

Wakeham welcomes changes to editors Code of Practice

New provisions on young people will “strengthen the protection of the vulnerable”

Press Complaints Commission Chairman Lord Wakeham today welcomed the changes to the industry’s Code of Practice announced by Les Hinton, Chairman of the Code of Practice Committee. The main changes relates to the provisions of Clause 10 of the Code, which now directs editors to pay particular regard to the potentially vulnerable position of children who are victims of, or witnesses to, crime. The change arises from the debates surrounding the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

Commenting on the change, Lord Wakeham said:

“One of the key features of the Code is the protection it gives to particularly vulnerable groups of people. Children who have the misfortune to become involved in crime – either as victims or witnesses – are among the most vulnerable, and I am very pleased that the Code specifically recognises this.”

Lord Wakeham also welcomed the change to the public interest defence in the Code, which now makes clear that – in adjudicating complaints – the PCC will have regard to the extent to which material is, or is about to become, available to the public. He said that this change to the Code was important for all newspapers as it recognised for the first time in the Code the public interest in freedom of expression itself.

Lord Wakeham added that it was always important that the Code was distributed as widely as possible. He was therefore “delighted that the Society of Editors will be repeating its important initiative of reproducing the Code in credit card format for the use of editors and journalists.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

1. Changes to the Code are made by the industry’s Code of Practice Committee, which consists of senior editors from across the newspaper and magazine publishing industry. It is chaired by Les Hinton, Executive Chairman of News International. Before Code changes are implemented, they are ratified by the Press Complaints Commission. This took place on 1 December 1999.

Changes to the Code:

1. Clause 10 of the Code is retitled “Reporting of Crime”. The provisions within it on the identification of innocent relatives and friends of those convicted or accused of crime are unchanged. A new provision is added relating to children who are victims of, or witnesses to, crime. The Code now makes clear that:

“Particular regard should be paid to the potentially vulnerable position of children who are witnesses to, or victims of, crime.”

The Code also recognises that this provision should not be interpreted as restricting the right to report judicial proceedings.

2. There is a change to the public interest definition in the Code. It now stipulates that: “There is a public interest definition in freedom of expression itself. The Commission will therefore have regard to the extent to which material has, or is about to, become available to the public.”

The wording of this change mirrors the “public domain” defence in Clause 12 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

3. One minor change to the Code is the addition of a public interest defence to Clause 7 (Children in sex cases). This corrects an anomaly in the Code which appeared to preclude identification of a child even where a judgement rules that identification would be in the public interest.

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