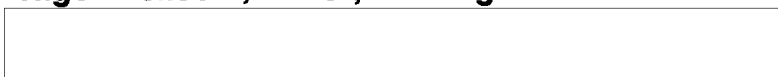


Dear Lord Leveson,

Please find enclosed my evidence for your inquiry – due to be delivered to you by **Thursday November 17**. I have made a general witness statement at the top of the questions (now answered) and I hope this is helpful to you. As you may be aware, The Evening Star is **unique in the Regional Press** in that it operates an **independent Ombudsman system** above and beyond the workings of the Press Complaints Commission. If you wish to contact our recently-retired Ombudsman, who held the post for five years until last month, I will supply contact details. It remains for me to wish you and your inquiry team the best of good fortune during the long and complicated work ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Pickover, Editor, Evening Star



Nigel Pickover statement

I have worked on daily newspapers, national and regional, for every single day of a career spanning four decades. And never once in that time have I witnessed any of the malpractices which have come to light in the News of the World telephone hacking affair. Working through the ranks at three regional daily newspapers and two national titles – and now being one of the longest-serving editors in the regional press, I have a unique insight into the workings of our industry. The story of the regional storytellers is quite simple – because we live and earn a living in the communities we serve, we have a duty to serve readers ethically and responsibly. Following publication of the stories we write, and the photographs we take, we have to face our readers the next day, the next week and the next year! Furthermore, I believe it is because we operate in a community-friendly way, we are never short of excellent stories – therefore never need to stoop to “basement levels” to gain our information.

A community which trusts its newspaper also feeds and nurtures it.

Our journalism, delivered by a small fraction of the number of journalists employed by the national press, comes through honest toil and legitimate means.

This doesn't mean we lose a cutting edge by doing things properly.

In recent months, The Evening Star, through the editor and one journalist, mounted robust and detailed inquiries in to the workings of Suffolk County Council.

Our hard-hitting pages made their mark ... and now Suffolk has a new leadership, both elected and administrative.

In all of our stories and investigations we were guided by the principles of fairness and balance.

Interestingly, today, we are firm friends with the council we investigated – because we held a searching, yet fair, spotlight into the authority's affairs.

I believe the regional press, be it at a daily newspaper or weekly title level, is a huge part of the democracy of our country.

In terms of the Press Complaints Commission, I am certain there is a huge difference between the organisation's dealings with national and regional press.

For us in the regions, the PCC works well – even if it creates difficulties and difficult debate at times.

My journalists adhere to the PCC Code of Conduct and all carry the Code Pocket Guide with them, at all times.

On top of that The Evening Star has its own independent Ombudsman.

He reviews all complaints which come in to the editorial department and writes his own, unedited, column in the paper.

This is unique in the regions - and sends a powerful message to all members of the editorial team, who have to read reports of any errors they make in their own title.

(1) Who you are and a brief summary of your career history in the media.

I am editor of The Evening Star, based in Ipswich, Suffolk, part of the privately-owned Archant group of newspapers, magazines and websites.

I have been in the newspaper industry for 39 years, all of this time on daily newspapers, regional and national.

I started as a junior on The Star, Sheffield and have worked on The Daily Mail (as a freelance) and Daily Express (staff) and Sunday Express (freelance.)

I rose to an executive production role on the Daily Express before leaving the company when production switched to London in 1989.

I held a senior editorial role at The Yorkshire Evening Press, in York, before moving to Ipswich as Deputy Editor in 1994.

The Evening Star has been one of the most successful titles in the regional press during my stewardship – and has won 17 newspaper of the year titles in that time.

We have won many campaigns on behalf of readers – and raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for their causes. Examples are available.

I was President of the Society of Editors in 2008/9 and spent five years as an SoE board member.

I have in 2011 been given an honorary fellowship of University Campus Suffolk (UCS) for my newspaper successes and community work.

(2) How you understand the system of corporate governance to work in practice at the newspaper where you were/are employed with particular emphasis on systems to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct;

All stories of a legal, or ethical, nature are referred to the Head of News, Deputy Editor, or Editor.

These individuals are all knowledgeable of media law and the Editors/PCC Code of Conduct.

My instructions are those which demand adherence to the PCC Code.

(3) What your role is/was in ensuring that the corporate governance documents and all relevant policies are adhered to in practice. If you do not consider yourself to have been/be responsible for this, please tell us who you consider to hold that responsibility;

My responsibility is total – I want to know where all material comes from and the authenticity of source.

In my absence the role falls to the Deputy Editor, or Head of News.

All material of a legal, or sensitive nature, is referred to our lawyers.

A budget is set aside so that our journalists can feel able to use the service of lawyers, in consultation with the newsdesk.

(4) Whether the documents and policies referred to above are adhered to in practice, to the best of your knowledge.

Yes, totally

(5) Whether these practices 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;

Not in any way.

(6) 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);

Reporter, Head of News or deputy, Deputy Editor, Editor

(7) 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 your newspaper each day (including the method by which the information was obtained);

Editor or Deputy, or Head of News - Completely

(8) The extent to which you consider that ethics can and should play a role in the print media, and what you consider 'ethics' to mean in this context.

Ethics is a vital component of the way we gain our information, we believe in doing things correctly, properly, morally and not illegally/ corruptly. We want to publish our information freely but not to upset the distressed or innocent or bystander. We will withdraw information if it is deemed to add extra upset to any 'innocent' individual. But will not shy away from publishing facts some, for example those guilty in court cases, or those at the centre of a story which is in the public's interest.

(9) The extent to which you, as an editor, felt any financial and/or commercial pressure from the proprietors of your newspaper or anyone else, and whether any such pressure affected any of the decisions you made as editor (such evidence to be limited to matters covered by the Terms of Reference);

Not once, in 16 years as editor, has any pressure been laid at my decision-making by my proprietors. Often such an issue is avoided by an editor's common sense in pre-warning senior colleagues before any difficulty may arise.

(10) The extent to which you, as an editor, had a financial incentive to print exclusive stories (NB. It is not necessary to state your precise earnings);

None

(11) Whether, to the best of your knowledge, your newspaper 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, please 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 (NB. You are not required to identify individuals, either within your newspaper or otherwise);

Never

(12) 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);

N/A

(13) if there was such a policy/protocol, whether it was followed, and if not, what practice was followed in respect of all these matters;

N/A

(14) 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. What factors were in play in deciding to depart from the protocol or practice?

N/A

(15) The extent to which you are aware of protocols or policies operating at your newspaper in relation to expenses or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by your newspaper or not). There is no need for you to cover 'official' sources, such as the Press Association;

Total knowledge – this refers to freelance material, i.e. external columnists and news freelancers but nothing more.

(16) The practice of your newspaper in relation to payment of expenses and/or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by your newspaper or not). There is no need to cover 'official' sources such as the Press Association;

Total knowledge of columnist/freelance payments, as above.

(17) In respect of editorial decisions you have made to publish stories, the factors you 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 paragraph 11 above) against the public interest in a free Press. You should provide a number of examples of these, and explain how you have interpreted and applied the foregoing public interest.

We publish stories with the confines of the law and the Editors' Code of Conduct. Freelance stories come from correspondents who cover areas such as court

(18) Anything else which you consider will assist the Chairman to arrive at considered conclusions on any aspect of the Terms of Reference, set out above.

The Chairman may want to understand the difference between national press reporters and local reporters when it comes to a big, ongoing, story.

In Ipswich in 2006/7 we witnessed the tragic murders of five women who were part of the street sex industry. The difference between the tactics of the national press and our local reporters was marked.

(19) If you cannot answer these questions, or take the view that they could be more fully answered by someone else, you must nonetheless provide answers to the extent that you can, and to the extent that you cannot you must provide the Inquiry as soon as possible with names of those who would be able to assist us further.

This has been done in the answers above.