

First Annual Reports of the Charter Commissioner and the Charter Compliance Panel

The PCC today publishes the first Annual Reports of the Charter Commissioner and the Charter Compliance Panel.

PCC Chairman Sir Christopher Meyer said: *"I am pleased to welcome the first reports of the Charter Commissioner and Charter Compliance Panel. Their scrutiny of our procedures will ensure that both the public at large and those who use the PCC can have faith in the transparency and accountability of the system. They have also produced some valuable recommendations which will further improve our standards of service"*.

The Charter Commissioner (Sir Brian Cubbon) was established on 1st January 2004 to consider complaints about the handling of complaints by the PCC. He does not review the substance of the Commission's decisions, only the handling of the complaint.

The Charter Commissioner received 59 complaints in 2004. Nearly all involved a complaint under Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code. All the Commissioner's recommendations were accepted by the Commission. As a result, the complaint was reconsidered in three cases; and the Commission's Director personally apologised to the complainant for the delay in three cases, and for a minor error of fact in another. In other cases the Commissioner clarified the decision taken on the original complaint and explained the operation of the Code.

The Commissioner's recommendations also led to changes in practice, which are set out in the report. You can access the Annual Report on the PCC website at: http://www.pcc.org.uk/about/charter_comm_report.html or to request a hard copy of the Annual Report please contact Tonia Milton by email at tonia.milton@pcc.org.uk or by telephone 020 7353 1248.

The Charter Compliance Panel consists of Sir Brian Cubbon, Dame Ruth Runciman and Mr Charles Wilson. The Panel was appointed from 1st January 2004 to audit the standard of service given to complainants by the PCC. It examined over 200 complaints files in 2004 and had meetings with the Chairman, the Director and the complaints officers. In general the Panel was satisfied that complainants receive a high standard of service from the Commission and the staff.

The Panel recommended changes in practice and procedure that have already been implemented by the Commission. Delays, including delays by the newspaper, will be more rigorously monitored. An independent expert is advising on the design and interpretation of the customer surveys conducted by the PCC. Commission staff will research complaints about the reporting of mental illness and scan the press for the use of discriminatory words in this area.

The Panel stresses the importance that complainants attach to headlines, and to inquest reports. It also mentions the advantage in having a good number of adjudications to raise and strengthen the public profile of the Commission and make its standards of service more transparent.

Other changes are specified in the report. You can access the Annual Report on the PCC website at: http://www.pcc.org.uk/about/charter_report.html or to request a hard copy of the Annual Report please contact Tonia Milton by email at tonia.milton@pcc.org.uk or by telephone 020 7353 1248.

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