

Dear Sir,

I support a robust system which is not a code of conduct only but has teeth.  
I believe it should have pre-publication powers and be free or very low cost.

I would like to give an actual example which demonstrates the high flown principles of the press safeguarding the public from mal-practice, corruption etc are not matched in real life. My example also shows at the other extreme how easy it is for a person's character to be traduced even before a verdict has ben reached.

A friend (Let scall him X) had heard of a case being heard At Reading Crown Court in which a number of A4E staff were accused of fraudulently having found people jobs to claim bonuses. As he had raised concerns with the Thames Valley Economic Crime Unit about them he was anxious to find out more details of what had been going on. He rang the local paper (Reading Chronicle) to be told they couldn't spare anyone to attend The Reading Evening Post had just closed after 100 years. Hence, he found when he atterded there was no-one on the press bench except for a note -taker from A4E. (Lets call him P).

He therefore decided to take notes from the public gallery and asked me to cover in case he couldn't attend. My friend and I went in separately sat quietly in the gallery and when the usher wanted to know who we were and we assured him we would not share our notes until the trial had finished . We didn't have the journalists privilege of publishing anything before the trial had finished.

A defence barrister then questioned our right to take notes from the public gallery. The judge referred to a book and said she could find nothing to prevent it. A few days later I questioned the usher outside court 2 about the fact we couldn't see the defendants and half the barristers which didn't seem to please him. It was to prove important because a few days later I was insulted by a barrister from the floor after asking the usher about reporting restrictions. P had told me they had been lifted and I wanted to check. In a loud voice the barrister shouted "Any competent journalist would know that" . Well we weren't journalists and when I peered around the dock from the gallery to see who it was

I was told to sit down in no uncertain terms.

The detective who was a witness motioned me out of the gallery later on. He seemed incandescent and said I could ruin his case. He accused me of being a friend of the other person in the public gallery (true but not a crime!) . At this point 6 people rushed out of another court and one said weve seen you trying to intimidate this gentleman and we don't like it. I thoughtit very good of them considering I didn't know them. When the policeman turned and left they said they had just been in a case where the man had been accused of sexually interfering with a young woman. They were adamant it was a pack of lies and the case had either collapsed or been thrown out . He thought I was a reporter and asked how he could get redress as the Court was not allowed to know that the woman had made similar accusations twice before with others and it had collapsed. His name had been besmirched in the local paper.

The local paper failed to attend a serious fraud case lasting 10 weeks and in the end only the Daily mail reported it on 1st April. Yet the local paper publishes every minor magistrates court verdict.