



YORKSHIRE POST
NEWSPAPERS LTD

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Peter Charlton, Editor & Director, 2004-present:

STATEMENT

In more than 40 years experience in the regional press, I have not encountered any behaviour that remotely resembles the subterfuge and invasions of privacy revealed by the phone-hacking scandal.

I believe it important to make the point that a very different culture prevails in the regional press to that which has become apparent at certain national titles. Put simply, we do not hack phones; we do not employ private investigators to dig dirt; we do not corrupt and bribe police officers; we do not engage in criminality to obtain details of private lives. These practices have never been a feature of regional journalism at any of the newspapers on which I have worked or edited.

Such unlawful and unethical behaviour is anathema to regional titles; it is not now, nor ever has been, part of our mindset. Nor is the obsession with celebrity gossip that was the driver for so much of the subterfuge at red-top titles part of our mindset.

The journalism of the regional press is honest journalism that is the product of honest endeavour and lawful means of inquiry. Our stock-in-trade is thoroughness and transparency; the cultivation of contacts who can steer us towards a story that would otherwise have remained hidden, the careful and patient investigation of public records that can reveal financial scandal or wrongdoing, the intelligent use of Freedom of Information legislation to unearth issues, the frank and on-the-record questioning of those who appear in our columns. Allegations are put and responses requested. The subjects of our stories are fully aware of our interest in them; there is nothing covert or underhand in what we do.

Honesty, fairness and balance are the principles that guide us. We are there to speak

up for the communities we serve, and further serve them by exposing wrongdoing, malpractice or corruption in public life.

The involvement of the regional press in the lives of the communities it serves is a key strength and also a safeguard against malpractice. All of us in the regional press live and work in the communities on which we report; we use the hospitals and schools about which we write stories, we pay our council taxes to the local authorities we hold to account, if we need the police we are seeking help from the forces that we periodically have occasion to criticise. We are part of the community, both trusted servant and guardian, and that is the most effective regulation of all on our behaviour. We share the values of the communities we serve and our methods, material and presentation must at all times be acceptable to those communities.

Our communities reacted with abhorrence to the phone-hacking scandal; our readers told us so in their letters to us. We shared that abhorrence, and condemned these practices in our leader columns, not out of any desire to posture or pontificate, but simply because we were shocked at what was being done in the name of journalism.

I feared that when this scandal broke, all journalists would be tarred with the same brush; that the transgressions of a few would taint the reputation of the vastly overwhelming majority who behave with honesty and decency. That is why I am at pains to stress that the regional press is different; we do not parachute reporters into areas where they will never tread again, cause mayhem and disappear. We are part of the fabric of the areas we serve.

I would like to make a point about self-regulation. There may have been failings in the performance of the PCC in relation to phone-hacking. But in overseeing the regional press, it has worked well. The regional press has embraced the spirit of the PCC's code of conduct as well as its letter; we respond quickly, sensibly and fairly to complaints, making amends when mistakes occur and apologising where necessary. I do not believe that further regulation on the regional press is necessary.

QUESTION 1: CAREER AND EXPERIENCE

Career:

I have been Editor of the Yorkshire Post for more than seven years and have edited daily regional papers in the North of England for nearly 24 years.

The Yorkshire Post is an upmarket morning newspaper which serves England's largest county. We bill ourselves as 'Yorkshire's national newspaper' because our agenda embraces both regional and national issues. We do not, however, view politics through the narrow prism of Westminster.

A key part of the newspaper's agenda is to act as an advocate for the region we serve. We place a premium on campaigning and investigative journalism which, by its nature, involves extensive and detailed inquiries being made about issues that affect not only our readers but others, who would wish those issues to remain undisclosed.

For example, we are currently campaigning on the North-South divide, given that our region receives less funding from Government. Previously, we have exposed mismanagement at a local authority; nepotism at the highest level in a police force and the victimisation of care workers by their employers.

In doing this, we have to place a premium of exclusivity and there have been countless stories in national newspapers which have originated from the Yorkshire Post.

All my 47-year career has been spent in the regional press.

October 2004 – present	Editor & Director, Yorkshire Post
1992 – 2004	Editor & Director, The Star, Sheffield.
1988 – 1992	Editor & Director, The Gazette, Blackpool
1968 – 1988	Reporter to Deputy Editor, Lancashire Evening Post, Preston
1981	Thomson Foundation - helped launch the English language newspaper, the China Daily, in Beijing.
1968	Reporter, West Cumberland Press Agency
1964 – 1967	Reporter, Cumberland Evening News & Star

Professional bodies:

2006 – present: Society of Editors' board member - representing more than 400 national and regional newspaper editors across the media including television.

2003 – present: Founder chairman and current board member of the Johnston Press Editorial Review Group, comprising editors which advises the PLC, Johnston Press, on editorial policy.

Notable others:

- Hon. doctorate, Sheffield Hallam University (2004) for services to Sheffield/journalism
- Yorkshire Ambassador
- Patron, NSPCC Full Stop Campaign - for fund raising to build a 'drop-in' centre in Sheffield
- Board member, Sheffield City Trust (1996-2005) - which runs the city's leisure facilities through its operating arm, Sheffield International Venues.
- Board member, Sheffield First Partnership (1999-2002)
- Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts

Recent professional awards:

- 2011: UK Regional Daily Newspaper of the Year, runner-up

- 2010: O2 Yorkshire Newspaper of the Year
- 2009: O2 Yorkshire Newspaper of the Year

QUESTIONS 2 TO 4: CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Yorkshire Post adheres strictly to the PCC Code of Conduct. Not only are all staff issued with a copy of the code, but it is a condition of their employment that all journalists must comply with the code (see Appendix 1). Additionally, guidelines are laid down by our parent company, Johnston Press, to which we also adhere (see Appendix 2 – JP editorial Policy 4.4). These state that at all times, journalists must operate within the law and observe the PCC code.

There is a further handbook for working editors produced by the Editorial Review Group. The ERG is an internal JP Committee whose members are Editors drawn from across the Group, and who represent a broad cross section of JP newspapers. As stated above, I was the ERG's founder chairman. The ERG's remit is to advise the PLC on editorial policy generally. A copy of the handbook appears at Appendix 3, and it will be seen that the need for professional and ethical integrity permeate it. References to the PCC, good practice, compliance with the law, the need to seek legal advice when appropriate, and so on, appear on almost every page. I refer in particular to the introduction from the current Chairman of the ERG (page 2), and the message from the Group's recently retired Chief Executive (page 3). The whole basis on which we operate could not be more clearly stated.

As editor, I expect staff to observe the highest professional standards and to behave at all times in a lawful and ethical manner. If a complaint is made, there is a clear procedure for dealing with it. A response is given within 48 hours of receiving a complaint, but usually before the end of the day on which it is received, even if that is an initial response to acknowledge the complaint and to inform the person or organisation concerned that we are investigating.

The staff concerned – for example, a reporter whose story has been the subject of complaint – will then be asked for a response. A decision will then be taken on how to treat the complaint. This can take several forms. A retraction or clarification may be published; on occasions, the complainant writes a letter for publication; on occasions, we carry a follow-up story which makes clear that an error has occurred.

In virtually all cases, complaints are dealt with and a solution acceptable to all parties settled upon within 24 hours.

The Yorkshire Post has unlimited access to legal advice, which we use frequently in advance of publication, mostly on complex investigative stories in which individuals are named in connection to wrongdoing. I offer an example (1) below.

Additionally, I am always mindful of what will be acceptable or potentially offensive or upsetting to readers. Four-letter swear words, even when used in evidence to a court, are never published, nor is excessively graphic detail of offences. The same mindfulness is at work in relation to the use of pictures. I offer an example (2) below.

Example 1: In 2009/10 the Yorkshire Post carried out an extensive investigation into financial mismanagement and failures of corporate governance at Leeds Metropolitan University which focussed on the activities of its vice chancellor. At every step of the way, we took the advice of our solicitor. The vice chancellor subsequently stepped down and there was wholesale change in the way the university was run.

Example 2: On the day Colonel Gadaffi was captured and killed, photographs of his corpse were available to us and widely used in the national newspapers and by television. We took the view that our readers would find such images upsetting and gratuitous, so decided against their use.

QUESTION 5: EDITORIAL PRACTICES

The phone hacking scandal has made absolutely no difference to our editorial practices. Unlawful and unethical activities were not part of the Yorkshire Post's methods, so there was nothing to change.

QUESTIONS 6 AND 7: CHECKING INFORMATION

There is a rigorous procedure for checking information and sources. The newsdesk staff are the front line on this issue; reporters work to them on a day-to-day basis, and the newsdesk expects to be briefed in detail on where the story has come from and who are the sources of information. The newsdesk is overseen by the assistant editor, who also expects to be briefed, and myself as editor.

There is an absolute requirement on reporters to reveal in full and in detail their sources and the method used to obtain the information. This can range from a formal interview in person or by telephone to documents passed on by sources within organisations (eg police authorities, NHS trusts etc) which are the trigger for on-the-record enquiries to the organisations concerned.

An editor should always be aware of the provenance of the central stories in his newspaper. In practice, I am briefed by the assistant editor or the newsdesk at various points in the day; at morning and afternoon editorial conference, by the newsdesk at the various points when I sit down with the staff to discuss the news schedule and how we should present that day's material. On particularly complex, or potentially contentious stories, I may convene a meeting with the reporter and news editor concerned to go through a story in detail, which would include its provenance and its sources. I believe I am fully aware of exactly where central stories have come from and how they have been obtained.

Example 1: In the course of an investigation into financial malpractice at Doncaster Borough Council, a confidential report by the Audit Commission which reached damning conclusions was passed to us. I satisfied myself that the source of this information was credible before I would countenance going ahead with the story.

Example 2: The Yorkshire Post revealed that a chief constable had engaged in nepotism to further the career of a relation. This followed a tip-off from a member of a police authority. Before publishing the story, I asked to see detailed notes of interviews and copies of confidential reports to the police authority on the matter. I also went through the story with the reporter concerned, so I was conversant with every aspect of the information it rested on.

QUESTION 8: ETHICS

Ethics should be central to the operation of a newspaper. My view on what this means in practice is that we should behave lawfully, honestly and with transparency at all times.

The issues which resulted in the creation of the Inquiry (phone hacking, breaches of the Data Protection Act, corruption of police officers, and so on) have never, ever, been part of the regional press, and as far as I am aware, have never occurred at any newspaper at which I have worked. Johnston Press policy on these issues was revised in July 2011 (see Appendix 4 – JP editorial Policy 4.10),

The readers' right to know is of major importance. However, an editor needs to be mindful of the sensitivities – legal and ethical - of those involved. For example, the reporting of inquests into the deaths of children has to be handled with great sensitivity for the feelings of the families involved.

QUESTION 9: FINANCIAL PRESSURE

I have never felt any financial/commercial pressure from the owners of the Yorkshire Post that have influenced my editorial decisions. The Group recognises the fundamental importance of press freedom, of an editor's right to edit, and of the need to ensure general management does not impinge upon editorial independence (see Appendix 5 – JP editorial Policy 4.7).

QUESTION 10: FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

I am on a fixed salary and receive no financial inducements/incentives related to exclusive stories. Any incentives relate to key performance indicators around company profitability; newspaper sales and online audience.

QUESTIONS 11 TO 14: PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS.

At no point in my career have any of the papers I worked on or edited used private investigators. Nor have payments or benefits in kind been provided to police officers or other public officials in return for information. We do not pay for stories.

QUESTIONS 15 TO 16: PAYMENT PROTOCOLS

No cash payments are made by the Yorkshire Post. Invoices from freelance journalists/agencies whose work we use are signed off by me and settled by bank transfer by a central accounts/payroll office which handles all Johnston Press transactions. Out-of-pocket expenses to staff, who must provide receipts, are also paid by bank transfer.

QUESTION 17: PRIVACY VERSUS PUBLIC INTEREST

I cannot recall an incident where the Yorkshire Post has been accused of breaching somebody's privacy. Nor can my assistant editor, who has 21 years' service with the newspaper.

On very rare occasions, members of the public who have been involved in – usually – traumatic events such as road accidents or crime, request that their identity or that of a family member is withheld. Each case is treated on an individual basis, but the presumption is that we do not wish to cause distress, and so generally treat such a request sympathetically, provided it does not compromise the accuracy or the comprehensiveness of the story.

More frequently, it is sometimes the case that police will ask us to withhold the name of a victim of crime for operational reasons. The name may have been passed to us, for example, by neighbours when a reporter has gone out to knock on doors. In those circumstances, if there is consensus with other media outlets in the area, we comply with such requests.

Example 1: The wife of a prominent businessman was car-jacked as she dropped her son off at school. Her name was passed to us by other parents who witnessed the incident. We were asked by police not to publish it as they believed it was a targeted attack connected to an ongoing investigation in which an arrest was imminent and which in turn would lead to the arrest of the car-jacker. We complied with the request not to publish the name.

QUESTION 18: CONCLUSIONS

The Yorkshire Post, in common with the rest of the regional press, behaves honestly, lawfully and responsibly.

The practices which prompted the formation of Lord Justice Leveson's inquiry do not, and never have, played any part in our journalism, and it would be grossly unfair – as well as a disservice to the communities we serve – if our ability to report fearlessly and with absolute integrity was compromised or hampered as a result.