

PCC rules on complaint against Hull Daily Mail about local web publisher

The Press Complaints Commission has today published its ruling in a case against the Hull Daily Mail, over a complaint made under Clauses 1 (Accuracy), 3 (Privacy) and 10 (Clandestine devices and subterfuge) of the Editors' Code of Practice. The complaint was upheld in part.

The articles in question had reported that the complainant - who was responsible for publishing a local community website - had "designed thousands of hardcore pornography websites". The complainant argued that this - plus the claim that he "owns the domain names to almost 4,000 sites" - was incorrect. The newspaper argued that at the time of its investigation, a web registration search showed the complainant owned 3,991 domains, the majority of which could be categorised as adult. However, it was not able to prove this figure conclusively after publication.

In its ruling, the Commission accepted that there was a legitimate public interest in the newspaper examining the business activities of the complainant, given his role in publishing a local community website. However, "such high-profile scrutiny carried with it the responsibility to be accurate". The newspaper had been unable to corroborate "crucial allegations" in the article, and should, the Commission said, "have been able to substantiate them fully (and been in a position to provide concrete evidence to the PCC)." This part of the complaint was upheld under Clause 1 (Accuracy) on the grounds that readers would have been misled as to the scale of the complainant's involvement in adult websites.

Additional parts of the complaint were not upheld, including an additional complaint under Clause 1 relating to a headline which the complainant argued was inaccurate. The Commission also rejected the part of the complaint made under Clauses 3 (Privacy) and 10 (Clandestine devices and subterfuge), in which the complainant argued that a journalist from the newspaper had misrepresented her identity to him (including creating a bogus Facebook page) when researching the story, before revealing her true identity when she met him in person.

The Commission ruled that the newspaper's public interest defence was justifiable on this occasion. There was no undercover filming or inappropriate access to private information about the complainant, and the level of intrusion involved was not "of a particularly serious order". The newspaper could, it said, "legitimately claim that this method was necessary to obtain the information, believing that the complainant may not have been forthcoming to a direct journalistic approach".

To read the full adjudication, which has been published today by the newspaper, please [click here](#).

ENDS

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