

**IN THE MATTER OF:**

**AN INQUIRY UNDER THE INQUIRIES ACT 2005**

**INTO THE CULTURE, PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS**

**CHAired BY THE RT HON LORD JUSTICE LEVESON**

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**FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MARIA THERESA MCGEOGHAN**

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I, **MARIA THERESA MCGEOGHAN**, of the Manchester Evening News, Mitchell Henry House, Hollinwood Avenue, Chadderton, Oldham OL9 8FF **WILL SAY** as follows:

1. I am the Editor of the Manchester Evening News, which is published by MEN Media. MEN Media is owned by Trinity Mirror plc (**'Trinity Mirror'**).
2. I am making this statement in response to a notice dated 29 September 2011 pursuant to section 21(2) of the Inquiries Act 2005 (the **'Notice'**) addressed to me at the Manchester Evening News. My married name is Brewer, however I have used my maiden name (McGeoghan) throughout my working life and, as the Notice is addressed to me in that name, I also respond to it in that name.
3. I understand that the Notice has been sent to me in connection with Part 1 of the Inquiry chaired by The Right Honourable Lord Justice Leveson into the culture, practices and ethics of the press (the **'Inquiry'**), the Terms of Reference for which were published by The Right Honourable Mr David Cameron MP, Prime Minister on 20 July 2011 (the **'Terms of Reference'**). The Notice requires me to provide evidence to the Inquiry panel in the form of a witness statement and to provide any documents in my custody or under my control as specified in the Notice.
4. Where the contents of this statement are within my own knowledge they are true and where the contents are not within my own knowledge I indicate the source of my belief and believe them to be true.
5. I am not authorised to waive any privilege on behalf of Trinity Mirror or MEN Media and nothing in this statement is intended to constitute a waiver of privilege on behalf of either of them.
6. I understand that Trinity Mirror has been asked to produce certain documents in relation to the Manchester Evening News, in response to the section 21(2) notice addressed to Ms Sly Bailey dated 4 October 2011 (the **'Documents Notice'**). Insofar as I refer to additional documents in this witness statement, these are included in the paginated bundle of documents which I produce and refer to as Exhibit MTM1. A copy of the Notice and the Documents Notice are annexed hereto at pages 1-9 of Exhibit MTM1.

**Overview of statement and general journalistic principles**

7. I deal with the matters asked of me in the Notice in the order set out in the Notice, referring to them as 'Matter 1', 'Matter 2' and so on, using the Inquiry's numbering.

8. Before answering each of the specific points requested I think it would be useful to set out the general principles which underpin my ethical stance, the culture of my newsroom and the nature of the publications we produce. I made my position clear publicly in a piece published in the Manchester Evening News on July 11, 2011, a copy of which I have attached at pages 10-11 of Exhibit MTM1.
9. Honesty, fairness, responsibility and decency are the fundamental tenets. Each on its own is not sufficient to maintain our standards.
10. Truth is the starting point of everything we do – indeed, it is the essential purpose of journalism. Our newsroom, like every other, is bombarded with rumour and conjecture from every quarter and we take pride in our ability to independently verify the facts.
11. But simply establishing the truth of every story is not enough to automatically merit publication. We pursue balance, whilst taking account of the context within which we are publishing and take steps to avoid inflaming volatile situations. The riots in Oldham in 2001 and the recent civil unrest on the streets of Manchester and Salford are prime examples of periods when caution was exercised in the tone and nature of material published. In these situations we took great care over the tone of the language we used and refrained from sensationalising extremely sensitive situations.
12. Finally, I am aware of the enormous power that mass publication brings and the impact this can have on the individual. My team and I take this burden of responsibility very seriously indeed. We are mindful of the upset or damage a single paragraph, however true, may create and balance that against the public interest the story represents. There have been a number of occasions when we have delayed or refrained from publication because we have been made aware of somebody's mental or physical well-being could be jeopardised: see for instance the examples I have set out in response to Matter 17 below.
13. In short, I insist we treat people with courtesy and decency.

**Matter 1: Who I am and my career history**

14. Matter 1 asks me to cover who I am and to provide a brief summary of my career history in the media.
15. I was appointed Editor of the Manchester Evening News and Editor-in-Chief of our 20 weekly titles (which include for example the Salford Advertiser, the Oldham Advertiser and the Macclesfield Express) in March 2010 on the same day that Trinity Mirror

completed their acquisition of the titles from the Guardian Media Group ('GMG') (as to which, see further below).

16. I joined the Manchester Evening News as Assistant Editor in 1998 after nine years at the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo where I held a series of senior roles including Features Editor and Deputy Editor.
17. Before that I worked on a freelance agency based in Lancashire and was health correspondent on the Lancashire Evening Telegraph.
18. I am immensely proud of the team here at the Manchester Evening News who work hard every day to make it the best paper it can be.
19. As the Notice is addressed to me in my capacity as Editor of the Manchester Evening News, in this statement I focus on my experiences whilst in this role, namely in the period from March 2010.
20. It may assist the Inquiry to give a short overview of my role. As Editor of the Manchester Evening News, I am responsible for all its content and make the final decision on content, fairness and tone. It is also my responsibility to keep that content within legal and Press Complaints Commission ("PCC") guidelines. As Editor I also feel I am responsible for the welfare of my staff when they are out and about doing their job. For instance during the Manchester riots their safety was paramount. I also have a responsibility to run the editorial department within budget.
21. As to my role of Editor-in-Chief of the weekly titles, those weekly titles all have a 'district head' or editor with legal responsibility for content fairness and tone, staff welfare and budget. As Editor-in-Chief I am line manager for the weekly editors and I also have a responsibility for the strategic direction of the weekly titles. I will also help with advice on legal and content issues.

**Matter 2: Corporate governance and systems to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct**

22. Matter 2 asks me to cover how I understand the system of corporate governance to work in practice at the Manchester Evening News, with particular emphasis on systems to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct.

23. MEN Media was purchased by Trinity Mirror plc from the GMG in March 2010. Under GMG ownership MEN Media operated under the auspices of the Scott Trust ethical policy (Scott Trust is the sole shareholder of the GMG). On an operational level our professional and ethical conduct was informed by the Editors' Code of Practice (the "**Code**") and the law, to which we have always strictly adhered and continue to do so.
24. Now under Trinity Mirror ownership, MEN Media complies with the Trinity Mirror Code of Business Conduct, which was most recently updated to take into account the Bribery Act having come into force in mid-2011. We also comply with Trinity Mirror's Regionals Editorial Policy, the most recent version of which is dated 18 August 2006 but which I believe is due to be updated to take into account the findings of the Editorials Controls and Procedures review described below.
25. Most recently, in September 2011 Trinity Mirror produced a document – Editorial Controls and Procedures Review – which was approved by the board and adopted as policy through all Trinity Mirror's subsidiary group companies, including MEN Media. The review made a number of recommendations for specific areas in which controls could be strengthened and practices and procedures updated to reflect current best practice. We adhere to all the policies set out in this document which incorporates the Code.
26. Lawful publication, both in print and online, is supported by our editorial structure and our “two pairs of eyes” policy, meaning we expect two different qualified journalists of an appropriate level of seniority to approve content before it is published. Whilst this is not a formal, written policy, it is one that we endeavour to follow in practice.
27. Moreover, MEN Media has developed an in-house automated legal check system. This involves a database of potentially problematic phrases and names against which copy is automatically compared through a word search. If a match is found, the phrase is highlighted in red and a separate panel is opened on the screen providing further information including details of specific court orders, injunctions, legal complaints and general legal risks (e.g. naming of an arrested person before charge). The database is updated and managed by the Deputy Editor.
28. Lawful publication is also enshrined in our content management system – Miles 33 Workflow – wherein content is clearly flagged as either ‘unsafe’ or ‘safe’. We define safe as lawful, accurate and fair. We endeavour to ensure that content can only be placed on a page once it has been declared ‘safe’. To be made ‘safe’ an automated legal check (as

described above) would be performed to identify any potentially problematic phrases and a journalist must also complete a declaration that the story is fit for publication. I have attached screen shots by way of example at pages 12-15 of Exhibit MTM1 (the shots show that a story is flagged as "unsafe" until it has been checked by a senior manager and only when the check has been carried out and the story moved to the "safe" pool can it be placed on a page for print publication). In addition, since May 2010 we have put extra checks in place to ensure that editors read and check court copy before the page is sent and that three other members of the team also read and initial proofs of court stories.

29. Any legal issues we are unable to resolve ourselves we refer to the Trinity Mirror legal team, consisting of media lawyers based at Trinity Mirror's head office at Canary Wharf, London. Advice we seek may range from the general discussion of a point of principle to the detailed scrutiny of an article and/or headline.
30. We may also consult the PCC prior to publication for guidance on potential breaches of the Code. Most recently we did this to consider the ethics of referring to a Manchester United footballer in connection to the arrest of his father over match fixing allegations (in respect of which we then published a short article on 7 October 2011 – see pages 16-17 of Exhibit MTM1).
31. Ultimately, if serious concerns are raised we err on the side of caution and refrain from publication.
32. We also have a policy with respect to comments published on our website [www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk](http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk) (a copy of which is published online and which I attach at pages 18-19 Exhibit MTM1). Changes were made to this policy in November 2010, in order to help reduce the chances of anything being posted which might be a potential legal risk and in particular we no longer publish any comments on 'live' crime stories (I have attached a copy of the email setting out the full details of the changes to the policy at page 20 of Exhibit MTM1). Again, we take the approach of 'if in doubt, don't publish'.

**Matter 3: My role in ensuring policies are adhered to**

33. Matter 3 asks what my role is in ensuring that the corporate governance documents and all relevant policies are adhered to in practice and, if I do not consider myself to have been/be responsible for this, to tell the Inquiry who I consider to hold that responsibility.

34. As Editor-in-Chief I maintain overall responsibility for ensuring the highest legal, professional and ethical standards are upheld by MEN Media.
35. Naturally, the volume of content published by all our titles precludes the possibility of my direct involvement or knowledge of every article. However, there is a clear chain of command from reporters to senior editorial managers to me which allows any concerns or issues about a story to be escalated and resolved. We have a cautious approach and insist that any doubts or fears be voiced at an early stage so they can be dealt with at an appropriate level.
36. Once each day I chair an editorial conference in which the heads of content generating departments (news, features, business and sport) gather with production managers (print and online) and senior newsroom managers (MEN Media executive editor and deputy editor) to run through the stories for the remainder of that day (for online publication) and for the following day (print and online publication). During that meeting we discuss any potential legal or ethical problems. If we feel unable to resolve an issue we seek guidance from the Trinity Mirror legal team or the PCC. Whilst we discuss any potential legal and ethical problems mainly at the conference, this dialogue can continue amongst senior managers right up until deadline. We also discuss any ongoing legal issues at our heads of department meetings, which are held either at the end of conference if there is an immediate issue to discuss or about once every six weeks for general housekeeping, and which are attended by section heads (in news, features, sport, online, pictures, business).
37. Legal and PCC issues are handled in the first instance by my deputy, however I have regular discussions with him on where we are up to with various complaints. Issues which arise outside daily conference are brought to my attention and discussed. Again, reference is made to the Trinity Mirror legal team or the PCC if this is felt to be necessary.

**Matter 4: Adherence to policies in practice**

38. Matter 4 asks me whether the documents and policies that I have referred to above are adhered to in practice, to the best of my knowledge.
39. We have an ongoing legal training programme to ensure our journalists are aware of the latest developments in the law. I set and maintain the professional ethical tone as now set out in the Trinity Mirror Editorial Controls and Procedures Review document. To the best of my knowledge, these documents and policies are adhered to in practice.

40. Any departures from our policies on lawful and ethical publication are brought to my attention and I take appropriate informal action (such as a discussion with the individual concerned) or formal action (such as a verbal or written warning). A serious breach could result in dismissal.

**Matter 5: Recent change in policies**

41. Matter 5 asks me whether the practices that I have referred to above have changed, either recently as a result of the phone hacking media interest or prior to that point and, if so, what the reasons for the change were.
42. As I have set out above, the Trinity Mirror Editorial Controls and Procedures Review document was adopted by the group board in September 2011. This review was prompted by a number of issues affecting the media industry including the ‘phone hacking’ allegations, disclosures of activities at the News of the World, and a recognition of the changes in Trinity Mirror newsrooms including the introduction of new content management systems.
43. As the 2011 review document itself records, prior to that review, Trinity Mirror last carried out a review of editorial control processes and procedures in February 2004 after the Hutton report concerning the death of Dr David Kelly.

**Matter 6: Responsibility for checking sources**

44. Matter 6 asks me where the responsibility for checking sources of information (including the method by which the information was obtained) lies: from reporter to sub-editor to editor and how this is done in practice (with some representative examples to add clarity).
45. Responsibility for ensuring the reliability and accuracy of information from sources lies at every level. I expect the overriding priority of every person in the chain of command to be accuracy.
46. A typical story will come to us from one of a number of sources; from a press release, to a call from a member of the public to a confidential contact. However the initial lead arrives in the newsroom the resulting story will undergo a series of checks and balances to ensure accuracy and fairness. These include:
- Reporter - The journalist writing the story knows they are expected to verify any claims being made.



- Newsdesk - The reporter answers to a newsdesk which will scrutinise the story and demand confirmation of the credibility of the source and, wherever possible, independent verification.
- Conference - The newsdesk, in turn, presents the story to the senior editorial management (including the editor) at conference. The accuracy of the story and the credibility of the source may again be scrutinised at this stage.
- Subbing - Once the story has been placed on a page prior to publication it is scrutinised by a sub editor.
- Duty editor - The duty editor (one of a number of senior editorial managers) will provide the final check to ensure the overall package of article, headline and pictures is fair and accurate.

47. I set out below some representative examples of how this works in practice:

*Prison inmates working on dustbin lorries*

48. In early 2010 we received a tip off from a source that inmates from a local prison, including someone convicted of kidnap and manslaughter, were being allowed out to work as refuse collectors. The source insisted on absolute anonymity. Naturally, we sought confirmation from the authorities involved but while they would confirm the general detail of the scheme they declined to discuss the individual prisoners involved. It was clear at this stage that we needed to rely on the anonymous source to establish the full picture. The news editor discussed the story with the editor and the reporter was required to divulge the identity of the source to a small group of newsroom managers to ensure we could check their reliability. The newsdesk then worked with the reporter to ensure a second corroborative source could be identified. The information subsequently obtained was then checked against our archive and court records.
49. Ultimately, the reporter was briefed to observe the bin lorry on which the inmates were working and to approach them for comment which confirmed the information our reporter had obtained. All the information and the checks performed were considered by the editor prior to publication, in order to communicate the veracity of the information to the editor. I have attached a copy of the story, as published, at pages 21-22 of Exhibit MTM1.

Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United tickets ending up in the hands of touts

50. In October 2011 an MEN reporter was in court when it was said that tickets issued to Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson had been found in the hands of touts as part of an illegal sales ring. Despite this being said in open court our reporter was asked to discuss the case with Manchester United and Greater Manchester Police to establish the precise nature of Sir Alex's involvement, if any, to avoid any misleading impressions being given. It became clear that the tickets with Sir Alex's name on had not been discovered by the investigating officers when they seized tickets being sold but had, in fact, been presented by the touts as part of their defence to suggest they had been authorised to sell United tickets. There was actually no evidence Sir Alex's tickets were being offered for sale. The duty editor, in discussion with the newsdesk and reporter, decided to remove the misleading court quote and amended the story to stress United manager's tickets were simply in possession of the touting ring and not being sold. I have attached a copy of the story, as published, at pages 23-25 of Exhibit MTM1.

Derby day football hooligans

51. In the week leading up to a derby football match between Manchester United and Manchester City in the 2010-11 season we learned that a police operation to track down troublemakers from a previous derby match had resulted in no action being taken against any of the people by either the courts or the clubs. The pictures of the suspects had originally been published in the MEN as part of the investigation and Greater Manchester Police confirmed that most of them had been identified, however no sanctions were being pursued. The story was presented to the editor at conference and there was a discussion of its impact during the run up to another derby. It was decided the story, while true, would inflame the already tense situation and encourage troublemakers who may believe they could act with impunity. The story was consequently held and rescheduled for use after the derby game.

**Matter 7: Awareness of an editor of sources of information**

52. Matter 7 asks me to cover to what extent an editor is aware, and should be aware, of the sources of the information which make up the central stories featured in the Manchester Evening News each day (including the method by which the information was obtained).

53. It is not necessary for the original source of a story to be discussed on every occasion if the subsequent checks and balances – i.e. contacting relevant parties for comment – confirm the truth of the allegation.
54. However, it is inconceivable that the source of a controversial story which relies significantly on the credibility of that source would not be scrutinised and approved by senior editorial managers.
55. If subterfuge or any possible prima facie breach of the law, the Trinity Mirror Editorial Controls and Procedures Review or of the Code were necessary for us to tell a story my approval would have to be sought prior to any activity. I would only grant my permission for such activity in the face of clear public interest and in consultation with senior executives at Trinity Mirror. Since becoming Editor I have never been asked for or granted my permission for such activities.
56. If the identity of the source is particularly sensitive I would expect anonymity to be respected generally in the newsroom. However, a senior editorial manager would need to be made aware of the identity of the source in confidence to ensure it is credible and bona fide, if a story is to be published.

**Matter 8: Role of ethics in print media**

57. Matter 8 asks me to cover the extent to which I consider that ethics can and should play a role in the print media, and what I consider 'ethics' to mean in this context.
58. As I set out in my general principles at the outset, I believe ethics and ethical behaviour are fundamental to good journalism. Simply publishing what is true with no reference to what is fair, responsible or decent would undermine our readers' trust in our motives and serve only to alienate the communities we serve. The publication of unredacted US embassy cable messages by Wikileaks earlier this year demonstrates the controversy surrounding this issue and the potential damage that can be caused.
59. In the context of publication, we should define ethics as the values we share with our readers to allow the media to serve as a force for good. I believe our readers expect us to be honest, fair, responsible and decent. They expect us to be compassionate when we are dealing with vulnerable people. They expect us to be accountable and transparent when we make mistakes. In short, they expect the media to treat the public in the same way we would all want to be treated as individuals.

**Matter 9: Financial and/or commercial pressure**

60. Matter 9 asks me to cover the extent to which I, as an Editor, felt any financial and/or commercial pressure from the proprietors of the Manchester Evening News or anyone else, and whether any such pressure affected any of the decisions I made as Editor (such evidence to be limited to matters covered by the Terms of Reference).
61. Financial and commercial pressures are a day to day reality in every modern media business and clearly do have an impact on editorial decisions.
62. However, these pressures are not imposed to set a specific agenda or bend content to the will of an individual - rather, they define the resource we have available and, therefore, our capabilities. Moral and legal pressures remain the most effective influences on the decisions I make.

**Matter 10: Financial incentives to print exclusives**

63. Matter 10 asks me the extent to which I, as an Editor, had a financial incentive to print exclusive stories. I am not required to state my precise earnings.
64. Exclusives are our lifeblood. Local and regional Press is the fountain from which the vast majority of news flows. It may be repackaged by TV or radio and the same story is often presented by national media as exclusive the next day, but more often than not stories originate in a local or regional newspaper.
65. Our offering to readers is clear – we will be the first to tell them what’s going on in their region. We compete directly with national papers on the newsstands, so if we fail to live up to our boast we will probably lose out.
66. So, the incentive to publish exclusives is extremely powerful. However, I do not get a financial bonus for publishing exclusives. My success as Editor will, in large part, be determined by circulation and that is driven by the quality of our content, including exclusives.
67. The rise of 24-hour broadcast and online news has changed the landscape in which we operate. Print has ceased to be an effective medium through which to break exclusives although it remains a very effective way of telling great stories. The increasing priority placed on online news has only served to make the management of exclusives more complex and decreased the amount of time journalists can afford to consider the content.

The race to be first to publish the result of the recent Amanda Knox appeal perfectly illustrate the pitfalls with the Daily Mail and the Guardian initially saying she had lost before updating their stories to reflect the fact she had been successful (see the Guardian article "Amanda Knox mistake exposes the media's guilty secret" dated 4 October 2011 at pages 26-28 of Exhibit MTM1).

**Matter 11: Connection with private investigators or external information providers**

68. Matter 11 asks me to cover whether, to the best of my knowledge, the Manchester Evening News used, paid or had any connection with private investigators in order to source stories or information and/or paid or received payments in kind for such information from the police, public officials, or others with access to the same. If so, I am asked to provide details of the numbers of occasions on which such investigators or other external providers of information were used and of the amounts paid to them. I am not required to identify individuals, either within the Manchester Evening News or otherwise.
69. We do not use private investigators.
70. We do use a search agency to assist us in finding contact details for people we are trying to trace from public records. This agency does not provide material for publication; it is solely to assist our reporters in the pursuit of a story. Contact with the agency is restricted to authorised news editors (five individuals) and is made infrequently (typically less than 10 times per month on average). The cost varies but is generally about £60 per search which is paid via invoice.
71. We subscribe to the Cameo website ([www.cameo.bvdep.com](http://www.cameo.bvdep.com)) which provides the facility for reporters to search for an address or for the name of an individual at a known address. This information has always been in the public domain through the electoral register but the website provides an effective search engine. I have attached at pages 29-30 of Exhibit MTM1 the page from Cameo's website which sets out details of the information that they provide.
72. We use some content submitted by trusted agencies or freelance journalists. This has significantly reduced in recent years and generally relates to coverage of court cases.
73. Pictures, including of celebrities, are submitted and are used when required and paid for at agreed rates – which rarely exceed £100. Checks are made to ensure the photographer did not contravene the Code. For example, if a picture of a defendant is taken outside Court,

we will aim to send the picture to the reporter covering the case to check it is the defendant before using it. We will also discuss a picture at our daily conference if it looks like it may be in danger of contravening the Code provisions on privacy (3.iii) or if there is a child involved. Sometimes pictures are taken of a person on their doorstep and we will discuss how the picture was taken and if the location can be seen from a public place. We will also seek advice directly from the PCC, as necessary.

74. The only other external source of information we use is The Press Association which is a respected agency providing a comprehensive news and sport service both in terms of words and pictures.

*Relationships with the police and politicians*

75. I understand that under Part 1 of its Terms of Reference, the Inquiry will consider the contacts and relationships between the press and the police and politicians respectively, and the conduct of each. I therefore set out below some additional information which may be of assistance.
76. As to the relationship between the Manchester Evening News and the police, we have a working relationship with Greater Manchester Police ("GMP") which ranges from day to day crime events to off-the record briefings ahead of big court cases or arrests.
77. Earlier this year GMP tweeted every crime reported to them in one 24 hour period which we carried on our website [www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk](http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk) as a live blog. We also have access to Chief Constable Peter Fahy through the press office and he will supply us with a comment should we ask for it. He has also taken part in a live web chat with our readers. GMP will ask for assistance in solving crimes and we often use still pictures or CCTV footage given to us by the police to help identify suspects.
78. As to the relationship between the Manchester Evening News and politicians, we no longer have a correspondent in the Commons so we rely on our local politicians to keep us up to date with what is happening in their constituencies/council areas. As we have 20 weekly titles covering Greater Manchester and parts of Lancashire and Cheshire our contact with local politicians and the issues affecting their areas is also very important.

**Matter 12: Protocols for private investigators and external providers**

79. Matter 12 asks me, if such investigators or other external providers of information were used, what policy/protocol, if any, was used to facilitate the use of such investigators or

other external providers of information (for example, in relation to how they were identified, how they were chosen, how they were paid, their remit, how they were told to check sources, what methods they were told to or permitted to employ in order to obtain the information and so on).

80. There is no written policy or protocol in place as such with respect to the use of external providers of information; rather we are guided by our obligation to act within the Code and the law.
81. The search agency is an effective method of gaining information from public records. As I have mentioned above, only authorised news editors can engage its services. The use of search agencies was covered in the September 2011 Review I have referred to above, which recommended that we should make it clear that we expect search agencies to carry out searches within existing laws and regulations.
82. Cameo is a tool used across the media industry and, again, Trinity Mirror has scrutinised its practice and confirmed it conforms to our standards of legality and ethics.
83. Generally, we only accept content from freelance journalists and agencies with whom we have an existing relationship and where we are confident that they abide by our editorial standards.
84. The Press Association is a reputable news agency which conforms to the Code.

**Matter 13: Following protocols for external providers**

85. Matter 13 asks me, if there was such a policy/protocol, whether it was followed and, if not, what practice was followed in respect of all these matters.
86. All protocols set out above have, to my knowledge, been followed.

**Matter 14: Situations where the protocol was not followed**

87. Matter 14 asks me whether there are any situations in which neither the existing protocol/policy nor the practice were followed and what precisely happened/failed to happen in those situations. I am also asked what factors were in play in deciding to depart from the protocol or practice.
88. There have never, to my knowledge, been any situations in which the existing protocol/policy or practice were not followed.

**Matter 15: Protocols in relation to payment of expenses/remuneration to external sources**

89. Matter 15 asks me to cover the extent to which I am aware of protocols or policies operating at the Manchester Evening News in relation to expenses or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by the Manchester Evening News or not). I am asked not to cover 'official' sources, such as the Press Association.
90. There is no specific policy or protocol as such in place in relation to expenses or remuneration paid to external sources of information, although there are authority levels in place in relation to the approval of financial payments above a certain level and any payments to the search agency must be approved by the Head of News. Payments to the search agency, Cameo, freelance journalists and press agencies (all described above) are by invoice.

**Matter 16: Payment of expenses/remuneration to external sources**

91. Matter 16 asks me to cover the practice of the Manchester Evening News in relation to payment of expenses and/or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by the Manchester Evening News or not). I am asked not to cover 'official' sources, such as the Press Association.
92. We do not directly pay for stories from members of the public.
93. The only enticement we provide to persuade someone to give us their story is to offer a syndication deal where we act as broker to sell their story exclusively to a national publication (newspaper, magazine or broadcast network) and split the proceeds with them. This will rarely result in a payment of more than £1000 to the subject. I would stress this process only relates to a small number of people each month.
94. As set out above, we do have contact with local politicians about issues affecting their constituencies/council areas. Many of our weekly titles carry columns from local MPs and council leaders but these are not paid for. Furthermore, entertaining politicians is rare and usually confined to a quick coffee and a chat.

**Matter 17: Balancing private and public interest**

95. Matter 17 asks me to cover, in respect of editorial decisions I have made to publish stories, the factors I have taken into account in balancing the private interests of individuals (including the fact that information may have been obtained from paid sources in the



circumstances outlined under Matter 11 above) against the public interest in a free Press. I have been asked to provide a number of examples and to explain how I have interpreted and applied the foregoing public interest.

96. The conflicting interests of a private individual and of the public at large are at the heart of any discussion of a free Press.
97. The commonly voiced distinction between those things which are in the public interest as opposed to those which are merely interesting to the public is a clever play on words but is as patronising as it is unhelpful to the day-to-day editorial decision making process. The journalist is an agent of the public, albeit generally paid by commercial enterprise, and should be willing to publish that which is both in the public interest and that which is of interest to the public.
98. Further, simply defining what is in the public interest as opposed to just interesting is by no means clear and open to interpretation. Personally, I regard sexuality, personal relationships and medical conditions as no-one else's business unless they have a direct relevance to a matter of public concern – e.g. conduct competence and honesty in a public office.
99. However, intelligent and sensitive journalism demands that careful thought is given to the implications both of publishing and of withholding a story. The private interests of an individual and the public interest in a free Press are not mutually exclusive principles; they lie on a continuum on which each editorial decision must be measured. The test is the balance between the two extremes – a degree of public interest does not outweigh a powerful personal issue where an individual's safety or health may be placed in jeopardy nor does a compelling private interest overcome a matter of great public importance which readers would expect to be made public in a free society.
100. I can recall postponing publication of a story about a police officer accused of misconduct after learning he was regarded as a suicide risk – clearly the story was in the public interest and was also interesting to the public but the potential risk to the individual of publication at that time was overwhelming.
101. Similarly, we were preparing a story about an NHS worker who was based overseas. Our checks proved the allegation was true but we also discovered the person was doing so because they were suffering from an aggressive form of cancer. We did not publish the story.

102. Of course, it is not always clear where the balance lies. Is an overwhelming public interest trumped by the most dire private circumstances? Ultimately we have to take each issue on its own merits.
103. Rarely is the decision as clear as a yes or no to publication. More often than not we will seek a compromise to protect specific private interests of an individual while publishing a substantive version of the story which may be in the public interest or simply interesting to the public.
104. The key to the decision making process is gathering sufficient information to make an informed choice. We scrutinise the stories we publish very closely throughout the day not only for accuracy but for fairness, reasonableness and decency. We will take on board appeals from any party involved in a story regarding the damage publication may have and attempt to make a robust decision based on knowledge and compassion.
105. I am constantly aware of the need to balance private interests of individuals and the public interest in a free Press. This affects both my decision on whether or not to publish a story at all and what treatment to give those stories we do publish (I am acutely aware of the power of the front page and the increased impact a page 1 story can have on an individual).
106. The following examples illustrate some of the issues we have deliberated over in recent years:

*Example 1: Bev Callard*

107. In 2009 the actress Bev Callard unexpectedly disappeared from her role in Coronation Street. Naturally, her disappearance from the soap opera was noteworthy and our journalists discovered (through a contact of one of the reporters) that she was suffering from depression.
108. We sought to confirm this with representatives of Ms Callard, who requested that we did not publish information regarding her mental health problems on the basis that publicity about her condition could have a detrimental affect on her health and her recovery.
109. We, along with other newspapers which had received a similar request, respected Ms Callard's desire for privacy on the grounds that the potential impact on her private life outweighed our freedom to explain her absence from the nation's TV screens for five months.

110. The story only became public when Ms Callard issued a press release through the Coronation Street press office about her condition which was used by the Manchester Evening News (I have attached our story dated 10 March 2010 at pages 31-32 of Exhibit MTM1) and national newspapers. She also did an exclusive deal with a national title.

*Example 2: Prince Harry*

111. In 2007 Prince Harry was deployed with British forces to Afghanistan. The Manchester Evening News, along with other news organisations, was contacted by the Ministry of Defence, and agreed to refrain from publishing details of his posting to safeguard him and his colleagues. This agreement was scrupulously honoured until foreign publications (first the Australian magazine New Idea and then the US website The Drudge Report) revealed the information in February 2008.

*Example 3: Wayne Rooney*

112. In October 2009 we were informed by Wayne and Coleen Rooney that we could confirm the birth of their child but that no other information, including pictures, should be published.
113. Subsequently, Mr Rooney has displayed his son, Kai, at high profile public events (Manchester United league title celebrations at Old Trafford stadium in 2010 and 2011) and posted pictures on social networking websites (Twitter). We initially respected the request for privacy from the Rooneys as we regarded them as the best judges of their son's best interests. However, we no longer operate a blanket ban on publication relating to Kai Rooney as his parents are clearly comfortable placing him in the public eye.

*Example 4: Development of East Manchester*

114. In 2010 we came into possession of a document giving detailed information about a plan to develop the land surrounding Manchester City Football Club's stadium in East Manchester to create large scale sporting and leisure facilities. The project was to be financed in large part by the owner of Manchester City FC, Sheikh Mansour.
115. Naturally we were extremely keen to publish detail of such a significant project for our city. Communities in this area are among the most deprived in the country and the proposals would transform the fortunes of the area and its residents. We had previously, in

September 2009 (see pages 33-34 of Exhibit MTM1), reported the fact that talks were taking place and it would be a natural follow-up to that story to provide full details.

116. However, there was a concern that publicity at that stage in the negotiations could jeopardise the deal. I was persuaded to delay publication until the deal was signed. We finally published the exclusive story in March this year (see pages 35-37 of Exhibit MTM1), about six months after we first learned of the plan.

**Matter 18**

117. Matter 18 asks me to cover anything else that I consider will assist the Chairman to arrive at considered conclusions on any aspect of the Terms of Reference, set out above.

118. I do not have anything else to add to what I have set out above, which I hope is of assistance to the Chairman.

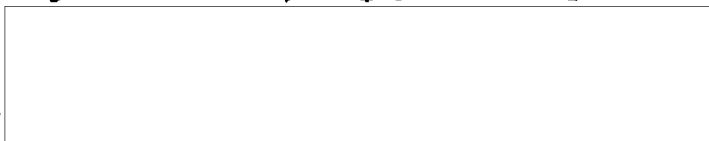
**Documents**

119. The Notice includes a request to me to provide any policies or protocols to which I have referred above and any details or documents relating to 'expenses' paid to private investigators and/or other external sources of information.

120. As set out above, I understand that Trinity Mirror is producing certain documents in relation to the Manchester Evening News, in response to the Documents Notice.

121. I have referred to the following documents above, each of which I understand has been or is being produced to the Inquiry by Trinity Mirror at the following respective references: the Code (Category A, Tab 1: disclosed on 14/10/11), the Editorial Controls and Procedures Review dated 28 September 2011 (Additional Documents, Tab 2: disclosed on 14/10/11); the Code of Business Conduct (Category A, Tab 2: disclosed on 14/10/11); and the Regionals Editorial Policy (Category A, Tab 1: being disclosed on 11/11/11).

Signed....



**Maria Theresa McGeoghan**

Dated: // <sup>14</sup> November 2011