

CUMBERLAND & WESTMORLAND HERALD IPSO ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Cumberland & Westmorland Herald (CWH), established in 1860, has just completed its second full year as part of Barrnon Media. It went into administration during early 2020 and is now part of a small but growing media business – that includes The Keswick Reminder newspaper and Cumbria Crack – the county’s biggest news website.

The CWH newspaper is an independent weekly broadsheet covering a large area of East Cumbria, including the towns of Penrith, Appleby, Kirkby Stephen, Keswick and Alston. It covers 75 parishes in Eden (population 53k) and the Keswick Reminder (KR) covers 5 parishes in Keswick (population 4.9k). Despite being historically plagued with declining print sales, declining advertising revenue and increased costs, the business is now sustainable and growing. The KR shows print sales growth of 2% YoY. As for the business, it’s recorded its second healthy profit in two years.

The history

The CWH newspaper has been published under a number of different titles including: Penrith Herald, Appleby & Kirkby Stephen Herald, and Mid Cumberland & North Westmorland Herald. Since 1925 it has been published under its present title, Cumberland & Westmorland Herald.

The paper gained national exposure when it revealed in 2015 that the then Cumbria police and crime commissioner had undertaken chauffeur-driven journeys at the time of cuts in the police service, with three people subsequently being arrested in connection with leaking the information.

2021

If year 1 was a year of change -- administration, new owner, new MD, investment and then growth. Year 2 was a year of consolidation amid another year of a global pandemic that resulted in more restrictive measures. A bit like someone switching the lights off in 2020, then in 2021 we turned the dimmer switch back on and turned it up or down to meet rising or falling demand. As we exited 2021, we were faced with higher asset prices, governments making their own decisions based on their own experiences and then inflation – especially in printing and energy costs.

It was also a year of achievements.

- The CWH was highly commended in the Society of Editors Regional newspaper awards
- It produced the best Christmas supplement in its history – another glossy supported by advertisers and our sales team

- It invested in staff and technology; cementing a new tech platform.
- And we partnered with Cumbria Food Awards 2021 to try and boost audience

Consultant (MD) John Holliday said: “Our goal is to build a sustainable media business from virtual scratch and it’s doing well. We will grow again in 2022. Our mission remains to create a sense of connection and belonging in the North Lake District community that is hard to come by in some other way.

“As local news publishers shrink – or go away all together -- here we are building a sustainable model for local news, which we think has tremendous value for local democracy.

“We have a vision to be the best small-cap multi-media media business in Britain. To win newspaper of the year awards. To serve our community and be the voice of the community.”

The financial year again proved successful. 80% of total revenue comes from CWH. Advertising has had a good year with new customers arriving, combined with retention of old and the return of a number dormant clients. We put the price of the weekly Keswick Reminder up by 10p to £1 and kept the price of the CWH static at £1.50.

“Newspaper sales continue to decline overall on the CWH, while rising on the KR. The goal for 2022 is to grow audience on all platforms with a content first strategy (as opposed a platform first strategy). We remain confident our ‘local names, local places and local faces’ tagline will resonate with local readers – and we envisage more growth online,” added Holliday.

Today

The newspapers still offer their Eden Valley and Keswick communities local news coverage, which includes a high number of reports and pictures, as well as extensive classified and ROP advertising, accounting for the strength of the newspapers and their loyal popularity. This is supported by a growing online offering.

Cumbria Crack has grown from 340k monthly uniques to 468k – and considering only 483k people live in Cumbria – it’s virtually saturated.

The publishing company has three main departments, editorial, advertising and distribution. The editor remains Emily Atherton -- the first woman and only the 8th editor in the Herald’s history when appointed in September 2019.

The Cumberland & Westmorland Herald and Keswick Reminder are both printed by Newsquest, in Glasgow.

The CWH circulation figures, in the process of being certified by BPP, stands at c8,121 copies sold on average for the CWH. This includes c300 copies mailed out to subscribers each week and c200 digital subscribers. The KR sells c 2k papers a week.

Editorial standards

The CWH and KR adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice, which, like most newspaper publishers in Britain, consider to be a sound statement of ethical behaviour for journalists. We strive to ensure that its articles are fair and accurate, and that readers have a right of reply if there is something they do not agree with.

As two established newspapers viewed as a matter of record, our journalists are well aware of how vital accurate reporting is in maintaining the public's trust.

The newspapers have not yet sought guidance from IPSO on the publication of one of its articles, but would do so if it was considered to potentially be in breach of the code of practice.

Complaints handling process

Editorial complaints are accepted in the first instance by letter, telephone or e-mail. Depending on the extent of the complaint, for instance a minor correction or clarification, it can be firstly handled by an experienced journalist or the news editor/deputy editor before being passed on to the editor. Any complaints that have legal implications are immediately lodged with the editor – and the MD is made aware.

A record, either in e-mail format or hard copy, is kept of all complaints received and what action, if any, has been taken.

We accept that complaints should be resolved as quickly as possible and hope this can be achieved in direct negotiation with the complainant, and an apology published where appropriate. Any complaints that have legal implications are dealt with in conjunction with our legal advisers and, if needed, lawyers are engaged.

A column for corrections and clarifications appears, as and when required, on Page 7 (CWH) page 2 (KR). Also on Page 7/2 in every edition is a statement that the Herald and KR abides by the IPSO code of practice. It also informs readers that if they want to make representations about articles they should write in the first instance to the editor and that, if not satisfied, they can contact IPSO, whose postal address, e-mail address, telephone number and website details are provided.

Training process

The company has historically run, on a refresher basis, training for its journalists in legal matters and responsibilities, but none of late. There is a plan for training in 2022 as it is now considered appropriate. Journalists are issued with a copy of the code of practice. There are ongoing internal discussions on developments in law and legislation which impacts on journalism. The Company has a long association with the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ).

Record on compliance

To my knowledge, from 1st January, 2021, to 31st December, 2021, there were no complaints against the publisher which have been ruled on by IPSO's Complaints Committee, and no incidents in relation to which the publisher accepted that it had breached the editors' code, or which otherwise raised significant concerns about compliance with the editors' code.

During the period there were a small number of complaints which were resolved satisfactorily via dialogue and explanation and the remainder were factual inaccuracies which were corrected at the earliest available opportunity.

Signed

John Holliday
IPSO responsible person

Date 17th March 2022.