

PCC upholds first complaint under new suicide rules

The Press Complaints Commission has upheld a complaint against the Wigan Evening Post and the Wigan Observer under Clause 5 (Intrusion into grief or shock) of the Code.

It is the first complaint adjudicated under the expanded terms of this Clause, amended in 2006, which now states that “when reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used”. This is to minimise the risk of copycat suicides.

The Wigan Evening Post and the Wigan Observer, and their shared website, published an article that reported on an inquest into the suicide of a local teacher, the complainant’s husband. This included specific details of how he had electrocuted himself.

The Commission made clear that, while newspapers were entitled to report on proceedings such as inquests, the Code’s requirements are over and above what the law allows. On this occasion, the Commission concluded that there was too much detail in the articles, and upheld the complaint. It used the opportunity to underline to editors the importance of taking care in this area.

The terms of Clause 5 were changed following the submission of evidence to the Editors’ Code of Practice Committee from Samaritans. The Chief Executive of Samaritans Dominic Rudd has commented on this first adjudication under the amended Code, saying:

“I am pleased to see that the PCC has upheld the complaint for precisely the reason the new clause was entered into the PCC Code last year – to make sure that there is no excessive reporting of suicide methods which might lead to copycat suicides. The PCC’s decision shows they are sincere in their desire to make reporting of suicide cases responsible.”

To read the adjudications in full [click here](#) and [here](#).

ENDS

For further information, please contact Stephen Abell on 020 7831 0022.

Notes

1. Clause 5 (Intrusion into grief or shock) was amended in June 2006. The full clause reads:
 - i) In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings, such as inquests.
 - *ii) When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used.
2. To read the press release announcing the change, [click here](#).

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