

Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin

Issue 553, 7 September 2026



Complaint by Mr John Cunningham about *Clare Ashford*

Type of case	Fairness and Privacy
Outcome	Not upheld
Service	BBC Radio Shropshire
Date & time	9 March 2026, 10:00
Category	Fairness
Summary	We have not upheld a complaint about unjust or unfair treatment in the programme as broadcast.

Case summary

The programme included a discussion about the hanging of the flag of St George and the Union Flag on lampposts in and around Shrewsbury, and the reaction this was causing in the community. The presenter interviewed the complainant, Mr John Cunningham, from the group 'Raise the Flags Plus Shrewsbury' which had been putting up the flags. Mr Cunningham complained that he had been treated unfairly in the programme because his last name was included in the broadcast despite having asked to stay anonymous.

Ofcom found that, though the complainant's last name was referred to in the programme, this did not result in unfairness to him in the programme as broadcast.

Programme summary

On 9 March 2026, BBC Radio Shropshire broadcast an edition of *Clare Ashford*, with Mr Mark Elliot sitting in as presenter.

The presenter introduced the first topic for discussion:

“So, we're ready to go, which means that we can get stuck into our first conversation, which today is one that divides opinion and that is putting it mildly. Flags being hung from lamp posts, particularly in and around Shrewsbury. Now down the A49 into Church Stretton as well. Some people see it as a symbol of national pride. Others see it as something that represents racism and intimidation. Others see it as a protest against the way the country is currently being run. In Shrewsbury, there's a bit of a running battle going on between a group called Raise the Flags Plus who are putting them up, paid for using people's donations, and another group taking them down. It's all a bit tit-for-tat at the moment. Last month, yeah, last month, we heard from members of both groups. And during those interviews, those removing the flags claimed the town's Muslim centre had been specifically targeted, intended to intimidate. I put that to John Cunningham from Raise the Flags Plus, who were the people putting the flags up. Hope you're staying with me”.

The programme then included a pre-recorded interview with the complainant, Mr Cunningham.

Mr Cunningham: *“What the other guy that's taking the flags down, his name is John as well. He said that we target the Muslim centre. We go back to that Muslim centre to put flags up within 24 hours of them coming down. Now, yes, that is correct, but Telford Way as well. That's, yeah, we do that within 24 hours. The A49 that was done within about six hours of them taking them down. There is no specific place we do them. Now, as for the Muslim centre, we have been to the Muslim centre and spoken to the people that own and run it, or whatever. We spoke to one of them and we actually went outside and did a pothole for them because we want to include everyone in the community. We did 12 potholes and we said ‘listen, we're doing potholes, we've just noticed one outside your drive, a massive one. So, we want to fill that for you’. He said, ‘listen, yeah, that's fine. We've got no problem with the flags’.*

So, when I was away last week, I emailed the Muslim centre and said, ‘listen guys, there's obviously, we come and chatted to you the other day and it was a good chat. Because, I do these good causes, I've done 12 today, I have the GoFundMe money, and we would like to do something with yourselves in sort of a collaboration sort of thing with the Muslim centre and Raise the Flag Shrewsbury’. To help someone out, doesn't matter who. I did attend the Muslim centre because, obviously, whilst I was away the Muslim centre has been attacked by someone. I don't know them. There was no reason anyone should be attacking any of them in their centre for any reason. So, I've rung them today and I'm actually going there tomorrow. They've invited me to a main prayer at 2pm. Two

main blokes now own and run this Muslim centre say 'no, we're not bothered about the flag. It doesn't bother us, we want [to] back community. There's no division between us'. There's, there's more division now in this country with, from what I see anyway, the British people. These people going out and taking flags, they're just British people, like me.

Presenter: *In terms of the sort of the individual residents, if somebody says they don't want a flag outside their house, there have been a few arguments on social media about this sort of thing, and you've put one there anyway.*

Mr Cunningham: *Up to the last time we went out, I have sort of said, 'yeah, sorry, there's been a donation. If you want them to be taken down, you've got to contact the council, or just rip them down yourself but that's criminal damage or contact the police'. The last time we went out, a woman, sort of, she's seen us and she watched us and ...I said 'she's eying up that that telegraph pole, she's eying it up'. And we sort of sat there in the van, we thought, hang on, let's leave her to go back in the house, but no, she sort of hung round. And then we pulled up out outside the telegraph pole just to have a chat with her just to see what was her thinking behind it. And I did go out to record it and then I thought, hang on, just play this one naturally and just see why she doesn't want it there. She said she's got one in her back garden, or she can see it from her back garden, and it annoys the dog. We just left that one. We said, OK, we'll leave it, but we will continue to do the rest of the lampposts round this little green. She said, 'yeah, that's fine'.*

Presenter: *Obviously, there will be people listening to this and think, OK, it's, you've got a lot of people working with you who, you know, you may not have threatened anyone. I don't know, somebody else might have done. On the other side you get a lot of abuse. It's taking up police resources. You say that you want to bring people together. It feels like this is causing massive divisions. Is it time to try something different?*

Mr Cunningham: *Like I say, with the things I've come out with, I'm going to the mosque tomorrow. You'd never ever really see me ever enter a mosque before, sort of, these times now what's happening with the flag, etc. And again, I've just mentioned the police. I'm looking to try to get a designated officer to try and get these, these police calls saying we're blocking the highway, etc, so they know that they don't need to come out. It's only us. They know we're not blocking the highway because they've*

been out three times. And they've said, well, clearly, you're not blocking the highway.

Everything seems to be coming back on Shrewsbury as if this is only happening in Shrewsbury. If you look all over social media, all over, it's even over the news. This is not just Shrewsbury, this is not something that's just happening here. This is happening all over the country. By means of what they're, some other people are doing it for other reasons, mainly the immigration thing. Part of what I'm doing it is because of that, but it's mainly because of the decades of lies and the lies. It's the elderly, it's fishermen, it's farmers. They've lied to everyone. Like I said before in the last interview, they've lied to everyone. This is what I'm about. And there's no real main party that think, I think at the minute that's going to fix that".

The interview ended, and the presenter said:

"So, what do you make of that? That's John Cunningham from Raise the Flags Shrewsbury Plus, if you want to say something in support or opposition to those viewpoints, love to hear from you".

There was no further reference to Mr Cunningham or his interview in the remainder of the programme.

Summary of the complaint and broadcaster's response

Complaint

Mr Cunningham complained that he was treated unjustly or unfairly in the programme as broadcast because his name was included in the broadcast despite having asked to stay anonymous.

Mr Cunningham explained that he had contributed to two separate interviews with the station on or around 13 January and 6 March 2026 about putting up flags in the Shrewsbury area and the organisation he had set up to do it. He said that he had spoken to both the station's News Editor, Mr Chris King, and the presenter, Mr Mark Elliot, telling them "under no circumstances mention my second name", however, his full name was disclosed in the programme.

Mr Cunningham said that some people were linking the "flags of the Union jack and St George to racism, fascism, ... so since them leaking my name on air" he has had "nothing but hell". Mr Cunningham added that now his name has been made public and was now "all over social media", he has received death threats and harassment.

Broadcaster's response

In response to the complaint to Ofcom, the broadcaster has said it "does not accept that Mr Cunningham was treated unjustly or unfairly in the programme as broadcast".

The broadcaster explained that Mr Cunningham took part in two interviews, the first of which was recorded on 13 January and broadcast on 17 February 2026. The BBC said that, for the first interview, “Mr Cunningham requested that only his first name be used” and that the programme makers “agreed to that request and honoured it in the resulting broadcast”.

However, in relation to the second interview subject to this complaint and broadcast two months later on 9 March 2026, the broadcaster said that “neither BBC Radio Shropshire News Editor Chris King nor other programme staff recall any request for anonymity specifically in relation to the second interview, and the BBC has identified no contemporaneous record of such a request”.

The BBC provided Ofcom with correspondence between Mr Cunningham and the programme makers between 17 December 2025 and 7 May 2026. The broadcaster submitted that “any anonymity arrangement agreed for the first interview did not automatically carry forward to future interviews” and that “there is a strong presumption that contributors to BBC programmes will be identified by name unless there are particular reasons for doing otherwise”. The broadcaster said that, should a contributor wish to be anonymous, “the BBC would ordinarily expect that request to be made and agreed in relation to the specific content concerned”.

The broadcaster also said that between the two interviews, “Mr Cunningham publicly associated himself with the campaign and its aims” and, as stated in his second interview, “he remained actively involved in the placing of flags in public locations and in promoting and defending the campaign's aims in and around Shrewsbury”. It added that “during this period Mr Cunningham publicly linked himself by name with the campaign by creating and promoting an online petition concerning the issues at the heart of the dispute”. The broadcaster provided Ofcom with a link to the petition on [change.org](https://www.change.org) which showed Mr Cunningham as the “petition starter”. It also provided screenshots from 29 May 2026 which showed the petition was started “three months ago” on 22 February 2026.

The BBC said that this was “relevant to the question of whether BBC staff should reasonably have understood that the anonymity arrangement agreed for the earlier interview remained in force in relation to the later interview”. It said that in circumstances where Mr Cunningham was publicly identifying himself in connection with the campaign, and no request for anonymity was made as in relation to the second interview, the BBC had no reason to understand that any such arrangement continued to apply.

The broadcaster also referred to the context of the interview, noting that Mr Cunningham was not contributing as a confidential source, whistleblower or private individual discussing a personal matter, but was interviewed as a representative of a group engaged in a public campaign involving the display of flags in prominent locations across Shropshire. The BBC said that the programme concerned activities that Mr Cunningham and his organisation were undertaking publicly, and which had become the subject of local public debate.

The broadcaster said that in the absence of any anonymity agreement, the BBC considered it appropriate to identify Mr Cunningham as the individual speaking on behalf of the campaign being discussed, and that this was in line with its normal approach to contributors participating in public debate about their own public campaigning activities.

The broadcaster said it was sorry to learn of Mr Cunningham’s claim that he has subsequently received harassment and threats, but reiterated that prior to the broadcast complained of, Mr Cunningham had already identified himself publicly in connection with the flags campaign, including through a petition he himself created, and under his full name. It said that it was clear the broadcast was not the first occasion in which Mr Cunningham's identity had been placed in the public domain

in connection with the campaign. The BBC also referred to Mr Cunningham's reference in the text of his petition that there has been a "fourfold increase in hostility towards individuals like myself", which, it said, indicated that public hostility associated with the campaign existed prior to the broadcast of 9 March.

In conclusion, the BBC said that it did not consider that it treated Mr Cunningham unjustly or unfairly, as Mr Cunningham participated voluntarily in an interview about a public campaign and he had previously publicly associated himself with the group. It said that no anonymity agreement existed for this particular interview, and that the programme makers had acted reasonably and fairly in identifying him through use of his full name.

Ofcom's Preliminary View

Ofcom prepared a Preliminary View that Mr Cunningham's complaint should be not upheld. Both parties were given the opportunity to make representations on the Preliminary View, but neither chose to do so.

Decision

Ofcom's statutory duties include the application, in the case of all television and radio services, of standards which provide adequate protection to members of the public and all other persons from unjust or unfair treatment in programmes in such services.

In carrying out its duties, Ofcom has regard to the need to secure that the application of these standards is in the manner that best guarantees an appropriate level of freedom of expression. Ofcom is also obliged to have regard, in all cases, to the principles under which regulatory activities should be transparent, accountable, proportionate and consistent and targeted only at cases in which action is needed.

In reaching its decision, Ofcom carefully considered all the relevant material provided by both parties. This included a recording of the programme and transcript of it, and both parties' written submissions.

When considering complaints of unjust or unfair treatment, Ofcom has regard to whether the broadcaster's actions ensured that the programme as broadcast avoided unjust or unfair treatment of individuals and organisations, as set out in Rule 7.1 of [Ofcom's Broadcasting Code](#) ("the Code"). In addition to this Rule, Section Seven (Fairness) of the Code contains "practices to be followed" by broadcasters when dealing with individuals or organisations participating in, or otherwise directly affected by, programmes, or in the making of programmes. Following these practices will not necessarily avoid a breach of Rule 7.1 and failure to follow these practices will only constitute a breach where it results in unfairness to an individual or organisation in the programme.

Ofcom considered Mr Cunningham's complaint that he was treated unjustly or unfairly in the programme as broadcast because his full name was included in the broadcast, despite having asked for his last name not to be used.

In considering this complaint, Ofcom had particular regard to Code Practice 7.7, which says:

"Guarantees given to contributors, for example relating to the content of a programme, confidentiality or anonymity, should normally be honoured".

We took into account the pre-broadcast correspondence between the programme makers and Mr Cunningham, as provided by the BBC in response to this complaint. Ofcom understood that the complainant had taken part in two interviews between 16 January and 9 March, and that he and the programme maker, Mr King, had maintained contact during this time.

Ofcom understood that the first interview was recorded in January 2026 and, in an email of 16 February, the day before its broadcast, Mr King emailed the complainant to say:

“I know you've asked us not to use your surname but that your name is all over Facebook and on your Go Fund Me page, I'm just wondering if you might be prepared to change your mind”.

Mr Cunningham responded in a number of emails on the same day, in which he said that he would rather not use his last name, and would prefer if only his first name was used. He added that:

“It works for me not to have it [his last name] on the Radio. The amount of weirdos and obsessed stalkers im getting isnt normal over flags. I need to protect my family and children to in all this...[sic]”.

Mr Cunningham also explained in his emails that he had experienced threats and that he wanted to shield his business from any negative consequences from taking part in the interview. Mr King responded later that day, saying “just to reassure you, we’re not broadcasting any of your personal details, or details about your business”.

On the date of the first interview, which was broadcast on 17 February, Mr Cunningham emailed Mr King, saying “If it comes to it id be happy to re do another” [sic]. Mr King responded on 18 February, saying:

“It would be good to have another chat, as obviously it's been a while since the first interview was actually recorded. We've had a few people come to us with concerns about some of the things you've been posting online, and I wondered if we could speak to you about it”.

Mr Cunningham replied on the 19 February, detailing his experiences of the online abuse he had faced, such as “daily anonymous comments on Facebook full of pure hate” and “stalking”. Mr Cunningham and Mr King continued corresponding between 19 February to 5 March to arrange a second interview, however, no further reference was made to anonymity in the email correspondence.

As set out in the “Programme summary” above, Mr Cunningham’s last name was then mentioned twice in the second interview. Following its broadcast, the complainant contacted the programme maker in an email of 13 March, stating that:

“it [i.e. the second interview] seems fair but again theres nothing about the abuse I face daily from hundreds of ppl per day over flags ... My second name was mentioned which [I] didn’t say was ok but its done now[sic]”.

In considering this complaint, we took into account that it was not disputed by the parties that Mr Cunningham had sought for his last name not to be included in the first interview broadcast on 17

February, and that the programme makers had agreed to his request. In relation to the second interview, we recognised that the BBC said in its response to the complaint that it was reasonable for it to conclude that the initial guarantee did not apply, and that Mr Cunningham had identified himself online as being associated with the public campaign relating to the hanging of the flags in the Shrewsbury area.

We took into account that the BBC said in its submissions that “any anonymity arrangement agreed for the first interview did not automatically carry forward to future interviews”. While we noted that time had elapsed between the two interviews, we considered that they were linked in both their production and subject matter, with the programme maker first stating that “it would be good to have another chat” in the same email thread as the arrangements for the first interview. The programme maker also referred to the second interview as a “follow up chat” in his email of 5 March. We also noted that the parties had maintained contact every few days during this period.

We considered Mr Cunningham had explained in his email of 16 February the reasons why he did not wish his last name to be used, namely to protect his family and business. He also expressed that his preference was for his last name not to be used despite Mr King pointing out that “your name is all over Facebook and on your Go Fund Me page”, with Mr Cunningham responding that “it works for me not to have it on the Radio...”. Given this previous correspondence, we acknowledged Mr Cunningham may have held an expectation that the guarantee of anonymity given for the first interview also applied to the second interview. However we also took into account the BBC’s submissions that Mr Cunningham had publicly attached his name to a petition started on 22 February in between the two broadcasts and that, “in circumstances where Mr Cunningham was publicly identifying himself in connection with the campaign and no request for anonymity was made ... the BBC had no reason to understand that any such arrangement continued to apply”.

While it may have been preferable for the programme makers to have clarified to Mr Cunningham that his last name would not be omitted from the second interview broadcast, in our view, it was clear from the correspondence that the BBC had not explicitly provided a guarantee that, in relation to the second interview, Mr Cunningham’s last name would not be included in the programme.

We went on to consider whether there was unfairness to Mr Cunningham in the programme. As set out in the “Programme summary” above, the interview concerned a dispute about the raising and lowering of flags in the Shrewsbury area. The presenter made it clear from the outset that this was a topic that “divides opinion” and that there was a “running battle going on between a group called Raise the Flags Plus who are putting them up, paid for using people’s donations, and another group taking them down”. We considered that, throughout the interview, Mr Cunningham was able to represent his viewpoint and that of Raise the Flags Plus Shrewsbury. For example, he described the relationship he had with the local Muslim centre, and the work the group had carried out to fill in potholes in the area. While the presenter provided counter viewpoints and questioned the potential divisions the flags could cause, Mr Cunningham was able to explain his reasons for putting up flags, stating: *“This is not just Shrewsbury, this is not something that’s just happening here. It’s just happening all over the country... some other people are doing it for other reasons, mainly the immigration thing. Part of what I’m doing it is because of that, but it’s mainly because of the decades of lies and the lies”*. We also noted that the presenter invited listeners to contact the programme “if you want to say something in support and opposition to those viewpoints”. We therefore considered that the programme itself did not seek to criticise or condone Mr Cunningham’s actions or viewpoints, and that listeners would have been able to form their own views as to Mr Cunningham’s

motivations behind putting up flags. We noted too that on 13 March, Mr Cunningham told the BBC in an email that the interview “seems fair”. For these reasons, we considered that the content of the interview was unlikely to materially and adversely affect viewers’ perceptions of him in a way that was unfair.

Further, we noted that Mr Cunningham said in his complaint that some people had been linking the “flags of the Union jack and St George to racism [and] fascism”. However, as explained above, we did not consider that the programme alleged that Mr Cunningham’s motivations were racist or fascist in nature, and he was able to explain to the presenter why he was putting the flags up. Overall, we considered that, as Mr Cunningham was already a member and spokesperson of a public campaign, and as we considered that the content of the interview itself was not unfair to him, it was unlikely that the use of his last name in the programme as broadcast would materially or adversely affect viewers perceptions of him or his actions in a way that was unfair.

Therefore, for all the reasons set out above, Ofcom considered that Mr Cunningham was not treated unfairly in the programme as broadcast.

Ofcom has not upheld Mr Cunninghams’s complaint of unjust or unfair treatment in the programme as broadcast.