

SWWMedia

South West Wales Media

Ms Brudenell
Leveson Inquiry Office
Royal Courts of Justice
Strand
London
WC2A 2LL

12th July 2012

Dear Ms Brudenell,

Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practices, and ethics of the press

Thank you for your letter dated June 29th 2012.

I respond to your specific questions below, but before doing so, I think it will assist if I explain my position, and that of Northcliffe Media Ltd. (the publisher of the Post) with regard to Lord Black's proposals, as contained in his witness statement dated June 7th 2012.

Neither I, nor any senior executive of Northcliffe Media, was aware of Lord Black's submission prior to receiving your letter at lunchtime on Friday, June 29th. On reading your letter, I located Lord Black's statement and appendices on the Inquiry website, and read them. I have also alerted Northcliffe senior management to his submission, who were also unaware of it. None of us have had sufficient time to consider the implications of his proposals.

I should make it clear that I am not authorised to provide you with any official comment on Lord Black's proposals. Any comments and decisions must come from Northcliffe Media's Board of Directors. I anticipate that the opinions of most, if not all, Northcliffe editors will be sought once a firm proposal is circulated for consideration, prior to the Board making a final decision.

Having said all this, I am able to tell you that my personal opinion is that I broadly agree with the day to day scheme of regulation suggested by Lord Black. I also believe that in view of Northcliffe's commitment to the current PCC Code, in due course the company will reiterate that it supports, believes in, and implements self regulation. However, it is not possible to give any kind of indication of my stance, or that of Northcliffe, to Lord Black's proposals at the present time. I and my colleagues are of the view that we need to see a final proposal which we can consider properly, before making a decision.

LLANELLI STAR ^{South Wales} Evening Post Carmarthen Journal
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South West Wales Media | P.O. Box 14 | Adelaide Street | Swansea | SA1 1QT | t (01792) 510 000 | www.thisissouthwales.co.uk

South West Wales Media is a trading name of Northcliffe Media Limited. Northcliffe Media Ltd is a company registered in England and Wales (registered no. 3403993) VAT No. 243571174 and its registered office is at Northcliffe Accounting Centre, PO Box 6795, St George Street, Leicester LE1 1ZP

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S o u t h W e s t W a l e s M e d i a

With regard to the specific questions you have raised:

- (a) I am Spencer Feeney, Editor of the South Wales Evening Post, Swansea.
- (b) As is obvious from my comments above, neither I nor any other officer or employee of Northcliffe Media has been involved in the drafting of Lord Black's proposals.
- (c) Only the company's Board would be able to enter into the type of contractual obligation envisaged by Lord Black, though I am sure that it will not make a decision without internal consultation. Along with Northcliffe's other editors, I expect to be asked to give my views on any new proposal, but the final decision will be the Board's, not ours.
- (d) For the reasons already stated, I am unable to answer this question, save to say that I know that it is Northcliffe's intention to be part of whatever regulatory framework is finally agreed. Northcliffe believes in the need for industry self-regulation, and as a responsible media owner, intends to be part of it.
- (e) If Lord Black's scheme were to come into force tomorrow, I do not consider that it would have any effect on the current culture, practices and ethics of the Post. As I have already said in my evidence, the Post is fully compliant with the PCC's Code (as are all other Northcliffe publications). That will continue to be the case.
- (f) I repeat that I cannot speak for Northcliffe, but I share the Society of Editors' view that a sense of proportion is vitally important while the future of press regulation is being considered in such depth; that the regional Press must not be penalised and limited as a result of failings in one very specific part of the industry, or some parts of the police, or some politicians; and that further work is required on funding, proposed contracts, and incentives to join the new regulatory arrangements.

Further, my colleagues and I remain concerned that Lord Black's proposal has not adequately addressed the regulation of online-only publishers. I am aware that Lord Black is suggesting that digital publishers based in the UK, Isle of Man or Channel Islands will be regulated in the same way that conventional publishers will be regulated. However, will such publishers agree to enter into contracts with the new regulator? The answer to this important question is unknown. Similarly, what will happen if they do not so agree? Again, we do not know.

It also seems to me that Lord Black's proposals will not result in foreign-based digital-only publishers being regulated, as the evidence of Paul Staines (who blogs as Guido Fawkes) to the Inquiry on February 8 demonstrated.

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These are important matters which remain unresolved.

There is one other matter I would like to raise with you. The Inquiry has heard much evidence about unethical and allegedly criminal conduct by a small number of people working within the national press. I do not recognise this kind of behaviour at all, and I have no doubt that all regional newspaper editors will agree with me. I am concerned, therefore, that the evidence of unacceptable behaviour on the part of the national press will be used to argue that such misbehaviour is rife throughout regional newspapers as well.

I wish to stress, therefore, that this is not the case. The UK's regional press is read by a large proportion of the UK's adult population each week, but despite this fact, not one of the witnesses who have given evidence to the Inquiry has alleged that there has been any similar behaviour by any regional journalist or publisher.

I believe that it would be wrong for the Inquiry to ignore this fact, and I urge Lord Leveson to bear in mind that no allegations of this nature have ever been made against the regional press. I also believe that it would be unfair and contrary to natural justice for the regional press to be penalised for the misdeeds of a small number of other people working within the national press.

Yours sincerely



Spencer Feeney
Editor in Chief

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