

Statement by Lord Wakeham on Dunblane

I have received a significant number of representations following my advice to editors on Friday 15 March about the media presence in Dunblane. There appears to be genuine and justifiable concern that the sheer number of journalists from all parts of the media may cause added distress to the grieving families of Dunblane during the week in which the funerals of the murdered children are to be held.

I hope that after the Royal visit today, media organisations can reduce the scale of their presence in Dunblane to allow the people there the space they will need over the coming weeks to bury their children and start to find their own route to recovery.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. Below is a copy of the advice note I issued to editors on Friday 15 March
2. It is apparent to all that the majority of journalists are taking great care to respect the feelings of the people of Dunblane, as would be expected from a responsible profession.
3. To date, the Commission has received no formal complaints about the behaviour of any newspaper or magazine journalists.

17 March 1996

Memo to national newspaper editors on Dunblane

There is a shortage of suitable adjectives to describe the horror of the events in Dunblane on Wednesday morning.

The Press Complaints Commission joins with Parliamentarians, Church and community leaders in offering the very deepest sympathy of all its members to those mourning the innocent victims of this inexplicable slaughter of children.

The press has a legitimate role to play in relaying both information about these shocking events to an audience nationwide and the unanimous sympathy of the British people to all those grieving. As ever, the Commission appreciates there is a fine line to be drawn between public interest and private suffering.

The Commission has received no formal complaints about the behaviour of print journalists in this matter. Nevertheless, in view of the special circumstances I would like to remind all editors that they and their journalists (including freelancers) throughout the UK are bound by Clauses 4 (Privacy), 8 (Harassment), 10 (Intrusion into grief or shock) and 12 (Interviewing or photographing children) of the newspaper and magazine publishing industry's Code of Practice.

In particular, Clause 10, with my own emphasis added here, states that 'in cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries should be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion.' I would ask all editors to remind those responsible to them about the terms of this Clause, and to be especially careful about respecting it when dealing with the unique and horrible events in Dunblane.

15 March 1996