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Press Complaints Commission

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Chairman
Sir Christopher Meyer

Members of the Commission

- Matti Alderson
- Roger Alton
- Professor The Lord Chan
- Edmund Curran
- Paul Dacre
- Jane Ennis
- Mary Francis
- Dr. Arthur Hearnden
- Vivien Hepworth
- Peter Hill
- Paul Horrocks
- Charles McGhee
- Professor Robert Pinker
- Eve Salomon
- Dianne Thompson
- The Right Rev. John Waine KCVO

Director
Tim Toulmin

From the Director

31 March 2004

Bill Hagerty Esq
c/o The Independent
Independent House
191 Marsh Wall
London
E14 9RS

Dear Bill,

I read your article in yesterday's Independent with interest, and it struck me that I ought to get in touch just to clarify a few of the issues that you raised, given that they concerned factual matters about the PCC.

In light of the major developments that have taken place since Sir Christopher's appointment last year I was a bit surprised to see that you called for a new programme of 'radical reform'. Such a programme is already underway. Some of the reforms relate to proposals that were made in the Select Committee's report – and indeed many others were initiated before the committee's findings were published. Even Gerald Kaufman referred to the PCC's response to the Select Committee – in a recent debate in Westminster Hall – as 'predominantly constructive', before listing a number of the instances where the PCC's action coincided with the points raised in his inquiry's conclusions. These include co-operation with broadcasters on the subject of media scrums, an increase in the lay majority, opening discussions with the Information Commissioner and so on.

In particular, you should be aware that an independent figure has already been appointed to provide the right of procedural appeal. He is Sir Brian Cubbon, who began his term of office as Charter Commissioner at the beginning of the year and is charged with investigating any appeals on the manner in which complaints have been handled.

Moreover, there is also an independent panel which is currently in the process of examining large numbers of files in preparation for its first complaints 'audit'. It will then submit an independent report to the Commission – which it will publish – on how the Commission's service can be improved. These are important developments which add a genuinely independent layer of external scrutiny to what we do. It used to be said that the PCC was not sufficiently transparent – but I do not believe that this charge can

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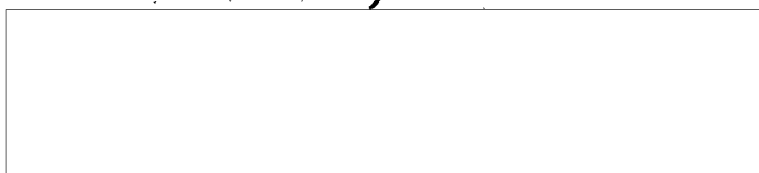
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realistically be made now. In addition to the reforms outlined above, all public members of the Commission are now appointed as a result of an open recruitment process – something that applies to new members of staff too. We even have a roving programme of open town meetings throughout the UK, where we invite members of the public to turn up to grill us about any aspect of the Commission's work – and then ask them all to join us for a drink and an informal chat afterwards. There can be few institutions in the whole of the UK that are so accessible.

Of course, if you would like to discuss any of these issues further then do give me a ring.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely



Tim Toulmin