

PCC sets out new guidance on payments after Patten stories

The Press Complaints Commission today publishes new guidance on the issue of paying parents for material involving their children's welfare, following its investigation into payments to the families of Chantelle Stedman and 13-year-old Alfie Patten for stories about the background to the birth of Chantelle's baby Maisie.

On February 16 2009, the Commission initiated its own inquiry to establish whether the alleged payments by The Sun, The People and the Sunday Mail had been made in breach of Clause 6 (iv) of the Code of Practice. Two days later, however, the High Court made a Reporting Restrictions Order which effectively precluded both further approaches to the families and the publication of any new information about Chantelle, Alfie and Maisie. The Reporting Restrictions Order was extended on two subsequent occasions in April and May.

This has limited the Commission's ability to make inquiries and publish information about this case. However, as this concerns a matter of considerable importance, the Commission has decided in any event to issue some guidance, available [here](#), on the general issue of paying parents for information about their children's welfare. In particular, the Commission says that editors should ask themselves three questions:

- Is the payment alone responsible for tempting parents to discuss a matter about their child that it would be against the child's interests to publicise? If so, only an exceptional public interest reason could justify proceeding with the arrangement;
- Is there any danger that the offer of payment has tempted parents to exaggerate or even fabricate the information?;
- Is the payment in the child's interest?

While accepting that parents have a right to freedom of expression, the Commission emphasises that editors must come to an independent judgement as to whether publication of information - and the payment involved for the material - is in the child's interest:

"On some occasions, this will mean – where there is an insufficient public interest in the story – that payment should not be made, even if the parents are happy for the story to be published."

The Commission also reminds editors that only "an *exceptional* public interest" can justify making a payment which is not deemed likely to be the interests of the child.

To see the guidance in full please click [here](#).

ENDS

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