

IN THE MATTER OF:

AN INQUIRY UNDER THE INQUIRIES ACT 2005

INTO THE CULTURE, PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS

CHAired BY THE RT HON LORD JUSTICE LEVESON

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF ROBERT SINCLAIR IRVINE

I, **ROBERT SINCLAIR IRVINE**, of the Manchester Evening News, MEN Media, Mitchell Henry House, Hollinwood Avenue, Chadderton, Oldham OL9 8EF WILL SAY as follows:

1. I am the Editor-in-Chief of the MEN Media titles and Trinity Mirror Huddersfield. MEN Media and Trinity Mirror Huddersfield are part of Trinity Mirror plc ("**Trinity Mirror**").
2. I am providing this witness statement in response to a notice dated 3 July 2012 pursuant to section 21(2) of the Inquiries Act 2005 (the "**Notice**").
3. Where the contents of this statement are within my own knowledge they are true and where they are not within my own knowledge I indicate the source of my belief and believe them to be true.
4. I am not authorised to waive any privilege on behalf of Trinity Mirror, MEN Media or Trinity Mirror Huddersfield and nothing in this witness statement is intended to constitute a waiver of privilege on behalf of any of them.
5. I deal with the matters set out in the Notice below, following the order of the Notice and using the Inquiry's numbering and headings.

Question 1: Who you are and your current job title

6. As stated above, my name is Robert Irvine and I am the Editor-in-Chief of MEN Media titles and Trinity Mirror Huddersfield. This role includes the editorship of the Manchester Evening News. I took up the post in April 2012, having previously been Editor of the Daily Post in North Wales.

Proposal for Self Regulation

The Notice states:

"Lord Black has submitted to the Inquiry a proposal for "a New and Effective System of Self-Regulation"¹. In his submission Lord Black states:

"Responses to the industry consultation from within an extremely diverse set of businesses have inevitably been varied. Parts of the industry – particularly the regional and periodical press – have been understandably anxious about such substantial change, especially when the current system works well for them (as the Inquiry has heard) and above all for their readers. They have rightly been worried about the potential increase in costs and bureaucracy of a new system. But at the other end of the spectrum, some national publishers have argued for even tougher controls. At the end of the day, therefore,

¹ <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Submission-by-Lord-Black-of-Brentwood1.pdf>

this proposal seeks so far as is possible to balance these views. But there is no doubt to me that the vast majority of the industry sees them as credible, likely to prove effective and that they will take part. Northern and Shell has indicated that it is willing to participate, subject to detailed contract terms."

7. In order to respond to the Inquiry's questions, I have familiarised myself with Lord Black's proposal, which I understand to be PressBof's (Press Standards Board of Finance) proposal and therefore refer to it in this statement as such, to the extent possible in the time made available to me in which to respond to the Notice.

Question 2: To what extent were you personally involved in drawing up this proposal for a new system of self-regulation based on contractual obligations, as now set out by Lord Black?

8. I was not personally involved in the drawing up of this proposal. I would not have expected to have been involved because this draft has been developed by PressBof in consultation with the publishing industry's trade associations amongst others, none of which I am or have ever been a member of. It also addresses issues of contractual and financial obligations which I believe fall outside the scope of my role within Trinity Mirror (as to which, see further below).
9. Whilst I am aware that the proposals form part of a continuing process of consultation within the industry, I have had no direct involvement in the consultation.

Question 3: How far would you personally, in your capacity as editor, expect to be involved in the final decision as to whether your publication signed up to the contractual obligations envisaged by this system? Please explain in full how that decision would be taken.

10. I would not, in my capacity as Editor, expect to be involved in the final decision as to whether the publications of which I am the Editor signed up to the contractual obligations envisaged by the system. This is because I believe that the final decision would be taken by Trinity Mirror's senior management, and in particular the Board of Directors, as part of a wider decision involving each and every one of the publications in the Group. I am not aware of the detail of how such a decision would be taken.

Question 4: In so far as you are able to do so, please indicate whether your publication is at present fully ready and committed to enter into these contractual obligations. If it is not at present fully ready and committed, please explain why, and detail any changes that would need to be made to the proposal, any further development to proposal [sic] required, or any preparatory steps that would need to be taken at your publication, in order to put it in the position of being fully ready and committed to enter into these obligations. If there are no circumstances in which it would be prepared to enter into obligations of this nature, please explain why not.

11. For the reasons explained above, I am unable to indicate whether the publications of which I am the Editor are at present fully ready and committed to enter into these contractual obligations, or as to whether there are no circumstances in which it would be prepared to enter into obligations of this nature.
12. In terms of the general proposals outlined in the draft, the publications of which I am the Editor would be ready to support a system of self-regulation.
13. I can see that, if my publications were to commit to enter into these obligations, then as a practical matter there are certain aspects of PressBof's proposals that would be likely to involve consideration of certain organisational matters and that some preparatory steps may need to be taken. For example:
 - 13.1. With respect to the proposal for there to be a "responsible person" or compliance officer appointed by each "Regulated Entity" responsible for publishing newspaper and/or magazine titles (contained in clause 3.1.7 of the proposed contractual framework at Annex B to PressBof's proposal), I can see that would involve the appointment of a senior individual at MEN Media with an understanding of the editorial role and the operational requirements.
 - 13.2. With respect to the proposal that every Regulated Entity shall submit an annual statement of its editorial practices containing the information identified in Annex A to the draft Regulations (at Annex C to PressBof's proposals), I believe that there would be preparatory steps that would need to be taken to present that information in the form of a statement to be submitted to the Regulator each year. However, I believe that those steps would be largely administrative because compliance-related information is already maintained at my publications. For example, any complaints and/or incidents relating to potential breaches of the Editors' Code of Practice are logged on a regular basis (for the purposes of discussion at weekly meetings and reporting to the Trinity Mirror parent company).

Question 5: What specific differences would membership of a system of the kind set out by Lord Black, underpinned by contractual obligations, make to the culture, practices and ethics of your publication?

14. From my current understanding of PressBof's proposal, I cannot at this time think of any specific differences which membership of a system of the kind set out by PressBof, underpinned by contractual obligations, would make to the culture, practices and ethics of my publications.

15. I adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice and I believe that its principles are engrained in the culture of my publications. The current relationship with the Press Complaints Commission has worked well for the regional press, including the publications of which I am the Editor. However, the success of those publications depends upon the existence of a trusting relationship with the communities we serve. People in those communities are aware of the concerns being addressed by Lord Justice Leveson's Inquiry. The public will inevitably have called into question the way in which the media in general is held to account. We, the regional press, cannot expect to be seen in complete isolation from other forms of media, especially during a time of media convergence, most notably online. I believe that a system of the kind proposed by PressBof would reinforce our relationship with the communities we serve and have their confidence in us underlined by a contractual obligation and an independent body which regulates as well as conciliates and has the teeth to address any systemic problems. I envisage that would be reinforced by the appointment of lay people in various aspects of the new structure (as detailed in Appendix 2 to Annex A of PressBof's Proposal).

Question 6: Is there any other comment you wish to make on the proposal put forward by Lord Black, or on the proposals put forward by others, that are now published on the Inquiry website at <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/about/module-4-submissions-on-the-future-regime-for-the-press/>

16. I believe that, although no regulatory system can be perfect, self-regulation is an acceptable regulatory system whereas statutory regulation is not. In my view, statutory regulation would be an unacceptable interference into press freedom and would threaten to interfere in the responsible, probing journalism that is vital in a democracy.

Signed



Robert Sinclair Irvine

Dated: **12** July 2012