



Advice from Alan The Media Council

by Alan Knowsley, consultant, Rainey Collins Lawyers

The Media Council deals with complaints generally about print media such as newspapers

and magazines plus online content of publications and broadcasters. A complaint should first be submitted to the editor or author and there are strict timeframes to raise a complaint. If it is about an article, within one month of initial publication. For a series of articles, within one month of the last article (or the grounds for complaint becoming apparent). For a blog or online content, within one month, but up to two years if it remains online. For matters not relating to a publication, within one month of the incident. For refusal to publish, within two months of the request to publish.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or it is not dealt with within 10 working days, then a complaint can be made to the Media Council within 20 working days.

The Media Council gives primary consideration to freedom of expression along with the public interest. The principles they usually look at include: accuracy, fairness, and balance – there should be no deliberate misleading or misinforming

of readers and opposing views should be included. Privacy should be respected, especially of those suffering from grief or trauma, but privacy does not override the reporting of matters of public interest or record. The interests of children and young people need special care and only an exceptional degree of public interest will override that.

Facts should be accurate and clearly distinguished from commentary. Opinion pieces should be clearly identified. Headlines should be accurate and fair. Issues of diversity and discrimination may be reported on and opinions offered. Confidential sources should be protected but need to be well informed and reliable. Information cannot be obtained by subterfuge or dishonest means, except in very limited circumstances. Conflicts of interest should be declared. Photographs must not be manipulated without disclosure and photographs of shocking or distressing situations need special consideration. Any significant errors should be corrected promptly with fair prominence. Apologies and a right of reply should be considered.

The Media Council website has an online process for submitting a complaint.