

PCC statement on Northern & Shell's withdrawal from press self-regulatory system

The Press Complaints Commission has today responded to the news that Northern & Shell is withdrawing its subscription to the Press Standards Board of Finance (PressBof) and, accordingly, its financial support for the system of press self-regulation. To preserve its independence, the PCC does not involve itself directly in obtaining funding from publishers. However, a refusal to support the self-regulatory system financially means that a newspaper publisher effectively withdraws from the PCC's formal jurisdiction, which the PCC considers regrettable.

The recent independent Governance Review into the PCC made a clear recommendation about funding disputes:

'A publisher who persistently withholds funding for the PCC should be considered outside the self-regulatory process. In these circumstances, it would be a matter for the funding body to seek to restore relations with the publisher. It should give every reasonable opportunity for payment to be restored. Should this not happen, the Commission should be informed of the position. Following consultation with the Commission, and only as a last resort, PressBof could then make clear to the publisher that defaulting on payment would mean it was no longer part of the system. The Commission would as a result formally decline to consider complaints about the relevant titles, or offer guidance to their editors.'

The Commission has accepted this recommendation and, therefore, must now regard Northern & Shell as being outside its jurisdiction. As a result, the PCC will be unable to deal formally with new complaints about Northern & Shell titles until the funding dispute is resolved. The Commission will continue to assist individuals to frame their complaints about published articles and will direct individuals to the relevant departments of the titles within the Northern & Shell group. The PCC will endeavour to resolve amicably its current workload of investigated complaints where possible.

Baroness Buscombe, Chairman of the PCC, said:

"It is disappointing that Northern & Shell no longer wishes to provide funding for the PCC and be part of the system of self-regulation. This means that they will not now be able to demonstrate to their readers that they are committed to adhere to the set of standards which are independently enforced by the Commission. We hope that they will resume their subscription to PressBof as soon as possible. In the meantime, the PCC will continue to work to consider complaints against all other major publishers, both national and regional. We will also continue our proactive programme to offer guidance on editorial issues and train journalists within the system, and to raise standards in the industry."

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. The PCC is an independent body which administers the system of self-regulation for the press. It does so primarily by dealing with complaints, framed within the terms of the Editors' Code of Practice, about the editorial content of newspapers and magazines (and their websites, including editorial audio-visual material) and the conduct of journalists. There is more information about the PCC at <http://www.pcc.org.uk/AboutthePCC/WhatisthePCC.html>.

2. Two main industry bodies form central parts of the self-regulatory system. The Press Standards Board of Finance (PressBof) is charged with raising a levy on the newspaper and periodical industries to finance the Press Complaints Commission. The Editors' Code of Practice Committee writes the

Code of Practice, and reviews it on an annual basis following public consultation. (The consultation is currently open - see

http://www.editorscode.org.uk/downloads/press_releases/CodeReview2011PR.pdf for full details).

Both PressBof and the Editors' Code Committee operate separately to the PCC and are not involved in the day-to-day running of the PCC.

3. A statement issued by PressBof is pasted below for reference.

4 . The titles affected are: Daily Express; Sunday Express; Scottish Daily Express; Scottish Sunday Express; Daily Star; Daily Star Sunday; OK!; New magazine; and Star magazine.

5 . The PCC will endeavour to resolve amicably its current workload of investigated complaints where possible. For new complaints, the PCC will pass on the relevant Northern & Shell contact details to the complainant.

6 . The report of the independent Governance Review can be viewed at

http://www.pcc.org.uk/assets/441/Independent_Governance_Review_Report.pdf. The recommendation cited in the press release above can be found on page 12 (paragraphs 62 and 63).

7. For further information please contact Jonathan Collett on 020 7438 1246 or 07740 896805.

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