



Express & Star

Shropshire
STAR

IPSO Annual Statement

Covering the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022

A photograph of the exterior of an Express & Star building. The building is a multi-story structure with a mix of brick and light-colored cladding. A large, prominent sign on the facade reads 'Express & Star' in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The sign is mounted on a white background. Above the sign, there is a circular satellite dish. The building has several windows, some with white frames and others with dark frames. The overall scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the building.

IPSO Report

Introduction: The MNA

The MNA is Britain's largest independent regional news company, reaching more than one million people every week in print and online. It has delivered the news since the 1880s, first through the Express & Star, and the Shropshire Star.

It has a portfolio of titles across the West Midlands, Shropshire, and Mid Wales, including a range of weekly newspapers, magazines and apps.

The MNA is part of the Claverley group which also owns Precision Colour Printing, software supplier Press Computer Systems, Cubiquity, Kennedy Publishing, HPCi Media and Signature Publishing.

The Claverley businesses, including the MNA, are all owned by the Graham family, the proprietors of the Express & Star for more than a century.

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to pose challenges for the MNA during 2021. Remote working continued for large parts of the year, raising challenges around effective communication and training. This was again mitigated through regular video calls with staff and the sharing of information and best practice through email, Slack and internal blogs. As restrictions have eased, we have reopened our offices and the return of staff to the office environment has been a welcome boost for the news operation.

Daily titles:

Express & Star
Shropshire Star

Weekly titles:

Brigdnorth Journal
Chronicle Week series
Market Drayton Advertiser
Mid Wales Journal
Newport Advertiser
Shrewsbury Chronicle
South Shropshire Journal
Telford Journal

Monthly titles:

Shropshire Magazine
The Farmer

Martin Wright is the editor-in-chief of the MNA and its associated daily and weekly newspapers and associated websites.

The 'responsible person' for the Express & Star, Shropshire Star and weekly titles who deals with IPSO matters is Martin Wright.

Our editorial standards

The MNA is committed to upholding the Editors' Code of Practice. Journalists are issued with copies of the code and details are set out on the company's intranet. Training sessions – internally and externally – reinforce and refresh the importance of adhering to the code. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in training sessions being held remotely through video calls, while best practice and updates on editorial matters have also been shared via email and through internal blog posts on the company intranet.

All staff are regularly reminded of the obligation to uphold the code at all times and the importance of representing the MNA – and the profession of journalism – in a positive and professional manner. Any changes to the Code are communicated to editorial staff verbally, via email and through the editor's blog.

A guide to editorial standards has been issued to all journalists working for the MNA, emphasising the importance of upholding the Editors' Code and upholding the highest professional standards. (Appendix 1).

In addition, the Express & Star and Shropshire Star send a copy of the Editor's Code of Practice to all regular freelance and agency copy suppliers. They are asked to give written confirmation that they have received the code and that they will adhere to it when dealing with any story or submitting copy for the MNA. The letter makes clear that if they do not reply accordingly, their services will no longer be required.

With regard to the verification of stories, all staff are made aware of Clause 1 (accuracy) of the Editors' Code and the need to always keep this in mind when researching, writing, news editing and sub editing stories.

The newsdesk requires that reporters and writers can stand up any claims made in their copy and that reports are balanced. Balanced reporting is an important part of our editorial standards and journalists are reminded of the need to give all parties an opportunity to reply.

All news stories appearing in our titles are checked by our team of content managers. Any stories of particular concern will be brought to the attention of the editor or deputy editor.

Those senior journalists with permission to publish content online have also received extra legal training on top of their ethical training.

In respect of potential ethical or Code of Practice matters, guidance would be sought from IPSO prior to publication if deemed necessary by the editor. Any guidance would be considered alongside any legal advice (if any) that had been sought.

Guidance would also be sought from IPSO in resolving complaints made to IPSO. This may take the form of agreeing a suitable resolution to a complaint with IPSO acting as the conduit between the complainant and the newspaper.

Our complaints handling process

The following guidance setting out our complaints handling process is issued to all editorial staff. It is available on the company's intranet and has been highlighted by the editor-in-chief in regular departmental blogs.

Dealing with editorial complaints

When dealing with complaints, every effort must be made to settle the issue at the earliest stage. If there are grounds for complaint and/or a mistake has been made, immediate efforts must be made to redress this.

If we are wrong, we have to put it right. If we have done nothing wrong, we have to be able to fight our corner which means accurate notes from the reporters and those who have dealt with the story.

Always make a note of any complaints, including the caller's name, the details of the complaint and, most importantly, any offer made to correct the mistake or make amends.

When complaints have been dealt with it is VITAL that you send a note to the Editor's Secretary. An annual report has to be compiled for IPSO. Therefore, please include all complaints detailing how they were dealt with.

Here are some guidelines for dealing with complaints:

- 1) If there are no grounds for complaint, for example the caller is unhappy that their court case has been reported, this should be explained to them calmly and clearly. If they are abusive and hostile you can end the conversation but ensure you make a note of the conversation.
- 2) If there may be a genuine complaint, take all of the details and promise to get back to the complainant as quickly as possible. The complaint must then be investigated with some urgency. If a mistake has been made, the deputy editor or editor should be informed.
- 3) In many cases, it may be possible to appease the complainant with a follow-up story containing the correct information, putting forward their stance on an issue to give a more balanced view or giving the organisation some positive press such as a feature.
- 4) The complainant may be satisfied with this. If not, it may be necessary to carry a correction as a blob par on the end of the story.
- 5) If neither of these options are appropriate or accepted, we may consider running a correction in the paper either clarifying or, if necessary, apologising for an error. This would need to be approved by the Editor-in-chief or Deputy Group Editor.
- 6) Make a note of all conversations, the offers made and the agreement hopefully reached. Send a note to the Editor's Secretary.

- 7) If a complaint is made directly to IPSO, in all likelihood the matter will be referred back to us with their primary goal being for agreement to be reached without their involvement. If we have already been contacted, we have to show that efforts have been made to satisfy the complainant. We must have notes ready.
- 8) If a mistake has been made and there is a threat of legal action, our solicitors must be consulted. The Editor-in-chief and/or Deputy Group Editor must be made aware of the complaint.
- 9) If there are any concerns about a complaint, take advice, whether it be from the newsdesk, Deputy Group Editor, Editor-in-chief or our solicitors when advised to do so. Always have a note of every conversation with the complainants.
- 10) In short, deal with complaints as quickly as possible, offer to make amends where necessary, take advice if required and keep notes. Send a final note to the Editor's Secretary as appropriate.

Complaints can be made in person, via the telephone or in written form (posted or electronic). The complaints are handled by the newsdesk, in conjunction with the Deputy Group Editor and/or Editor-in-chief. Records of complaints and outcomes are retained by the editor's secretary.

Details of our complaints handling procedures are published on the letters' pages of both the Express & Star and the Shropshire Star each day, usually page 11. A copy of a page 11 featuring the information panel is attached (Appendix 2).

We also carry full details of how to make a complaint on the Shropshire Star website here: shropshirestar.com/making-a-complaint/

Similar details are also included on the Express & Star website here: expressandstar.com/complaints/

Our training process

Making staff aware of IPSO

Information about IPSO outlining our responsibilities and commitment is posted on our intranet for all staff to read, supported by regular updated blogs from the Editor-in-chief. This information is accompanied by a document setting out our complaints handling procedure, as set out above, which is available to download by all staff. All staff also receive copies of the procedure by email.

In addition, staff are updated on any changes to the regulations as they are with any changes to the law verbally, via email and through the editor's blog. Where necessary, formal training is arranged.

All staff have also been issued with a guide to the MNA's editorial standards which outlines our commitment to upholding the Editors' Code.

IPSO rulings that are particularly interesting and/or relevant are also shared with the editorial team via email to ensure staff are kept up to date with the committee's interpretation of the Code.

IPSO training

IPSO training sessions, conducted by our head of editorial training are held for all members of the editorial team.

IPSO training for any new starters is carried out by the head of editorial training or a senior editorial executive at the Express & Star and Shropshire Star using a PowerPoint demonstration and similar exercises.

All journalists working for the MNA are expected to hold the relevant NCTJ qualifications. Any trainee journalists working towards their qualifications receive training on the Editor's Code and must sit exams testing their knowledge of the Code and its application.

Manuals, codes and guidance used by journalists

Editors' Code – As previously outlined, all journalists including freelance staff are issued with copies of the code and details are set out on the company's intranet. We issue wallet size copies of the code to all staff.

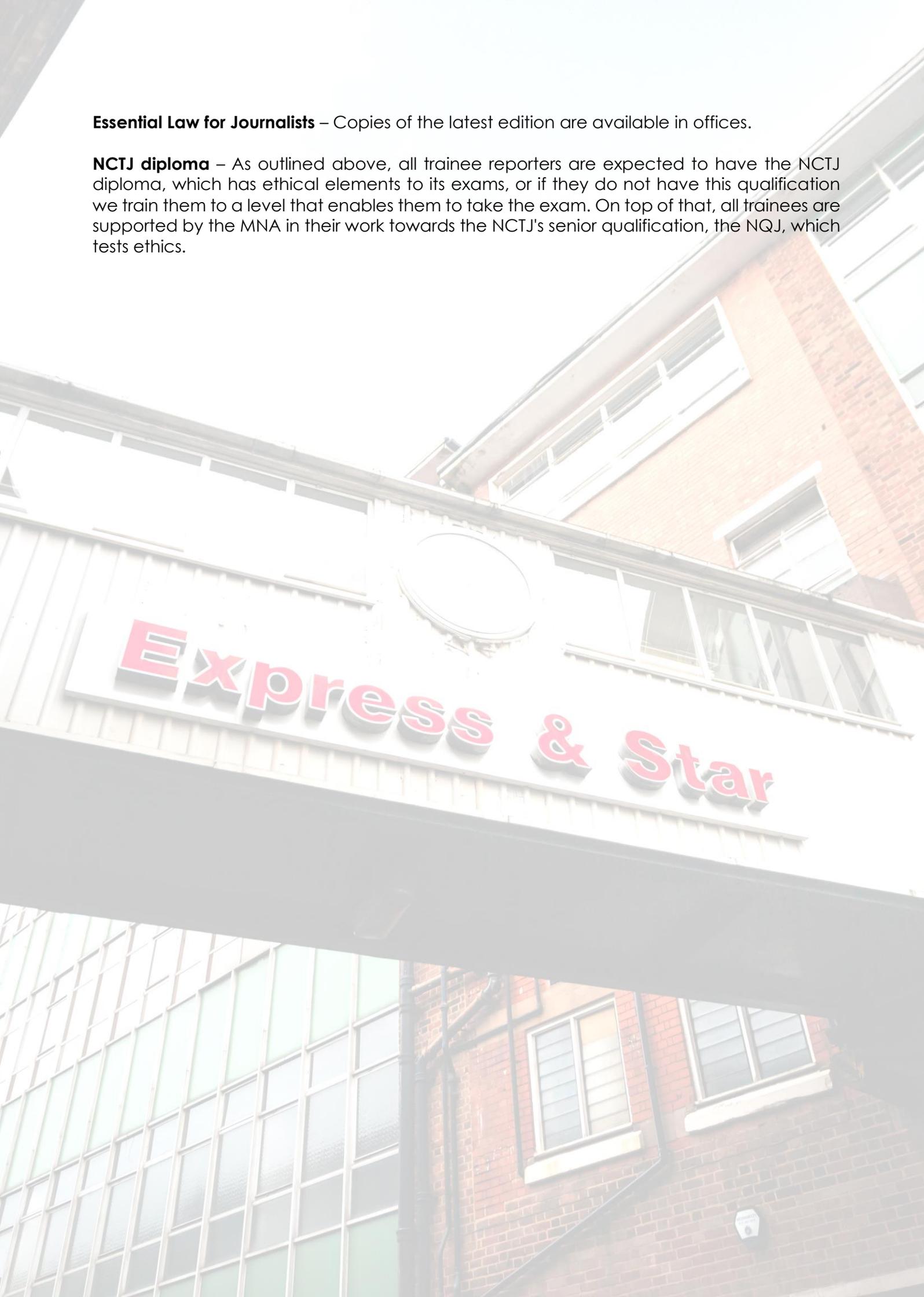
MNA guide to editorial standards

Regular training sessions – internally and externally – reinforce and refresh the importance of adhering to the code.

In house training – The editorial training manager continues to head up the training of all editorial staff and also directs training for any new recruits.

Essential Law for Journalists – Copies of the latest edition are available in offices.

NCTJ diploma – As outlined above, all trainee reporters are expected to have the NCTJ diploma, which has ethical elements to its exams, or if they do not have this qualification we train them to a level that enables them to take the exam. On top of that, all trainees are supported by the MNA in their work towards the NCTJ's senior qualification, the NQJ, which tests ethics.



Complaints

There were no upheld complaints involving MNA publications received in 2022.



Appendix 1 - MNA guide to editorial standards

MNA guide to editorial standards

Introduction

This document is intended to set out the standards expected of journalists working for the Midland News Association. It is essential that all journalists working for the organisation read the document carefully and understand the importance of applying this guidance to their work. Our role as journalists requires us to make difficult decisions, often under pressure of deadlines. This document is designed to support journalists in making those decisions and to articulate the responsibilities of our journalists in providing our readers with accurate and informative stories, holding those in power to account and shining a light on decisions that would otherwise go unreported.

Above all, we have a duty to check and double-check the accuracy of information before publication. This is not always easy when deadlines are approaching, but pressure of deadlines must never be used to excuse articles that fall below our high standards.

Our editorial standards

The MNA is committed to maintaining the highest editorial standards. All of our publications are regulated by IPSO and all of our journalists are expected to adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice (see appendix 1).

All journalists are expected to uphold these standards at all times to ensure that information published by MNA titles is accurate, complies with the Editors' Code and is legally sound.

Journalists should remember they are representing the MNA when dealing with members of the public, their contacts or other members of staff. It is important that journalists are professional in all of their dealings, treating people courteously at all times and responding to enquiries in a polite, professional and timely manner, whether in person, on the telephone, via email, social media or any other medium.

The MNA expects journalists to rigorously check and verify all stories before submitting for publication. Stories involving contentious issues must be passed to senior editorial colleagues prior to publication.

Journalists are similarly expected to carry out thorough verification of sources to ensure stories are genuine and not in any way malicious.

The advent of social media has increased the likelihood of inaccurate information gaining currency and journalists are expected to treat all information sourced through these channels with the utmost care, checking the authenticity of the material independently before it is submitted for publication. If there is any doubt, however small, about the authenticity or intent behind information, this must be flagged up immediately to a senior colleague for further discussion and investigation.

The MNA is committed to providing fair and balanced reporting and it is important that all parties involved are given an opportunity to respond through our publications.

Copyright

One of the key issues to have arisen in recent years is rights usage. This is particularly important with regard to the use of images – whether they are sourced using Google or social media. Our policy is that we must have explicit permission to use any material before publication. For the avoidance of doubt, we should seek permission in writing (an email is acceptable) which acknowledges we have permission to publish the material in question.

Remember, even when a picture is publicly available on social media, the person who took that picture could still claim copyright and be entitled to payment.

If there is any doubt about whether permission has been given, please consult a senior colleague.

Complaints

A copy of our procedure for dealing with complaints is available on our intranet and also attached to this document (see appendix 2). For the avoidance of doubt, it is essential that any errors are dealt with immediately once we become aware of them. As part of this process, senior colleagues must be informed so that an appropriate course of action can be agreed.

When dealing with complaints or any form of reader/user feedback, it is important that journalists remain professional and handle any such complaints in a timely manner. It is also essential that a record of any emails and/or correspondence is kept, together with an explanatory note about any discussion with the complainant. These must be passed on to the editor's secretary as soon as possible for our records.

You should also ensure that any information, including source material, your notes, your shorthand notes, and so on, relating to the article in questions is stored securely so that it is available should the complaint require further investigation.

Where will your material appear?

Your work will appear on multiple platforms within the MNA portfolio. As well as the daily titles, we have a range of weekly newspapers covering the West Midlands, Shropshire and Mid Wales – in addition to our magazines and periodicals. Please think about these different publications when submitting your content – if you have additional material (for example extra pictures) that would sit better within one of our locally-focused weekly titles, let the relevant weekly editor know or, if in doubt, notify newsdesk.

Think digital

A key consideration for all of our journalists is ensuring that copy produced should be ready for publication on our digital channels. Please ensure that you are familiar with the requirements of the digital workflow and that your copy meets these requirements. Think also about any additional digital content available – Is there any video footage that would enhance the story? Can you insert some Tweets to give the article more depth?

Remember, it is your responsibility to notify the digital news editor and/or newsdesk when

you have content ready for publication online, particularly where breaking news is concerned.

If you are a senior journalist with the required privileges, it is your responsibility to publish the story online. Please ensure that your copy is checked and double-checked before publication – accuracy must be our watchword to ensure we maintain the reputation of the MNA as a trusted news organisation. If you have any doubts over your story, exercise caution and consult a senior colleague before publication.

Photographic diary

Photographs are a vital part of our news operation, both in print and online. We have a team of staff photographers who should be booked using their online diaries.

When booking in jobs please ensure that as a minimum you include the following details: The contact's name; the contact's address; the contact's telephone or mobile number; a full description of the job so that the photographer attending knows what they have to do; and your details (in case of queries).

Please also consider the following important points:

1. If your booking clashes with another job, make sure you notify any affected parties (internally and externally) immediately so that alternative arrangements can be made. Do not assume that somebody else will sort out the clash. It is vital we give people as much notice as possible if we need to rearrange bookings.
2. Look at the job before your booking and the job after your booking. Ask yourself how long it will take to travel between the jobs (if you're not sure, check on Google). Have you left enough time for the photographer to take the picture/s (a minimum of half an hour is a sensible start)?
3. When booking in a job, ask yourself the following: Is this going to result in a brilliant picture? Is it even worth a picture? Is it simply a free advert for a business who should be paying to appear in our newspapers? It's worth watching out for the likes of pubs and hotels offering up pictures of wedding fairs, beer or gin festivals, or unveiling refurbishments.

Tips for journalists

1. Read the style book and ensure your copy complies with MNA house style. A copy of the style book has been given to each member of the editorial team but if you have misplaced yours or have not received a copy, please contact the editor's secretary.
2. Keep your intros short and to the point – aim for about 20 words or fewer.
3. Avoid editorialising in your copy. For instance, saying a planning application is “controversial” on the basis that it has one or two objections is an unnecessary cliché which we should avoid. Similarly, beware of inserting words such as “shock” or “plunge” into copy – ask yourself is anybody really shocked? And is a decline a fall

rather than a “plunge”?

4. Keep your copy simple. Ensure you understand what you are writing – don't simply copy and paste extracts from reports or press releases which contain inexplicable jargon. It is our job to inform readers in a way that is easy to understand.
5. If there are different points of view, it is important to reflect these in your copy. As the saying goes, there are two sides to every story so ensure you have approached all parties to provide balance in your article.
6. Read and re-read your copy. Does it make sense? Are there any obvious questions that aren't answered in your copy? Put yourself in the shoes of a reader with no prior knowledge of the subject and then ask these questions again. Where possible, ask a senior colleague to have a read through your story as a fresh pair of eyes can help spot mistakes – or even pick out a stronger news line.
7. Make sure you add any follow-up lines, subsequent events and so on to the office diary immediately after filing your article. Almost every story we publish can be followed up in some way. It is extremely frustrating when we break a big story, only to be beaten to the follow-up by a competitor. An efficient diary system is the most effective means of avoiding this – and remember that follow-ups provide good stories for your news list each day.
8. Beware of press releases. Ask yourself: who has sent this to me and why? Is it simply a free advert for a company? If so, they should pay for an advert and the journalist should contact a colleague in the commercial department.
9. Similarly, approach all press releases with caution – challenge any statements or assumptions made in the press release and verify any claims thoroughly. If it includes references to surveys, for example, find out more about the survey and how it was conducted. If it references an inspection report, get a copy of the original report. Are the claims made in the press release genuine? What questions were asked? Do the results have the necessary context? Remember, it is our job to apply journalistic rigour to all material we encounter – we will lose the trust of readers if we simply publish press releases unchallenged and without context.
10. Finally, as a journalist it is important to remember that your stories can have a profound impact on the lives of those involved. Ask yourself if you think your story is responsible and fair to all parties. And if you are unsure – seek the advice of a senior colleague.

Appendix 2 - Copy of page 11 of the Express & Star giving details of our complaints procedures procedure to readers

Creative spiders work together to set an example

The mid-autumn sunshine is a nice break from the torrential rain and high winds that have caused havoc and mayhem the last few days. It has also brought out the house spiders that grace our kitchen's large picture window.

Herself brought them to my attention, and I must say the intricate and expertly spun webs are a masterpiece of design and function. However it was the anchoring that caught my eye.

The two webs were only a foot or so apart, two spiders, sitting patiently waiting for their prey at the top of the window frame, below two webs, and it was at the base of the webs that intrigued me. I will explain.

During WW2, Ford built what was at the time the biggest war factory in the world, over a mile long, called Willow Run in Michigan. Here they produced the B24 liberator heavy bomber on a continuous production line. Now here's where the humble spider and the bomber meet.

The aircraft started their life on four parallel moving production lines, they then merged into two, and then one, and at the end a fully fitted out and airworthy aeroplane emerged, one every 20 minutes, and they they made over 8,600 of them.

Now the connection. The two webs were connected by a single strand of silk to the bottom of our window frame, in the same configuration as the Willow Run production line. Each web had two strands at their base, merging into one on each, and then both came together to form one strong strand holding them down.

Two spiders, both in competition for food, and both fear-some rivals, but in the spirit of common purpose, have called a truce, and combined millions of years of survival instincts, and merged their webs into one super strong anchor point.

A truly wondrous example of rivals, knowing of the common rewards, working together..... central government take note.

Tony Levy, Wednesfield

PICTURE FROM THE ARCHIVE



Cannock firefighters were ready to start building the bonfire for their annual charity fireworks night at their station in Hednesford Road when this picture was taken in November 1982. To see hundreds of pictures from the past visit our photographic collection at photo-archive.expressandstar.co.uk

Need a general election now!

Following the recent tumultuous events in British politics, the need for an immediate general election is now mandatory.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the need for a general election is a demographic imperative. These are unusually wise words from the first Minister for Scotland.

The second reason is purely mathematical and unanswerable. Even up against an 80-seat majority, Sir Keir Starmer has become the first opposition leader ever to be able to win the next general election without having to get out of bed (sorry Boris).

He will possibly or probably win the subsequent one. The Conservative Party need to get used to the fact they are going to be in the opposition for a very long time. The sooner they realise this, then the sooner they will be back in power!

D N Grant, West Midlands

Police budget cut is disastrous

I find it ironic that on the day our new Prime Minister takes up office and promises to continue with the levelling up agenda, that the government has reduced the budget of the West Midlands Police Force by £30million per year.

With gun and knife crime and drug dealing at recorded levels, this decision is disastrous. I trust that our local Tory MPs will be banging on the door of number 10 Downing Street to get this reckless decision reversed.

Name and address supplied

Nuclear worry

In today's expanding nuclear and biological world, is any country's irreconcilable differences with its neighbours now a good idea?

Peter Timlin, Cannock

It is an awful lot of money oil firm is making!

I laughed like a drain at a comment on BBC Breakfast show the other morning (October 27) when, I assume, their economics reporter said, when commenting on the £7billion profit made by one of the big oil companies in three months ending in September, words along the lines of people may think that's a lot of money!

Trust me as an ordinary working class man - albeit retired - that is an AWFUL lot of money!

Seeing the price of electricity, gas and vehicle fuels being charged, no wonder they're making so much money. Still they'll be able to pay their executives their obscene seven or eight-figure bonuses easily won't they? While the ordinary person in the street struggles to heat and eat.

Michael Gough, Wombourne

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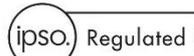
The Express & Star home delivery team is available freephone on 0800 146 540 or via email at operations@mnamedia.co.uk

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Email: letters@expressandstar.co.uk

Write to: Letters, Express & Star, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number. Letters will only be published anonymously in exceptional circumstances. The editor reserves the right to condense or amend letters.



The Express & Star's policy is to correct errors as soon as we can. Please contact us if you are unhappy with the accuracy of any story. The Express & Star adheres to the Editors' Code of Practice, which can be seen at www.ipso.co.uk. We are regulated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES. If we cannot reach a resolution, contact IPSO at complaints@ipso.co.uk or by post at IPSO, c/o Gate House, 1 Farringdon Street, London, EC4M 7LG.



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COUNCILS HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO PUBLISH LEGAL NOTICES ON ISSUES WITH A PUBLIC INTEREST. THEY INCLUDE PLANNING AND LICENCE APPLICATIONS AND ROADWORKS. THEY APPEAR EACH DAY IN OUR CLASSIFIED SECTION.



Further training

IPSO newsletters and updated guidance are circulated to all editorial staff who are encouraged to refresh their knowledge of the Code routinely. The Code is linked to our staff intranet which includes editorial guides as well as the editorial standards that we expect all staff to work to across all publications.

Staff are regularly reminded that further training and professional development is available to them through the NCTJ's Journalism Skills Academy via their Skills training, e-learning, exam refreshers and tutor workshops.

