

2 Arch Grove  
Long Ashton  
Somerset  
BS41 9BW

3<sup>rd</sup> September 2015

Dear Sirs,

**Complaint: Rubbish! Mad bureaucracy, petty rules and vindictive fines"**

Thank you for your e-mail of 27<sup>th</sup> August regarding my complaint concerning Richard Littlejohn's article headlined "Rubbish! Mad bureaucracy, petty rules and vindictive fines".

I do recognise the nature of Mr Littlejohn's journalism, and hope that I made it adequately clear in my previous letter that I am not concerned with his views, only with the inaccurate factual statements that he makes in advancing them. Equally, I have sought not to bring my own views on recycling into this correspondence. If Mr Littlejohn feels that his views stand once the inaccuracies are corrected, that is entirely a matter for him.

Nor do I ask that Mr Littlejohn undertakes "detailed analysis of the precise nuances of the recycling regulations in Leeds or anywhere else." I simply wish to point out that he has made a number of factual mistakes, and seek their correction.

Given the delay in the response, it is disappointing that it does so little to engage with the points raised in my letter; in many cases, it is as if the responses have been written without consideration of either the actual claims made in the article, or the Editor's Code requirements that:

*A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence*

And:

*The Press, whilst free to be partisan, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.*

The article wholly fails on the latter point, mixing comment, conjecture and factual inaccuracy to support a partisan viewpoint. Now, having had the inaccuracies, distortions and misleading statements explained in some detail, the *Mail* has opted not to correct them promptly, but to instead engage in tendentious or irrelevant arguments, which fall far short of establishing that the article's claims are defensible.

Let me tackle your responses in turn:

1. There is advice regarding what citizens of Leeds do with should do with excess waste.
  - “no advice was provided by the dustman”: The article clearly places the claim “There’s no advice regarding what to do with your excess waste” in the context of the council’s policy, rather than the actions of the particular member of staff. This point is therefore irrelevant to the accuracy of the article.
  - “the examples you provide appear to relate to recycling only.” The examples I provide are quoted directly from the article, which states “The bags he so casually discarded contained rotting food and opened cans”. My point is that both of these materials are recyclable in Leeds, and that therefore there clearly is advice regarding alternative means of disposing of this portion of the excess waste – i.e. by using the appropriate recycling containers. These are the only materials mentioned in the article; perhaps the *Mail* would like to indicate what non-recyclable materials it believes made up the rest of the waste in Miss Campbell’s bin?
  
2. The ozone hole exists
  - I appreciate the point that Mr Littlejohn was attempting to satirise, although the satire is weakened by the fact that such “bogus connections” are rarely made by those actually engaged in waste and recycling. It is also weakened by the fact that the ozone hole is an observable fact.
  - You are correct in asserting that what is commonly referred to as “the ozone ‘hole’” is an area where ozone levels are depleted – indeed, depleted so far that there is insufficient ozone to provide the protection from ultraviolet light that we normally enjoy. This has various health implications.
  - You will note that the NASA website explains that these depleted areas are precisely what is meant by the term “ozone hole” – not that there are areas where there is no ozone at all. If the *Mail* wishes to justify the assertion that the “ozone hole” is “non-existent” it can do so only by departing by what is normally meant by the term, and proposing its own definition.
  - If the *Mail* wishes to redefine a term in this way, surely this is bound to mislead readers who have not been alerted to the special meaning the newspaper places on the words “ozone hole”? NASA is certainly clear that, as commonly understood, the “ozone hole” still exists.
  
3. There is no evidence that the polar bear population is burgeoning.
  - Whilst Dr Susan Crockford has made the statement “there are more polar bears now than 40 years ago” she is also on the record as saying “no one truly knows how many polar bears there were in 1960”, rather undermining her claim:  
<http://polarbearscience.com/2014/02/18/graphing-polar-bear-population-estimates-over-time/>
  - Her estimates are widely disputed, and contradicted by numerous other studies, usefully summarised here:  
<http://www.carbonbrief.org/blog/2015/03/what-does-the-science-say-about-polar-bears-and-climate-change/>
  - To refer to “the burgeoning polar bear population” as though this were a widely accepted fact, rather than a contentious claim made by one or two researchers serves to mislead the *Mail*’s readers.

- Crockford also makes clear that 40 years ago, the key pressure on polar bear populations was due to over-hunting. It is possible (although not clearly evidenced) that populations are higher than previously since hunting has been cut back; but that polar bears are now very much under threat due to a decline in their habitat brought about by climate change.
  - While the polar bear preservation argument is not one I have heard advanced within the recycling sector, as I made clear in my original letter, recycling helps reduce CO2 emissions, and therefore contributes to efforts to reduce global warming. The *Mail's* attempt to dismiss the link between recycling and protecting polar bears' habitat as "bogus" is therefore misleading. The two are genuinely connected.
4. Susan Le Poidevin is not being prosecuted for using a 'non-regulation' bag
- How the *Birmingham Mail* reports on the Susan Le Poidevin case has no bearing on the accuracy of the *Daily Mail's* account of it.
  - It is only "clear from Richard Littlejohn's article" that Ms Le Poidevin alleges that she was "grilled for hours", and "treated like a common criminal" – which she may indeed turn out to be. The other remarks about the circumstances of the case are presented as fact.
  - The *Birmingham Mail* at least makes clear that Ms Le Poidevin has been charged with two specific offences, "causing controlled waste to be dumped without a permit and failing to have a legitimate means of disposal of her trade waste from the premises." It also explains that "she had not ordered replacement bin bags from the authority since 2012", helping readers to understand that she was supposed to order special trade waste bags from the council. The *Daily Mail* does not assist its readers in reaching accurate conclusions in this way.
  - The *Mail's* article instead places Ms Le Poidevin's case in the context of Mr Littlejohn's complaints about household waste services, blurring the quite separate issues of commercial and domestic waste collections.
  - In this context, the *Mail* should take additional care to ensure that readers are not misled, and should therefore provide some context or clarity regarding the legitimate reasons for the council's action: namely, that commercial waste collections are a charged-for service, and that by failing to use pre-paid sacks she may in practice have been breaking the law and effectively defrauding the council.
5. There is no new £1,000 penalty relating to bins in England and Wales
- While the Le Poidevin episode concerns "business rather than household waste" the article goes on to state that £1,000 is "the new maximum penalty recently introduced nationwide to force all **house-holders** and businesses to comply with even tighter recycling rules."
  - As explained in my previous letter, stating that this fine applies to all householders is inaccurate, and should be corrected; no such powers to fine householders exist in England or Wales.
  - There are also no "tighter recycling rules" that apply nationwide – waste being a devolved matter.
6. Three-weekly collections do not have 'alarming insanitary implications for infestation and decay'

- With the exception of food and nappies, I would be interested to learn which materials the *Mail* believes may have “alarming insanitary implications for infestation and decay” if left for some weeks in a bin.
  - If no such materials can be identified, the claim regarding such implications should be withdrawn.
7. There is not ‘an assortment of ever-more vindictive penalties’ in relation to waste
- Mr Littlejohn’s article may not “restrict itself to England and Wales”, but it makes no explicit statement about the geography that it addresses. Since the great majority of its readers will be based in England and Wales, the natural conclusion for readers will be that when he says “we”, he means residents of these countries. If he means to exclude England and Wales, or perhaps to highlight new penalties in Sweden or Singapore, perhaps this ought to have been made clear to English and Welsh readers, who are otherwise likely to be misled?
  - Mr Littlejohn’s article may not restrict itself “to penalties that have been introduced since 2008”; however, it claims that “we” are subject to “an assortment of ever-more vindictive penalties”. This assertion is not likely to lead English and Welsh readers to reach the factually accurate conclusion that (1) no new penalties have been introduced for nearly a decade and (2) the last change in the law was to reduce penalties, not increase them. It is therefore misleading as it stands, and requires deletion or clarification.
8. David Miliband did not propose that ‘every household should buy a ‘kitchen caddy’ for food waste’
- It appears that the *Mail* has reported the *Times*’s speculations about what Mr Miliband *might* say as facts about what he actually *did* say in 2007.
  - I explained in my previous letter what the Waste Strategy 2007 actually said, which is not consistent with the *Times* quotation supplied, or Mr Littlejohn’s embellishment of it.
  - Nowhere in the *Times* quote or the Waste Strategy does it say that householders might have to “buy” a kitchen caddy.
  - The *Mail*’s assertions are therefore inaccurate and misleading, as previously explained.
9. The 1975 Waste Framework Directive which drives modern waste practice and was ‘intended to tackle the problem of a lack of landfill sites in the Netherlands and Belgium.’
- If Mr Littlejohn’s aim was to make “the point that the bureaucracy around waste collection dates back to this 1975 document, a goal of which was to reduce the amount of material ending up in landfill”, perhaps he might have chosen a less misleading way in which to do so?
  - I have explained in my previous letter the range of inaccuracies in what Mr Littlejohn has actually written. If his intention was to make the statement set out in your response, perhaps these clear and accurate words should be substituted for the melange of mistakes that currently appears in the article?
10. Councils did not ‘simply ignore’ Eric Pickles Weekly Collection Support Scheme

- Since semantics is “the branch of linguistics and logic concerned with meaning” I am happy to concur that my concerns are “a simple matter of semantics.” I am concerned about the meaning of the words used in the *Mail's* article, which I find to be inaccurate and misleading.
- There is a world of difference between what councils actually did in response to Mr Pickles’ calls for weekly collections, and “simply ignoring” them.
- Councils carefully weighed up whether the money made available by Mr Pickles to support weekly collections was adequate in the context of their overall finances. Some 130 made applications for Weekly Collection Support Scheme funding, of which 90 were successful. A condition of all of the awards made was that weekly collections should be instituted or retained for five years.
- It is therefore inaccurate to state that councils ignored Eric Pickles.

I hope that it will not be necessary to engage in protracted argument over these quite straightforward factual points. I look forward to your proposals regarding how the article will be amended to address them.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and 'J'.

Peter Jones