



For accountable journalism

The Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP
Speaker of the House of Commons
By email, c/o: edwardsjj@parliament.uk

1 August, 2025

Dear Sir Lindsay,

Thank you for your letter dated 21 July 2025 regarding IPSO regulation and the Editors' Code of Practice in relation to press harassment. I am glad to have the opportunity to share some thoughts on the points you have raised. If it would be helpful, I would also be happy to come in to speak to the Speaker's Conference about these matters.

I will use your subject headings for clarity.

Homes and families

I was deeply concerned to read the report that a Member of Parliament's son was persuaded to share their parent's mobile telephone number through deception. I was not previously aware of this allegation, and having made some internal inquiries, it does not appear to have been raised with us. I would be keen to speak with the person concerned to understand what happened in more detail, and how IPSO might be able to assist. If it is possible for you to convey this to the appropriate party, I would be most grateful. It raises several issues of potential significance under the Editors' Code of Practice.

More broadly, IPSO operates a number of services to support those experiencing unwanted press attention, intrusion or harassment. In addition to the complaints service, IPSO operates a 24-hour harassment helpline. This can be reached on 0300 123 22 20 between 9am to 5pm and by leaving a message for a call back on 07799 903929 when out of hours. We can provide advice and in some instances

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issue confidential privacy notices to prevent or stop intrusion or harassment. This system covers all IPSO-regulated publications, and also broadcasters, agencies and non-regulated publications who choose to participate on a goodwill basis, because they recognise the importance and effectiveness of the system.

We are always working to raise awareness of these services and how they can effectively protect individuals. We have made particular efforts to publicise these services to Members of Parliament, as they play a dual role: as individuals in the public eye who may be in need of our services; and as conduits to members of the public in their constituencies who may be in need, similar to (for example) police and coroners' services.

Because we are particularly concerned that MPs should be aware of who we are and how we can help, following last year's general election, we supplied every Member of Parliament with an information pack outlining how IPSO operates and the services we can provide MPs to protect themselves and their constituents. We also send a newsletter to all MPs quarterly, which regularly features these services. We are always looking for opportunities to build on this work. the Speaker's Conference and its work on the safety of MPs is regrettably vital, and I believe IPSO can be of support in protecting members from unwanted press intrusion, as we do with members of the public. I would be eager to work with you and your office to discuss how we might collaborate on this issue.

Finally, with respect to the question you raise about attempts to contact Members of Parliament at their homes, Clause 3 (Harassment) sets a clear standard that journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit; and further that they must cease in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist, and leave a property when asked to do so. Any journalist wishing to depart from this standard must be prepared to demonstrate that they reasonably believed the journalistic activity would both serve, and be proportionate to, the public interest – and explain how they reached that decision at the time.

It is also the case, however, that approaching an individual for comment is often a part of taking care over accuracy, as required under Clause 1 (Accuracy), and in certain instances may be essential.

Applying the terms of Clause 3 to a particular situation is a matter for the Complaints Committee, based on close scrutiny of the circumstances, including precisely what has happened, the accounts of the complainant and publication, and consideration of any relevant public interest justification offered.

Headlines

The Editors' Code of Practice is clear: under Clause 1 (i) (Accuracy), the press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.

To give just two examples, in [Various v The Daily Telegraph](#), in which a headline figure of a pay increase was found by the Committee to not be supported by the body of the text, the complaint was upheld and an adjudication issued.

Likewise, in [Williams-Key v express.co.uk](#), the Committee found a headline claim of a £450 payment towards households' heating costs was not supported by the text. The Committee ordered a correction that made clear the headline claim was not supported by the article, and that households would not receive £450.

Publishers finding new ways of presenting information that engages readers in a challenging media environment is something to be celebrated, and IPSO does not seek to interfere with editorial discretion over headlines. Where it identifies headlines that are misleading, distorted or unsupported by the text, however, it will not hesitate to uphold the required standard.

Independent journalists

IPSO regulation applies to any editorial content included in a printed newspaper or magazine, and editorial content on electronic services operated by regulated publishers, including websites, apps and social media feeds controlled by the

publisher. This is regardless of the medium (text, pictures, video, audio/visual and interactive content) and contributor (staff, freelance, user).

This principle is established firmly throughout IPSO's governance framework.

The preamble to the Editors' Code of Practice, the set of rules against which IPSO regulates, states that "It is the responsibility of editors and publishers to apply the Code to editorial material in both printed and online versions of their publications. They should take care to ensure it is observed rigorously by all editorial staff and external contributors, including non-journalists." This is further underlined in Clause 3, which emphasises the proactive duty that editors have to take care over the sourcing of content, stating "Editors must ensure these principles are observed by those working for them and take care not to use non-compliant material from other sources."

Furthermore, the Scheme Membership Agreement, the contract that sets the terms by which IPSO regulates publishers, requires that each regulated entity will use its "reasonable endeavours to ensure that "all its employees, officers, agents and sub-contractors [...] comply with the Editors' Code".¹

In practical terms, this means that conduct comes within IPSO's remit, either:

- When it takes place as part of activity that has been commissioned by regulated publication (whether or not the contributor has specifically been instructed to undertake that activity, for example following a person or taking a photograph at a particular time); or
- When the activity occurred as part of the process of gathering or preparing material that is later published by a regulated publication.

¹ IPSO [Scheme Membership Agreement](#), Clause 3.3.1

This is why we recommend anyone concerned with the upholding of press standards to look for news sources that are IPSO-regulated and be mindful of whether or not the outlet they are viewing is subject to any form of regulation, be it IPSO, Ofcom or otherwise. IPSO-regulated titles are required to declare that they are regulated by IPSO and give details of how to make a complaint.

Conclusion

I hope these responses are useful in addressing your concerns. As I referred to earlier, I would be keen to work with yourself and your office to explore ways we can increase awareness of IPSO's harassment services, so every MP can feel reassured there is support available to them, should they need it. If you wish to meet, or hear evidence from IPSO in front of the committee, we would be more than willing to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Charlotte Dewar

Chief Executive, Independent Press Standards Organisation



Speaker's House House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Monday, 21st July 2025

Dear Ms Dewar,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Speaker's Conference, a committee set up by the House of Commons to consider threats against MPs, candidates and elections.

One of the questions the Conference is working to answer is what is driving public attitudes towards abuse in politics, and as part of this we are considering the role played by the press. We recently took evidence from the chair of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, Anushka Asthana, and the chair of the Parliamentary Lobby, David Hughes. During this session, the Conference discussed with witnesses how journalists engage with subjects' homes and families, the accuracy of headlines, and the role of independent journalists, who we were told are covered by the IPSO code. The session raised several questions relating to IPSO's role, set out below.

Homes and families

What are IPSO's requirements around when and how journalists can speak to the family members of an MP or candidate who is the subject of a story (or any other public figure)? We have heard a story about a journalist telling an MP's young son that they were a friend of the MP in order to get the MP's personal number:¹ would this be acceptable under the IPSO Code, and if not, could there be a public interest defence?

Groups of journalists waiting outside an MP or candidate's home are often threatening and reduce their sense of safety. The IPSO Code includes a public interest defence for harassment that is used to justify press gathering at private residences. What do you believe is the public interest in this practice, when it is possible to simply report that the subject declined to comment? Do you agree with the view that this practice is necessary to demonstrate that the press made every attempt to get a comment from a subject?²

¹ Q188

² Q197

Headlines

We have been told that headlines must be accurate but must also be read in the context of the story. Given that for many people the headline may be the only part of the story they read, what provisions do you have in place, or consider may be effective, in ensuring that headlines do not give a misleading or unbalanced impression of the content of the article? What position does IPSO take on “click bait” titles, or headline writing practices such as presenting a claim from a partisan organisation as a fact,³ phrasing headlines as questions when the evidence cannot justify a claim,⁴ or other misleading practices?⁵

Independent journalists

We understand that editors must ensure that the IPSO Code rules on harassment are observed not only by their staff but also by contributors such as agencies.⁶ What penalty would IPSO apply if an editor engaged an independent journalist who then breached the rules on harassment, or used material submitted by an independent journalist who had breached those rules (either with or without the editor’s knowledge)? How has the increase in citizen journalists affected the IPSO Code’s impact and its ability to ensure journalistic standards?

We would appreciate you providing this information by 1 August so that we can properly consider it as part of the Conference’s future programme of work. I plan to publish this letter and any reply.

Best regards,



Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP

Speaker

Charlotte Dewar
Chief Executive Officer, IPSO

³ Q179

⁴ “[Betteridge’s law of headlines](#)”, Wikipedia, accessed 16 July 2025

⁵ “[The media must stop using misleading headlines](#)”, Full Fact, 28 May 2021

⁶ [Editors Codebook](#), p61