the report from the environmental health inspectors, which it had obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, had made criticisms of the complainant's restaurant. However, it eventually offered to publish a correction and apology; an offer that the complainant rejected.

The Commission concluded that the article was misleading in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code of Practice. It had failed to make clear when the inspection took place and exaggerated the inspectors' concerns. The newspaper's offer to apologise was welcomed by the Commission but was insufficient to remedy a serious breach of the Code. The complaint was therefore upheld. This case demonstrated the importance of not taking material obtained under the Freedom of Information Act out of context.

To see the full adjudication, which has now been published by the newspaper, [click here](#)

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