

IPSO ANNUAL REPORT

For Highland News and Media Limited,

New Stadium Road,

Inverness IV1 1FG

Covering the period 1st January to 31st December 2019

Prepared by Editorial Director David Bourn.

Introduction

Highland News and Media Limited, formerly known as Scottish Provincial Press, is a privately-owned company producing eighteen weekly newspapers covering Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, Strathspey, Moray Banffshire and Aberdeenshire.

All titles are printed at the DC Thomson's print centre in Dundee after we closed our own press in the Ross-Shire county town of Dingwall in 2017.

Up until 2017, Scottish Provincial Press had editorial and advertising offices in Wick, Thurso, Golspie, Dingwall, Inverness, Grantown-on-Spey, Kingussie, Forres, Elgin, Banff, Keith, Huntly and Buckie.

In 2017 we closed many of the smaller offices to concentrate operations in three main centres, Inverness, Wick and Elgin. Our Golspie office is also still open, although not to the public, and we now have an office in Turriff. This follows the acquisition of the Advertiser series.

We still employ around 120 people across the remaining sites in the Highlands, Moray and Aberdeenshire.

As well as the paid for titles, these people also produce two 11 newspaper websites, 4 classified websites, around 140 special publications annually and 120 armed forces publications annually.

Up until January 2016, each of the newspapers had its own editor, reporting into me and I represent the editorial function on the management board. I now also edit our two Inverness titles, the Inverness Courier and the Highland News, on top of my group responsibilities.

TITLES

Inverness Courier, Highland News, Caithness Courier, John O'Groat Journal, Northern Times, Ross-shire Journal, North Star, Strathspey and Badenoch Herald, Forres Gazette, Northern Scot, Banffshire Journal, Banffshire Advertiser, Banffshire Herald, Huntly Express, Ellon Advertiser, Inverurie Advertiser, Turriff Advertiser. In addition we publish a monthly business magazine, Executive, which is free.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON

Editorial Director, David Bourn. Email david.bourn@hnmedia.co.uk

OUR STANDARDS

All of our journalists are issued with a code of conduct when they join and their contracts make it clear that they are expected to act within its guidelines. The sub editors and the editors are also trained to spot any stories that fall below those standards as a further check level.

The editors are instructed to inform the editorial director if they are in any doubt and he has the remit to run any stories he is not sure about past an IPSO officer.

He has not had to do this in the seven years he has been in the job, either with IPSO or the PCC.

All of our journalists understand the need to have stories independently verified.

All updates to the code are communicated directly to all the relevant staff as soon as they are announced as are any guidelines, like the notes issued about social media reporting.

OUR COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS

We accept complaints in any format, letter, email, telephone call or personal attendance at one of our offices.

Our complaints procedure, issued to all editors is:

- 1) All complaints should be handled in the first instance by the title editor. Initial contact with the complainant must be made within 24 hours of receipt.**
- 2) Each editor must report all corrections and formal complaints to the editorial director in a weekly report. The report should include how disputes were handled and this will make compiling the annual compliance report easier.**
- 3) If disputes look like they will not be resolved, the editorial director must be informed as soon as possible so the matter can be discussed.**
- 4) After initial contact with the editor, further official correspondence with an aggrieved party should come from the editorial director so the complainer is aware the matter has been escalated.**
- 5) If the editorial director is satisfied the complaint has been handled properly but there is no resolution the editorial director should inform the complainant their next step is to refer to IPSO.**
- 6) The editorial director will compile a monthly complaints report which can be discussed at an the editors' quarterly forum and submitted to the board reports. Again, this will**

make the job of compiling the annual report much easier.

7) The complaints protocol should be prominently displayed in print and online so no-one is in any doubt how the system works.

8) If there is a complaint about an online article, before making any substantive changes to that article in response to a complaint, staff should archive a complete copy of the article complained about. (This does not include trivial changes such as changes to spelling of grammar). The archived copy must be kept for a minimum of four months from the date of the amendment to ensure that IPSO has access to the original article should a complaint be received.

All news managers have been instructed that when a complaint is made it should be referred immediately to me so that I can decide how it is to be handled. Sometimes that is done by me and sometimes by the local news team, whichever is deemed more appropriate.

All of our titles carry a panel explaining our complaints procedure and stating that if a complaint is not resolved it will be referred to IPSO. We also include web links to the code and IPSO and IPSO's telephone number. All websites also have a "How to complain" tab at the bottom of the home page containing the same information.

TRAINING

For four years we ran an annual training session for editorial staff with Alison Hastings from the PCC hosting.

Around 50 per cent of our editorial staff received this training.

With the introduction of the new regulator, we have now subscribed to an online training service provided by the Press Association. Currently almost half of our senior editorial staff have successfully completed this.

OUR RECORD

We have had no IPSO complaints in the 12 months covered by this report.

DOCUMENTS

The amended complaints procedure was issued to all our content management teams for distribution to their reporters.

The document issued to each new starter in the company makes reference to the editors' code which is also issued to each new editorial starter.