

IPSO Annual Statement for 2020

About DNG Media

We are an independent publisher with four weekly newspaper titles covering Dumfries and Galloway.

We also have a website and a range of specialist publications.

The paid for print titles are the Annandale Herald, the Moffat News and the Annandale Observer. There is also the free newspaper, The Dumfries Courier, which is distributed through pick up points.

As hyperlocal titles, the bulk of content is news, sports and features and in 2020 this, obviously, was dominated by the impact of covid on the local area and the people. Editorially, the papers take an independent political stance and we ensure all the political parties and local representatives are included regularly, with MSPs and MPs given the chance to submit a monthly column.

When the papers and website is combined, our circulation area covers Dumfries and Galloway and also stretches into parts of north Cumbria and the Scottish Borders. However, the main focus is on eastern Dumfries and Galloway, around the towns of Dumfries, Annan, Lockerbie, Lochmaben and Langholm and their rural hinterlands. All four newspapers date from the 19th century and have a readership of varied age.

In 2020, the website was revamped but it still carries all the main stories and breaking news from around the whole region. There are also sports sections, features, weather and travel information. It transcends the circulation area of the print titles, extending out to the far west of the county.

Content for the print titles and website is created and edited at our headquarters in Annan by the newsroom team, comprising the editor, associate editor and staff reporters. There is a staff photographer but freelancers are also used for pictures. Readers also submit some content, reports, columns and letters.

During 2020, we introduced a partial home working system for the reporters in light of lockdown restrictions. This is still in place.

In terms of DNG Media's IPSO membership, the responsible person is Peter Laidlaw, managing director. His contact is 01461 202417.

Editorial Standards

The news team continues to be led by Fiona Reid, who has worked for the company since 2000 and has been editor since April 2018.

As such, she is well acquainted with the firm's policies, procedures and standards.

All members of the editorial team live in the circulation area and are in daily contact with readers, who are encouraged to contact us via social media, the phone and online. This has been more valuable than ever during covid.

The news team value feedback - both positive and negative - and it helps to reinforce editorial standards.

We take our reporting responsibilities seriously, with several levels of proof reading and fact checking in place.

Our aim is to be fair and balanced in what we publish and to satisfy the demand for local news and to provide an effective local advertising service.

The Editors' Code of Practice is on display in several places in the newsroom and is regularly referred to and consulted- and updated when applicable. It is also the subject of a module taught to the trainee journalists by our trainer, Charles Fletcher.

We also take ongoing professional advice on the latest legal developments impacting on the media and discuss examples of best practice elsewhere. These are shared across the team. When contentious stories arise, we seek to verify facts from various sources, including our own legal consultants, and, on occasion, we have used IPSO's own pre-publication guidance service as well for advice.

Overall in the course of the year we received a low number of complaints relating to our content and most of those were minor factual errors which were dealt with by corrections or clarification statements in the next edition.

We believe this low level of complaints can be attributed to our high editorial standards and thorough procedures.

As previously, we received occasional queries from readers unclear about the legality of us being allowed to carry court content in the paper. This type of contact usually just requires an explanation of the rules around court reporting.

With regards to our policies relating to transparency regarding financial relationships or conflicts of interest: as a company it is our policy not to make payments for any news stories or leads to the general public. We do, however, make occasional use of freelance journalists, photographers and occasional columnists. In addition, our journalists' employment contracts contain the firm's Anti Bribery Policy.

Complaints Handling

Our policy is to correct factual errors at the earliest opportunity in a bid to maintain trust with our readers.

Individuals also have a right of reply through our letters page.

Minor factual mistakes are usually dealt with by the reporter concerned, who types up the required text and flags it up to a senior member of the editorial staff to ensure it's reviewed and placed appropriately.

More serious complaints go straight to the editor or her deputy for consideration. They are immediately logged and fact checked, then a memo is drawn up for our records. We keep in touch with the complainant with updates on our findings/assessment and if a correction is required then we agree a form of words with them.

A summary of our complaints policy and contact details for IPSO and ourselves appear in all our newspapers and on our website.

DNG Media takes complaints about our titles seriously and we are committed to abiding by IPSO rules and regulations and the Editors' Code of Practice.

Complaints Policy

1. This policy relates to all complaints made against the Editors' Code of Practice administered by IPSO.
2. DNG Media aims to handle all complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible.
3. All complaints will be acknowledged within five working days.
4. If we receive multiple complaints about the same issue, we may make one response to all.
5. We may request further information from you in order to investigate your complaint.
6. We will seek to resolve the complaint once all the details have been established to your satisfaction within 28 days where appropriate. If we fail to resolve this to your satisfaction then you may refer the matter to IPSO.
7. If we feel that we cannot take your complaint forward because we do not believe it has raised a complaint against the Editor's Code, we will let you know.
8. You can see a copy of the Editor's Code here - [web link](#)
9. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint you can contact IPSO here - [web link](#)
10. If at any stage we do not hear back from you within a 28 day period, we will consider your complaint to be resolved.

Training Process

The small editorial team comprises the editor with over 20 years experience and industry qualifications, supported by senior journalists with varied backgrounds, including journalism graduates.

The newspaper group has a long association with the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) and has put many reporters through their recognised qualifications.

Our trainees learn through a mix of on the job experience, in house training with professional tutors, courses and distance learning.

There is ongoing internal discussion and training updates in law and on legislation which could impact our work.

There was very little formal training during 2020 due to coronavirus.

Record of compliance

In 2020, DNG Media logged seven complaints, of which four were related to court stories and were submitted by the person convicted or their family member and were objecting to their details appearing in the paper.

There was another complaint lodged about details given out by the police following a road traffic accident; and the final two related to a story on a breach of covid regulations and questioned our interpretation of legislation.

Most were resolved satisfactorily through discussions between the editor and parties involved and explanations/clarifications about law points. Any inaccuracies that were found and proven were corrected in subsequent editions.

However, one of the court case complaints necessitated several discussions with both the accused and his victims and took a few weeks to resolve. It arose from and was complicated by the lack of access to the courts during the first covid lockdown.

Finally, a request was made to remove a headline from an archived website story relating to a court case.

There were no complaints relating to our newspapers or website submitted to IPSO for independent adjudication.