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Further to your letter of August 8, I would answer your questions as following:

1 Who you are and a brief summary of your career history in the media

My name is Phil Hall. I worked in local newspapers from 1974 until 1985, when I joined the Sunday People as a reporter. I later became news editor of that publication before moving to the Sunday Express in a similar capacity. In 1993 I moved to the News of the World as features editor, becoming deputy editor in 1994. In September, 1995 I became editor of the News of the World, leaving in May 2000.

I became editor in chief of Hello! magazine in 2001, leaving the following year to form a contract publishing company for the Press Association. In February 2003 I became Director of Editorial Development at Trinity Mirror, where my prime role was to run the company's magazine division. I left two years later to found my own PR company, now known as PHA Media.

2 How you understand the system of corporate governance to work in practise at the newspaper where you were employed with particular emphasis on systems to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct

When I became the editor, I was a strong advocate of the Press Complaints Commission code of conduct and constantly reminded my senior staff of their obligations under that code.

If we received complaints about our practices (which were rare) they were investigated swiftly and I appointed a full-time ombudsman – a senior journalist called Bob Warren (now deceased). It was his job to ensure a high level of ethical standards were maintained and he promptly investigated any complaints to bring them to a satisfactory conclusion for the newspaper and the complainant.

Mr Warren was seen as a wise counsel in the office and reporters often approached him for advice and to discuss whether a story could be run within the PCC Code of Conduct – even prior to beginning work on it.

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3 What your role is in ensuring that the corporate governance documents and all relevant policies were adhered to in practise. If you do not consider yourself to have been responsible for this, please tell us who you consider to hold that responsibility

Please see the answer above. Also on a day-to-day basis I would constantly check certain principles laid down by the PCC Code of Conduct, for example was the story in the public interest; had the subject of the story been given the right of reply?

There were constant debates about, for example, what was a public place when photographs had been taken by a freelance photographer. My view was a restaurant is private, but I know others in the industry had a different view. But these views in the newspaper industry evolved as the issues were constantly debated.

I was clear though that we did not ever report on matter like medical issues without the subjects permission, minors, the mentally ill, although we campaigned successfully for a mentally ill man to be freed after he had spent 30 years in custody for burning a set of curtains.

A high profile MP's daughter was caught with alcohol at school. The MP was high profile and had been a great support of high moral values, but in my/our view children's activities were private, however anti-social.

4 Whether the documents and policies referred to above were adhered to in practise, to the best of your knowledge

To the best of my knowledge the PCC code of Conduct was adhered to and if it was breached we responded in the appropriate manner. It is over 11 years ago and I cannot recall any specific breaches, but we were involved with 15,000 stories a year and I had over 200 staff, so minor discretions did arise and were dealt with appropriately (reporters were warned about their behaviour and the possible consequences of further digressions). I am sorry but I cannot remember specific incidents.

5 Whether these practises changed, and if so when and what the reasons for the change were

As far as I can recall, there were no significant changes. The PCC code was occasionally changed if improvements were suggested, but I can't recall precisely what these changes would have been. The

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main thrust of the code remained the same, however, that it was the editor's role to try to create a culture of good, professional journalism.

6 Where the responsibility for checking sources of information (including the method by which the information was obtained) lies: from a reporter to news editor/showbiz editor/royal editor to editor, and how this was done in practise (with some representative examples to add clarity)

It is common practise in newspapers for journalists to keep their sources confidential. A political reporter would not reveal the identity of a politician who had tipped them off about a story, for example, for obvious reasons.

A reporter's value to a newspaper is his/her ability to bring in stories. If they revealed their sources to the editor and then left the newspaper, there was a high risk an editor might try to keep that contact for the paper thus devaluing the reporter's worth to his/her new employer.

On most occasions, people who speak to newspapers only do so on the basis their identity is protected and that request was adhered to. This is the case all over the world.

Reporters would be asked to support their stories with signed affidavits from witnesses where possible, taped interviews, documents and photographs. Where possible they were also accompanied by a colleague to ensure accuracy. My senior management team were always involved on a day to day basis, it was thus hard for bad practises to go un-noticed.

I operated an open door policy so that reporters could walk into my office and explain if they felt something was wrong or unsubstantiated in their stories.

It is common for newspapers to be sued for libel and damages. There were no successful lawsuits against the News of the World during my editorship and I believe that was due to the fact the staff knew I adhered to the PCC Code of Conduct and was indeed a sitting member of the PCC.

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7 To what extent an editor is aware, and should be aware, of the sources of the information which make up the central stories featured in your newspaper each day (including the method by which the information was obtained)

The majority of stories are reasonably straight forward – interviews, live events, court cases, for example, are covered by reporters who are witnessing the event.

Many News of the World stories were of an investigative nature. Editors would need to satisfy themselves that the story was accurate and clearly one of the criteria in a contentious story would be who the source was and whether that source be prepared to stand by the story in the event of a complaint, legal or otherwise.

Some of our stories would take three months to come to fruition. My mantra was get it right, not get it quick.

It is common practise for specialists to protect their sources, as I explained earlier. So an editor might feel the fact that his/her crime editor is vouching for the credibility of the story's source, is enough. But it was usual in those circumstances to then have independent corroboration for the story.

Many contentious stories came from members of the public and it would always be necessary to have independent support for their account.

Contentious stories were always discussed at length by a small group of senior editors and the legal manager to make sure we had sufficient evidence, the PCC code had been followed and the right legal corroboration was in place.

8 The extent to which you consider that ethics can and should play a role in the print media, and what you consider 'ethics' to mean in this context

It is the editor's job to set standards. Clearly if you are not ethical in the way you treat staff, you can't expect them to be ethical in their work. Of course the staff knew they had to perform, but within ethical standards.

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I have always believed that being polite and sincere meant you had a greater chance that people would talk to you and provide the story you were after, rather than a heavy approach.

That said when investigating serious criminals, it is not always possible to make a polite approach.

At the News of the World we also had a great track record for breaking big stories because we treated every news agency and freelance journalist properly. When fees were agreed, they were paid. If we bought a story from them, but did not publish it, we paid a non publication fee. That was ethical in my view.

The Press Complaints Commission formed what I believed was a practical, working platform for ethical behaviour.

For example subterfuge should only be used when investigating criminal behaviour or a story that has a serious public interest defence.

The subject of every story should be given the right of reply (some newspapers stopped doing this because when approached the subject of the story would immediately approach a rival publication to try to negate the impact of the story. On other occasions the subject of the story would deliberately avoid a newspaper so the account could not be put to them and thus published).

Harassment by reporters and photographers is not acceptable. Paying criminals is not acceptable, unless exposing the story is in the public interest.

9 The extent to which you, as an editor, felt any financial and/or commercial pressure from the proprietors of your newspaper or anyone else, and whether any such pressure affected any of the decisions you made as editor (such evidence to be limited to matters covered by the Terms of Reference)

No financial or commercial pressure ever affected my decision making. My own pride meant I wanted to publish the best newspaper I could. Editors do not want to have to face the PCC or print apologies in their newspapers because it severely affects their credibility.

So if anything the pressure that was felt was to get the story right and not break the PCC code.

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I made decisions that my proprietors did not always agree with, but I was given the freedom to make those decisions.

10 The extent to which you, as an editor, had a financial incentive to print exclusive stories (NB. It is not necessary to state your precise earnings)

I had no financial incentive to print exclusive stories.

11 Whether, to the best of your knowledge, your newspaper used, paid or had any connection with private investigators in order to source stories or information and/or paid or received payments in kind for such information from the police, public officials, mobile phone companies or others with access to the same: If so, please provide details of the numbers of occasions on which such investigators or other external providers of information were used and of the amounts paid to them (NB. You are not required to identify individuals, either within your newspaper or otherwise)

In the light of the phone hacking scandal, I should start by pointing out that according to court evidence which has emerged that practise started in 2001. I stood down as editor in 2000.

Private detectives have always been used by newspapers I have worked on. Reporters are primarily trained writers and do not possess the skill to trace people, discover their backgrounds, find friends or associates who might have helped with our inquiries, other than through the basic door knocking approach.

They were also used on surveillance. We jailed over 100 criminals during my time as editor including counterfeiters, paedophiles, gun runners and drug dealers and reporters are not equipped to operate safely in these environments.

My instruction to the news and features editors was that private detectives could be used when they were investigating stories with a strong public interest defence.

I was not responsible for paying them; department heads had their own budgets to work within.

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To the best of my knowledge they were ever the source of a story. We had good relationships with police officers through our crime correspondents, but did not pay them. They needed us to publicise their investigations and we needed them for stories.

We also needed police relationships so that when exposing criminals they could be arrested and charged at the appropriate time. We always provided all our evidence to the authorities and helped them secure a prosecution.

Experienced police officer knew that to keep a story going in a newspaper they needed to provide different angles – at the same time they were not experienced news gatherers. I therefore believed it was a mutual beneficial relationship.

I am not aware of any public officials or mobile phone companies being paid during my time.

12 What your role was in instructing, paying or having any other contact with such private investigators and/or other external providers or information

As a reporter I had contact with private detectives, although it was 20 years ago and I can't recall specifics. It was usually to try to find an individual who was trying to avoid exposure for bad behaviour.

We did not have the resources to allow a reporter to spend several weeks tracing one individual, so a private detective would be asked to do that part of the investigation and then the reporter would be re-introduced to make the approaches to the individuals.

As an editor I had no contact with private detectives but occasionally met the sources of stories if I wanted to be sure of the quality of the individual or the information provided to us.

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13 If such investigators or other external providers of information were used, what policy/protocol, if any, was used to facilitate the use of such investigators or other external providers of information (for example, in relation to how they were identified, how they were chosen, how they were paid, their remit, how they were told to check sources, what methods they were told to or permitted to employ in order to obtain the information and so on

That was left to the news editor or features editor or whoever instructed them. They were professional agencies and anecdotally I was aware many were retired police officers or former detectives.

I did not appoint junior, inexperienced department heads deliberately. They were people whose judgment I trusted. The same rules applied to anyone who worked with us be they private detectives, freelance reporters or members of the public i.e. they had to behave within the guidelines laid down by the PCC.

For example, subterfuge could only be used when investigating criminal behaviour or a story that had a serious public interest defence; people could not be harassed by, for example, constantly knocking on their doors for an interview.

Any information gleaned by private detectives would be rigorously tested in the office in the usual way by our legal team or by myself. Usually they would have photographic evidence to support what they were telling us or documentary evidence (births, marriages and deaths certificates; court papers; company house records; local newspaper cuttings; church registries).

If they were working undercover they would produce taped evidence to substantiate their findings.

As far as I can remember, the private detectives that were used had been connected with the newspaper for some years and thus had a good track record and were trusted. We had not received complaints about their work

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14 If there was such a policy/protocol, whether it was followed, and if not, what practise was followed in respect of all these matters

It was my policy to check every contentious story and ensure the evidence supported what we were about to publish and the PCC code had been followed. Other senior members of my team would also analyse the story, the justification for running it, the methods used to obtain it and the source of it.

15 Whether there are any situations in which neither the existing protocol/policy nor the practise were followed and what precisely happened/failed in those situations. What factors were in play in deciding to depart from the protocol or practise?

I can't ever recall this happening, but with 15,000 stories a year and 200 reporters to manage, there must have been mistakes or errors of judgment. I genuinely cannot recall them up to 16 years later.

One thing I should point out is that during my time the editor effectively ran the News of the World business. I was involved in marketing and advertising strategy; News Corps business worldwide; long-term strategy meetings, conferences etc. The job entailed more than just editing a newspaper.

But as a long-time journalist I managed the paper in a very hands-on way and believe I had a firm hand on procedures.

16 the extent to which you were/are aware of protocols or policies operating at your newspaper in relation to expenses or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by your newspaper or not). There is no need for you to cover 'official' sources, such as the Press Association

The Managing Editor Stuart Kuttner was in charge of payments to sources.

We did not pay criminals, unless it could be justified in the public interest. I can recall this happening only a handful of times in 30 years in journalism.

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We did not pay witnesses involved in court cases. Everything was logged in the normal way. People had to show proof of identity on some occasions before they would be paid.

Individuals would be paid expenses like hotel bills and travelling costs if they were working with our staff on a story.

Many sources were represented by agents like Max Clifford and were paid through the agent.

In the majority of cases invoices were raised and payments made to the individuals as they were professional sources working for us on a regular basis.

Cash payments were only made if someone did not have a bank account and it was on those occasions they had to show proof of identity.

17 The practise of your newspaper in relation to payment of expenses and/or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by your newspaper or not). there is no need to cover 'official' sources such as the Press Association'

The newspaper would first insist on being sure they knew who the person was we were dealing with before making any payments. The next judgment call was whether the story was in the public interest and if the story passed that test and we knew who the person was, we would make an agreed payment for their assistance. Expenses were paid if the individual incurred out of pocket expenses, but usually the reporter on the story would pay any on going expenses during their time together, then claim them back afterwards by filling in an expenses claim form.

To my knowledge we would only make payments when we had commissioned the project ourselves.

Payments would be authorised by a head of department and/or Stuart Kuttner, the managing editor. I only got involved if it was a particularly large payment, but I am sorry I cannot remember the limit. It would probably have been around £10,000.

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18 In respect of editorial decisions you have made to publish stories, the factors you have taken into account in balancing the private interests of individuals (including the fact that the information may have been obtained from paid sources in the circumstances outlined under paragraph 11 above) against the public interest in a free Press. You should provide a number of examples of these, and explain how you have interpreted and applied the foregoing public interest

Firstly, it is important to point out there was no “privacy law” in existence when I was editing. That said the PCC was clear on this subject.

The factors I would have taken into account in publishing a story are:

- Was the individual a public figure? Did they court publicity and project a particular image? Were we now showing that is not a fair reflection of the truth?
- Was illegal or unsocial activity taking place?
- Were we exposing hypocrisy? For example a politicians says one thing in public and then behaves differently in private?
- Did the individual mind the media attention? For example Princess Diana would complain about Press attention while meeting members of our staff for lunch to “leak” stories

I do not have newspapers from my time as editor, nor are they available on the internet; but to illustrate some examples were:

- We exposed a swingers’ party – the individuals attending would not be identified to protect their privacy, but the person running it would because he was breaking the law making money out of such behaviour
- We did not run a story about Paul McCartney having a new girlfriend because he asked us not to because he wanted it to remain private; he later facilitated us breaking the story
- There were many stories every week that were not published because they would have fallen foul of the PCC code

I apologise but I cannot remember individual debates in the office over specific stories up to 15 years ago, but I know we based our decisions on the PCC code and proportionality; in other words was what we were doing fair and balanced.

On the subject of paid sources, it always had to be justifiable and the motivation of the source fully investigated.

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19 Whether you, or your newspaper (to the best of your knowledge) ever used or commissioned anyone who used 'computer hacking' in order to source stories, or for any other reason

Absolutely not.

20 If you cannot answer these questions, or take the view that they could be more fully answered by someone else, you must nonetheless provide answers to the extent that you can, and to the extent that you cannot you must provide the Inquiry as soon as possible with names of those who would be able to assist us further

I have answered the questions to the best of my ability in the light of the fact that I do not have records to refer to.