

PCC publishes paper on payments to criminal and the public interest

Following a number of recent high-profile cases where newspapers have paid criminals for information - and the suggestion by some newspaper editors and commentators that the Commission's handling of them has been ambiguous - the PCC is today publishing a paper outlining how its approach to these matters, and the case law it has built up, has been coherent and consistent over many years.

In particular, the Commission pointed out that:

- Following discussions with the Home Office in 1998 the Commission has investigated all criminal payments by newspapers or magazines of its own volition where it appears that there may be issues under the Code;
- It takes a liberal view of the serialisation of books because the newspaper industry operates under more rigorous - but voluntary - restrictions than book publishers and because the Code of Practice directs the Commission to have regard to the extent to which material is about to become public;
- It does not generally censure publications when the criminal or their associates have received no direct payment;
- It assesses the extent to which the material obtained is in the public interest. The public interest will vary from case to case but includes exposing miscarriages of justice, throwing new light on a crime, illuminating an issue of general public policy or bringing significant new material to the attention of the public (which may not be about the crime itself);
- It takes into account the extent to which an article glorifies crime. None of the cases which the Commission has rejected involved the glorification of crime;
- Stories that are likely to breach the Code are those with no public interest element to them, including stories concerning sex or romance or gossip;
- Articles written by inmates about fellow prisoners - where there is no public interest element - are also likely to breach the Code. The Commission is anxious to avoid the development of a market for intrusive material about inmates (some of whom may be high-profile).

The Commission believes that its application of the editors' Code of Practice, and its interpretation of the public interest, has been coherent, transparent and unambiguous. However, it hopes that by giving an overview of its approach to criminal payments, publication of this paper will assist those editors who feel uncertain about how to proceed when considering sanctioning such a payment.

To read the paper entitled 'The PCC, payments to criminals and the public interest' in full, please [click here](#)

For details of adjudications under Clause 17 (Payment to criminals) search our website.

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