

D Neesom
16 September 2011
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Exhibit: "DN1"

IN THE MATTER OF THE LEVESON INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF DAWN NEESOM

I, **DAWN NEESOM**, of Express Newspapers, The Northern & Shell Building, Number 10 Lower Thames Street, London, EC3R 6EN, **WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:**

- A. I am the editor of The Daily Star Newspaper. I make this statement in response to a request of the Leveson Inquiry (the "Inquiry") pursuant to a letter dated 8 August 2011. A copy of this letter can be found at pages 1-4 of Exhibit "DN1".
- B. I confirm that all matters in this statement are true and, unless I specify to the contrary, are based upon my own knowledge and a review of the relevant documents. Where matters are not within my own knowledge, I state the source and believe the same to be true.
- C. There is now produced and shown to me a paginated bundle of documents marked as Exhibit "DN1". References to documents in this witness statement are references to documents in that exhibit.
- D. For convenience, I have reproduced as subheadings the questions asked of me in the 8 August letter.

Question 1: Who you are and a brief summary of your career history in the media.

1. I started in journalism as a casual reporter on the Newham Recorder in 1982. I joined the Sun Newspaper as a features writer in 1992. I joined the Daily Star as its Woman's Editor in 1997, rising to Associate Editor and became the Daily Star's Joint Deputy Editor in 2003. I have been the editor of the Daily Star since December 2003.

Question 2: How you understand the system of corporate governance to work in practice at the newspaper where you are employed with particular emphasis on systems to ensure lawful, professional and ethical conduct.

2. Ethical and professional standards for the press are set out in the Editors Code of Practice (see page 5 of Exhibit "DN1"). At the Daily Star, a copy of this Code is on the desk of every reporter and editor. The Code and its core duties, including the right to respect people's privacy and the prohibition on intercepting private conversations, are also clearly set out in the Contractual Section of the staff handbook (see page 6-34 of Exhibit "DN1"). As the Daily Star's Editor I fully expect all of our reporters and editors to abide by the Code.
3. Until January 2011, the newspaper was party to the PCC. However, the directors decided that all of the company's newspapers would withdraw from the PCC. This was primarily because the PCC appeared to have stopped resolving disputes as originally intended and some decisions appeared to be more political than practical. Instead of the PCC, there is an in house complaints committee which comprises all of the Editors, the Legal Department and the Group Editorial Editor. The Committee meets on an ad hoc basis as and when complaints arise.
4. The Daily Star is Britain's leanest staffed daily tabloid newspaper. There are only some 80 staff, most of whom sit on the same floor directly opposite my office. The others are based at our Broughton office in Lancashire. With such a small team, the chain of command at the Daily Star is very clear. Each reporter reports to their head of department: the News Editor, Sports Editor, Pictures Editor or Features Editor. These Editors in turn report to the Deputy Editor, who reports to me. All of the Editors meet on a daily basis at the morning news conference where we decide which

stories and pictures will be included in the paper that day. As Editor, I have the final say over all the main stories. Given this clear chain of command and the relatively small number of staff, I believe I am able to oversee all the main aspects of the paper.

5. New recruits to the newspaper do not undergo a formal induction process. However, it is made clear to them on a daily basis that the Daily Star sticks to the rules. Given the relative size of my team, our practices and policies are quickly picked up by all new recruits. In any event, most new recruits come from local or provincial newspapers and therefore are well practised at good, ethical conduct.

Question 3: What your role is in ensuring that the corporate governance documents and all relevant policies are adhered to in practice. If you do not consider yourself to have been/be responsible for this, please tell us who you consider to hold that responsibility.

6. I believe that all of the paper's reporters are responsible for adhering to the Editors Code of Practice and that their Editors, in approving the reporters' stories, ensure that the Code is adhered to in practice. Ultimately, however, as the individual with final say over which stories are published each day, it is my role to ensure that standards are being met. As stated above, the team at The Daily Star is relatively small and I believe this allows me to oversee all aspects of the paper, such that I consider all the staff act lawfully, professionally and ethically.

Question 4: Whether the documents and policies referred to above are adhered to in practice, to the best of your knowledge.

7. To the best of my knowledge, the Daily Star's journalists and editors adhere to the Code and to the best of professional standards.

Question 5: Whether these practices have changed, either recently as a result of the phone hacking media interest or prior to that point, and if so, what the reasons for the change were.

8. There has been no change to practices and policies at the Daily Star as a result of the phone hacking media interest or prior to such interest.

Question 6: Where the responsibility for checking sources of information (including the method by which the information was obtained) lies: from reporter to news editor/showbiz editor/royal editor to editor, and how this is done in practice (with some representative examples to add clarity).

9. As stated above, the chain of command is very clear: reporters' stories are checked and approved by the News, Sports and Features' Editors which are then passed to the Deputy Editor and are ultimately approved by me at the morning editorial meeting.
10. I should say however that The Daily Star is not a political paper or an investigative paper. We primarily cover celebrity entertainment stories. In the vast majority of cases the sources for our stories are obvious: they come directly from the celebrities themselves and/or their PR teams, or our reporters pick them up from the media (from television, celebrity magazines etc), or the stories have come from sister publications within the Express Newspaper group. We also use independent and recognised news, photographic and sports agencies such as the Press Association. On the very rare occasions when a story's source is unclear, I – or my deputy editor if I am away from the office - ask where it is from. Certainly as Editor, I would never allow a story to be published if I believed it to have been sourced improperly or in breach of the Code.

Question 7: To what extent an editor is aware, and should be aware of the sources of the information which make up the central stories featured in your newspaper each day (including the method by which the information was obtained).

11. Even at a small paper like the Daily Star it is impossible for an Editor to be aware of the sources for every story in the paper. An Editor should however be aware of the main stories and where they come from. As I have said, at the Daily Star in almost all cases the source is self-evident. Where it is not, I – or my Deputy Editor should I be absent - ask.

Question 8: The extent to which you consider that ethics can and should play a role in the print media, and what you consider 'ethics' to mean in this context.

12. As I hope I have made clear, ethics do and should play a part. I agree with the Code and I certainly expect all my journalists to abide by it. That said, The Daily Star is not positioned as a political or investigative paper. Much of its content is intended as entertainment (the dress sense of a celebrity, their latest film role etc) and, therefore, ethical questions do not always arise.
13. Where ethical questions do arise, for example when a story concerns aspects of somebody's private life, the key questions are always the same: is the story accurate, and if it is, is it justified in the public interest.

Question 9: The extent to which you, as an editor, felt any financial and/or commercial pressure from the proprietors of your newspaper or anyone else, and whether any such pressure affected any of the decisions you made as editor (such evidence to be limited to matters covered by the Terms of Reference).

14. As Editor of the Daily Star, I have never had any financial or commercial pressure from the proprietor of the newspaper or anyone else. We have a daily circulation of around 800,000. We aim to increase this circulation and make The Daily Star Britain's leading tabloid, but the editorial decisions made at the paper are made by myself and my team; they are not made by the proprietor.

Question 10: The extent to which you, as an editor, had a financial incentive to print exclusive stories (NB. It is not necessary to state your precise earnings).

15. There are no personal financial incentives for me to print exclusive stories. My salary is not linked to the paper's circulation. I would not expect nor would I be entitled to any financial reward for printing such stories.

Question 11: Whether, to the best of your knowledge, your newspaper used, paid or had any connection with private investigators in order to source stories or information and/or paid or received payments in kind for such information from the police, public officials, mobile phone companies or others with access to the same: if so, please provide details of the numbers of occasions on which such investigators or other external providers of information were used and of the amounts paid to them (NB. You are not required to identify individuals, either within your newspaper or otherwise).

16. To the best of my knowledge, no private investigator has ever been used by The Daily Star during the 8 years that I have been Editor, nor have we paid the police, public officials or mobile phone companies for information. Our reporters source their information themselves and in the old fashioned way, by knocking on doors and talking to the individuals involved.
17. I was not aware until recently when I was informed by our legal team, who are working with accounts department to investigate all expenses claims, that the newspaper has previously used search agencies in order to obtain addresses so that a reporter can speak to a source of information in a hurry. Such search agencies had been used purely due to time constraints on a daily newspaper with such a small team. As far as I am aware there is nothing illegal in doing this. The search agency is paid for this service via an expenses claim. I do not know how the search agencies carry out their work. The expense claims would be submitted to the News Editor and signed off by the Deputy Editor before being passed to the Managing Editor for final approval. I do not have time to personally sign off minor expenses claims as that has always been considered the Deputy Editor's job on The Daily Star. If there is a

discrepancy or large amount of money though it will be brought to my notice by my Deputy and/or Managing Editor.

Question 12: What your role was in instructing, paying or having any other contact with such private investigators and/or other external providers of information.

18. During my time as Editor, I have had no involvement in instructing, paying or contacting private investigators.

Question 13: If such investigators or other external providers of information were used, what policy/protocol, if any, was used to facilitate the use of such investigators or other external providers of information (for example, in relation to how they were identified, how they were chosen, how they were paid, their remit, how they were told to check sources, what methods they were told to or permitted to employ in order to obtain the information and so on).

19. There are no written policies at The Daily Star to deal with external providers of information or private investigators but we all work within the confines of the Editors' Code of Practice.

Question 14: If there was such a policy/protocol, whether it was followed, and if not, what practice was followed in respect of all these matters.

20. This question is not relevant.

Question 15: Whether there are any situations in which neither the existing protocol/policy nor the practice were followed and what precisely happened/failed to happen in those situations. What factors were in play in deciding to depart from the protocol or practice.

21. As mentioned in paragraphs 16 and 17 above, I have no knowledge of private investigators ever having been used and I was not aware until recently that search agencies have been used. The Daily Star does not hire individual private investigators and therefore has no protocol dealing with them.

Question 16: The extent to which you are aware of protocols or policies operating at your newspaper in relation to expenses or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by your newspaper or not). There is no need for you to cover 'official' sources, such as the Press Association.

22. All payments to external sources are done through official channels at Express Newspapers and are recorded on its payment books. The Daily Star occasionally pays celebrities and their PR teams for 'showbiz exclusives'. Smaller payments are also made for lesser stories to the individuals concerned. All such payments are itemised on a payment sheet, with details of the story paid for and who was paid. These sheets are signed off by the Deputy Editor. They are subsequently approved by the Managing Editor's office and then by Express Newspapers' Joint Managing Director, Martin Ellice. I believe if there was anything unlawful or untoward about any of the payments made, they would not have been approved either by my Deputy Editor, or by me, or by the Managing Editor, or by Martin Ellice. Any large items of expenditure would need to be first approved by the Managing Editor.

Question 17: The practice of your newspaper in relation to payment of expenses and/or remuneration paid to other external sources of information (whether actually commissioned by your newspaper or not). There is no need to cover 'official' sources such as the Press Association.

23. There is no regular expenses account or expenses credit card system at The Daily Star. When journalists do incur expenses, for example buying a source a drink, the expenses are paid out of the journalists own pocket. No expenses will be reimbursed by the newspaper unless they are properly invoiced with supporting receipts. All expenses, including my own, must be approved by the Managing Editor's office and then by Express Newspapers' Joint Managing Director, Martin Ellice before it is signed off by the board. Again I believe if there was anything untoward or unlawful about anyone's expenses this would have been picked up.

Question 18: In respect of editorial decisions you have made to publish stories, the factors you have taken into account in balance the private interests of individuals (including the fact that information may have been obtained from paid sources in the circumstances outlined under question 11 above) against the public interest in a free Press. You should provide a number of examples of these, and explain how you have interpreted and applied the foregoing public interest.

24. As I hope I have explained, when The Daily Star pays external sources for information, it is invariably to those individuals who are the subject of the story (i.e. celebrities or members of the public 'selling' their stories). In most cases therefore it is in the interests of the person involved to be in the story and no balancing exercise is necessary. That said, there are, of course, stories where this is not the case, particularly, for example, in 'kiss and tell' stories. When deciding whether to publish such stories, my first priority is always that the story should be accurate. If I believe a story to be inaccurate I would never use it. Secondly, I weigh up whether the story is in the public interest and the interest of our readers and whether this outweighs the interests of those who might be affected by the story. In 'kiss and tell' stories, this would often involve assessing the public persona of the individual involved, and whether his or her exposure is justified. By way of example, in the recent Ryan Giggs' sex scandal the Daily Star paid Ryan Giggs' ex-lover for a story. I considered this to be acceptable as the story was already in the public domain, having been broken by another media organisation, and that his continued self-styled reputation as a family man, for which he received handsome reward from sponsors, justified his exposure.

Question 19: Whether you, or your newspaper (to the best of your knowledge) ever used or commissioned anyone who used 'computer hacking' in order to source stories, or for any other reason.

25. To the best of my knowledge, during the 8 years I have been its Editor, The Daily Star has never used or commissioned anyone who used 'computer hacking' in order to source stories, or for any other reason. Furthermore, I was not involved in any such practice during my employment with The Sun nor did I experience anyone else using such method.

Question 20: If you cannot answer these questions, or take the view that they could be more fully answered by someone else, you must nonetheless provide answers to the extent that you can, and to the extent that you cannot you must provide the Inquiry as soon as possible with names of those who would be able to assist us further.

26. I believe I have answered all the questions.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

[Redacted Signature Box]

DAWN NEESOM

16 September 2011