

Sir Christopher Meyer's statement on the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee
Report on Privacy

Embargo: 12:01hrs, Monday 16th June 2003

I welcome the fact that the Select Committee recognises that “overall standards of press behaviour, the Code and the performance of the PCC have improved over the last decade” (p.3).

There is good reason for this. As the majority of submissions to the Committee underlined, the PCC does a first-rate job in serving the public and in raising standards of reporting across the print media in the UK. This is demonstrated by:

- the increasing number of people who use our service (heading towards a record of over 3,300 in 2003);
- the high level of satisfaction expressed by those who use the service (almost 70% of all complainants in the first quarter of this year, including those whose complaints did not succeed);
- the fact that almost all journalists now have observance of the PCC’s tough Code of Practice written into their contracts;
- the repeated recognition by the Courts (Flitcroft, Campbell, Ford, Douglas / Zeta-Jones) that privacy and the press is a matter for the PCC.

The PCC is not perfect. But it works better through “self-regulation plus” – a Commission in which tough-minded lay members outnumber editors – than any alternative on offer. It has been constantly improved over the years. Permanent evolution is one of its strengths. I have already set out in May an 8-point plan to increase independence, transparency, visibility and accountability. I welcome the fact that the Select Committee has endorsed this approach in its recommendations.

My colleagues and I will of course read what the Select Committee has had to say in detail. It is important to remember, however, that as an independent body – independent from newspapers, politicians, lawyers and any other interest group – the PCC is not obliged to accept any of them.

Our four-fold commitment to the public whose interests we serve remains clear. To continue raising standards of reporting across the British print media. To ensure that all those who need to complain have the information and help to do so. To provide a first class service to those with a grievance - free, fast and fair for all regardless of background. And to do so in a transparent, accountable and robustly independent way.

Behind these commitments is a deeper one: to freedom of speech, the life-blood of democracy.

ENDS