

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION ANNUAL REVIEW LAUNCHED

Record numbers use PCC services as Meyer hails 'strong public confidence' in self-regulation

The Press Complaints Commission's annual report for 2008 has been published. It reveals that:

- There were **4698** complaints about British newspapers and magazines in total – up by 8% on the previous year;
- The Commission made rulings on **1420** different cases - up by 16% on 2007 – including 45 formal adjudications; (Note 1)
- Almost half of these cases – **678** (up 4%) - involved a breach of the press Code of Practice;
- There were **329** privacy rulings, up **35%** on the previous year;
- The PCC issued **57** pre-publication private advisory notices to the media, which helped protect people's privacy; (Note 2)
- The most complained about article was a *Times* comment piece by Matthew Parris, which attracted **584** complaints. (Note 3)

Launching the report, PCC Chairman Sir Christopher Meyer said:

"These figures set all-time records in every category. There could be no clearer evidence of strong public confidence in the PCC and our ability to put things right quickly when inaccuracies or intrusive details are published, whether online or in print. 2008 has, as never before, underscored the range and flexibility of our services to the public, including confidential pre-publication advice, our 24/7 anti-harassment service, the negotiation of corrections and apologies, the rapid removal of online material, and, where necessary, the public censuring of newspapers and magazines.

As I prepare to step down after 6 years chairing the PCC, it is particularly gratifying that we are now able to help record numbers of people to protect their privacy. Compared with 2007, there was a greater increase in privacy rulings than in any other category; and thanks to the expansion of our pre-publication activity, we have more than ever been able to prevent intrusions arising in the first place. At the same time, as the recent publication of the revised edition of the Editors' Codebook makes clear, the PCC has been able further to develop the necessary distinction to be made between the protection of 'genuine' privacy and unacceptable attempts at image control by, for example, people in the public eye."

The annual report includes examples of actual cases that the PCC dealt with in 2008, along with special reports on privacy, social networking and the reporting of suicide.

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Notes:

1. Not all complaints to the PCC fall for consideration under the Code of Practice. Adjudications are rulings made at formal meetings of the PCC. Other rulings include findings agreed through correspondence, and the endorsement of remedial action taken or offered by publications. For a fuller breakdown of the 2008 statistics see pages 26-28 of the Annual Review. See also an article from the Commission's latest e-newsletter, available on the PCC's website at <http://www.pcc.org.uk/news/newsletter/february/factsbehindfigures.html>.

2. Private advisory notes – or desist messages as they are sometimes called – are circulated to editors and lawyers with individuals' concerns about harassment by photographers or potential intrusion in articles. They almost always result in the problem disappearing so that a formal complaint is not necessary.

3. 584 people complained about a comment piece article in *The Times* by Matthew Parris, published on 27 December 2007, headlined "What's smug and deserves to be decapitated?". The complainants were mostly cycling enthusiasts objecting to the suggestion that piano wire be strung across country lanes to decapitate cyclists, as a punishment for littering the countryside. The Commission said that the Code of Practice had not been breached, although it was pleased that Mr Parris had apologised for his comments.

4. The Press Complaints Commission is an independent body which deals with complaints from the public about the editorial content of newspapers and magazines and their websites (including moving pictures and sound). There are seven industry representatives and ten members of the public on the Commission's board.

5. For more information please contact Stephen Abell on 020 7831 0022.

6. Hard copies of the Annual Review can be requested from tonia.milton@pcc.org.uk

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