

Links: power to the people

5 March, London

This conference will examine how communities can best be engaged in health and social care decision making. It will build on the local government and public involvement in health bill, which sets out new arrangements to involve local people in shaping the services and priorities of health and social care bodies in their area.

Shaping places: the strategic housing role

3 March, London

How can local area agreements be used to deliver housing objectives? How can elected members lead the housing growth agenda and ensure there is community engagement? What will sub-regional housing and planning strategies look like, and how can they balance housing markets? These questions and more will be debated at this event.

Exercising the strategic lead for 14-19 education

9 March, London

The further education white paper published last March confirmed a key role for councils acting as the strategic leaders for the education of 14-19 year olds. This event will examine how councils can best do this, working with their local partners to enable the aspirations of young people themselves and ensure local and national economic outcomes.

Integration and cohesion: clarifying the local authority role

6 April, London

This conference will focus on the interim report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. Using examples of good practice, it will demonstrate the importance of good communications, myth busting and community leadership and provide delegates with an opportunity to discuss any related matters of interest or concern.

Trade waste: tackling the issues, supporting local business

26 April, London

Councils can save money and support the local economy by offering their recycling services to local businesses. This event will show how this is being done, demonstrate why it makes sense to work with businesses to become more resource efficient and explain how to tackle the problems caused by closure of transfer stations.

For further details or to book a place at any LGA event, telephone 020 7664 3131, email info@lga.gov.uk or visit at www.lga.gov.uk

Putting it right

The Press Complaints Commission offers a mediation service to put the record straight when local newspapers get their facts wrong, writes Sue Roberts

"The newspaper gets hold of the facts and figures, but somehow it manages to present them in a way that just ends up misleading the readers."

This is the kind of comment that the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) hears from local authorities fairly often.

There are, of course, many examples of good relationships between councils and the local press, but disputes do sometimes occur. If articles are published that are materially misleading, it is important that the record is put straight as quickly as possible.

The PCC knows that, in most cases, councils are happy to raise complaints directly with the editor concerned, but an independent negotiator can sometimes help in the mediation process – and that's where the complaints service can help.

Publicising success

Through meeting and speaking with councils about their views on press behaviour and the service offered by the PCC, it appears that there may be more to be done to make councillors and executives aware of the commission's successes. Here are two recent examples.

A newspaper stated that a council spent just 32 pence on each meal it provided for school children in the city. The council said the newspaper had been informed that this information was wrong before publication – the figure failed to take account of how many children actually took up the option of a school meal. Through the mediation work of the PCC, the following correction and apology was published:

"We reported on December 1 that school dinners for pupils in Glasgow secondary schools cost the city council 32p each. The actual cost is between 95p and £1.05 and we were told this by Glasgow city council in advance of publication of the story. The 32p figure was reached by dividing the total cost of school meals by the total number of secondary pupils in the city, rather than by the number of secondary pupils who take a school meal. We are happy to clarify this matter and apologise for the impression that was given in the article."

Another council complained that a newspaper reported, incorrectly, that it was housing sex offenders from outside its boundaries in return for cash grants from

other authorities.

The newspaper agreed to publish the council's denial of the claims and publicly withdrew the allegations, accepting that they had relied entirely on sources and that there was no evidence to substantiate the story. The newspaper also apologised for any distress the report may have caused residents within in the authority.

A complaint to the commission need not be a long drawn-out process. Indeed, the PCC's primary aim is to resolve substantive complaints which fall within its remit amicably and quickly.

It recognises the important relationship between councils and the local press and will only resort to formal adjudication if mediation fails.

As well as accuracy, the other main areas covered by the code are privacy, newsgathering and protecting the vulnerable – all of which may apply in the reporting of local government affairs.

Where should you start if you have a concern about the press? Our website www.pcc.org.uk is a good place, but to discuss making a complaint before you decide whether to proceed, call the helpline in confidence on 0845 600 2757.

For copies of the code of practice and our information booklet 'How to complain', or to join the mailing list to keep up to date with news from the PCC, please contact pcc@pcc.org.uk.

Sue Roberts is external affairs manager at the Press Complaints Commission

