

Mr and Mrs Addai-Twumasi v MK News

Clauses noted: 1, 3

Mr and Mrs Addai-Twumasi complained to the Press Complaints Commission, through the Milton Keynes Citizens Advice Bureau, that an article in the MK News on 8th November 2006 was inaccurate and intrusive in breach of Clauses 1 (Accuracy) and 3 (Privacy) of the Code.

The complaint was upheld.

The article reported the tragic death of Deanne Asamoah, the complainants' thirteen-year-old daughter. It included the claim that Deanne had taken her own life after learning that her mother was suffering from a medical condition. The complainants said this was inaccurate. There was no evidence that Deanne had taken her own life, or that her mother's illness was a factor: she had known about the condition for four years. The reference to Mrs Addai-Twumasi's health was an intrusion into her privacy.

The newspaper had found out about the death a few hours before deadline, after it had been reported, in very general terms, in a school newsletter. Two separate reliable sources had confirmed the story, including the relevance of the mother's illness. It was in the public interest to cover the tragic death of such a young girl, but efforts to speak to the family pre-publication had come to nothing. The article distinguished conjecture from fact by making clear that there was some uncertainty about the circumstances, saying that they were "believed" to be the case. When contacted by the family, the newspaper offered to print an interview with family members, an offer that remained open. It published a follow-up report on the initial inquest and undertook to cover the full inquest in April 2007.

The complainants considered that the newspaper should apologise for the inaccurate and intrusive article.

Adjudication

Newspapers have a right to report news about deaths. But in this case, the article represented a serious breach of the Code by publishing details, without consent, of Mrs Addai-Twumasi's state of health. This information was not in the public domain – following the inquest, for instance – and there was insufficient public interest for publishing it. The intrusion was compounded by the publication of what was ultimately speculation concerning the reasons for the death.

The Commission regretted that the subsequent reasonable request for an apology had been rejected by the editor. This was an obvious, and unacceptable, breach of the Code that should have been swiftly remedied. The Commission had no hesitation in upholding the complaint.

Adjudication issued 19/03/2007