

Dorset News Media

Editors' Code of Practice

For accountable journalism

This Code of Practice, framed by the Editors' Code of Practice Committee, sets out the framework for the highest professional standards that Dorset News Media commits to uphold. It is the cornerstone of the system of voluntary self-regulation adopted by Dorset News Media and is enshrined in internal editorial policy.

About the Editors' Code of Practice

The Code – including this preamble and the public interest exceptions – sets the framework for the highest professional standards. It balances both the rights of the individual and the public's right to know.

To achieve that balance, it is essential that an agreed Code be honored not only to the letter, but in the full spirit. It should be interpreted neither so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect the rights of the individual, nor so broadly that it infringes the fundamental right to freedom of expression – such as to inform, to be partisan, to challenge, shock, be satirical and to entertain – or prevents publication in the public interest.

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.

Editors must maintain in-house procedures to resolve complaints swiftly and ensure appropriate remedies, including prompt and prominent corrections where required.

Exceptions to the Code

There may be exceptions to clauses marked * where they can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. These are fully explained at the end of this document.

1. Accuracy

- i) The press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.
- ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected promptly and with due prominence.

iii) A fair opportunity to reply to significant inaccuracies should be given, when reasonably called for.

iv) The press, while free to editorialise and campaign, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.

v) A publication must report fairly and accurately the outcome of an action for defamation to which it has been a party, unless an agreed settlement states otherwise.

Public Interest

There may be exceptions to clauses marked * where they can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

1. The public interest includes, but is not confined to:

- Detecting or exposing crime or serious impropriety.
- Protecting public health or safety.
- Protecting the public from being misled.
- Disclosing failures to comply with obligations.
- Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.
- Contributing to public debate on serious misconduct or incompetence.
- Disclosing efforts to conceal any of the above.

2. Freedom of expression is itself a matter of public interest.

3. Editors invoking the public interest must demonstrate how they reasonably believed the journalistic activity or publication would serve the public interest and that it was proportionate.

4. An exceptional public interest must be shown to override the normally paramount interests of children under 16.

Contact Dorset News Media

If you have concerns or wish to raise a complaint under this Code, please contact:

Email: newsdesk@dorset-news.co.uk

Website: <https://dorset-news.co.uk/>

2. *Privacy

- i) Everyone is entitled to respect for their private and family life, home, physical and mental health, and correspondence, including digital communications.
- ii) Editors will be expected to justify intrusions into any individual's private life without consent. In considering an individual's reasonable expectation of privacy, account will be taken of the complainant's own public disclosures of information and the extent to which the material complained about is already in the public domain or will become so.
- iii) It is unacceptable to photograph individuals, without their consent, in public or private places where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy.

3. *Harassment

- i) Journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit.
- ii) They must not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist; nor remain on property when asked to leave and must not follow them. If requested, they must identify themselves and whom they represent.
- iii) Editors must ensure these principles are observed by those working for them and take care not to use non-compliant material from other sources.

4. Intrusion into grief or shock

In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively. These provisions should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.

5. *Reporting suicide

When reporting suicide, to prevent simulative acts care should be taken to avoid excessive detail of the method used, while taking into account the media's right to report legal proceedings.

6. *Children

- i) All pupils should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion.
- ii) They must not be approached or photographed at school without permission of the school authorities.
- iii) Children under 16 must not be interviewed or photographed on issues involving their own or another child's welfare unless an adult with legal parental responsibility or similarly responsible adult consents.

iv) Children under 16 must not be paid for material involving their welfare, nor parents or guardians for material about their children or wards, unless it is clearly in the child's interest.

v) Editors must not use the fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life.

7. *Children in sex cases

1. The press must not, even if legally free to do so, identify children under 16 who are victims or witnesses in cases involving sex offences.

2. In any press report of a case involving a sexual offence against a child –

i) The child must not be identified.

ii) The adult may be identified.

iii) The word "incest" must not be used where a child victim might be identified.

iv) Care must be taken that nothing in the report implies the relationship between the accused and the child.

8. *Hospitals

i) Journalists must identify themselves and obtain permission from a responsible executive before entering non-public areas of hospitals or similar institutions to pursue enquiries.

ii) The restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to enquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions.

9. *Reporting of crime

i) Relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime should not generally be identified without their consent, unless they are genuinely relevant to the story.

ii) Particular regard should be paid to the potentially vulnerable position of children under the age of 18 who witness, or are victims of, crime. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.

iii) Editors should generally avoid naming children under the age of 18 after arrest for a criminal offence but before they appear in a youth court unless they can show that the individual's name is already in the public domain, or that the individual (or, if under 16, a custodial parent or similarly responsible adult) has given consent.

10. *Clandestine devices and subterfuge

- i) The press must not seek to obtain or publish material acquired by using hidden cameras or clandestine listening devices; or by intercepting private or mobile telephone calls, messages or emails; or by the unauthorised removal of documents or photographs; or by accessing digitally-held information without consent.
- ii) Engaging in misrepresentation or subterfuge, including by agents or intermediaries, can generally be justified only in the public interest and then only when the material cannot be obtained by other means.

11. Victims of sexual assault

The press must not identify or publish material likely to lead to the identification of a victim of sexual assault unless there is adequate justification and they are legally free to do so.

12. Discrimination

- i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.
- ii) Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

13. Financial journalism

- i) Journalists must not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication, nor should they pass such information to others.
- ii) They must not write about shares or securities in whose performance they or their close families have a significant financial interest without disclosing the interest.
- iii) They must not buy or sell shares or securities about which they have written recently or intend to write in the near future.

14. Confidential sources

Journalists have a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information.

15. Witness payments in criminal trials

- i) No payment or offer of payment to a witness – or any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness – should be made in any case once proceedings are active.

ii*) Where proceedings are not yet active but are likely and foreseeable, editors must not make or offer payment to any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness, unless the information concerned ought demonstrably to be published in the public interest.

iii*) Any payment or offer of payment made to a person later cited to give evidence in proceedings must be disclosed to the prosecution and defence. The witness must be advised of this requirement.

16. *Payment to criminals

i) Payment or offers of payment for stories, pictures or information which seek to exploit a particular crime or to glorify or glamorise crime in general, must not be made directly or via agents to convicted or confessed criminals or to their associates – who may include family, friends and colleagues.

ii) Editors invoking the public interest to justify payment or offers would need to demonstrate that there was good reason to believe the public interest would be served. If, despite payment, no public interest emerged, then the material should not be published.