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## ADJUDICATION

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1. On 26 February 2016, the FT published an article - 'London property and the madness of the crowd' - by Merryn Somerset Webb. The article remains online at this URL: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/80e61830-dbd8-11e5-98fd-06d75973fe09.html#axzz45cjb3h9>. The article discussed various businesses that are looking to innovate to solve the problem of unaffordable property. One such business was Gifted Deposit, of which it was said:

*"Some [solutions] are completely nuts. First up we have Gifted Deposit. This launches in April and will allow first-time buyers to use their "social wealth" to beg family members and strangers to give them the cash they need for a deposit. They can "tell their story to a global audience" using photos and videos to "create engaging campaigns" and then sit back while the money rolls in.*

*This is clearly absurd. The global audience has (I hope) better causes to donate to than the bank accounts of residents of first world nations who are mildly dissatisfied with their housing arrangements. So any donations made via this silly site will be made by family. And guess what? It doesn't come cheap. Hand over a cheque to your kid and the additional cost will be zero. Send it via GiftedDeposit.com and it'll cost you 5 per cent. I think you get my point. There's no need to visit the site."*

2. By email to the Letters Editor, dated 6 March 2016, the co-founders of Gifted Deposit (Owen Angel and Paul Lamm) sent the FT a substantive response to what they claim were the article's misrepresentations (or misunderstandings) of their business. This rebuttal, although in the style of a letter to the editor, was in fact over 700 words in length (akin to a commissioned article).
3. That letter was not selected for publication, and Mr Angel wrote again to enquire when it might appear (especially by hyperlink on the bottom of the article itself) on 23 March 2016. The Letters Editor replied the same day to say "Dear Owen Angel, The letter was not selected for publication. Kind regards, Heather Davidson, Letters ed."

4. That same day, Mr Angel made a complaint to the FT, on the basis that:
  - a. Irrespective of whether he had been correct and entitled to assume from the initial acknowledgment of his letter that it would be published, he considered he was owed a ‘more courteous and explanatory reply’ than on 23 March; and
  - b. The article misrepresented/misunderstood, and thereby having ‘rubbished’, a developing small business, Mr Angel considered that it would be reasonable to its founders to respond to that attack, thus giving FT readers ‘both sides of a particular subject’.
5. The complaint was forwarded to me the very same day (23 March 2016) by the Letters Editor, who has also sent me the responses of the journalist in question and her editor, Clear Barrett. I wrote to Mr Angel on 29 March 2016 to confirm he wished for me to adjudicate as to whether there had been a breach of the FT Editorial Code of Practice, and he replied affirmatively the same day.

## **Discussion**

6. I am treating this complaint under Clauses 1.1 (inaccuracy) and 2.1 (Opportunity to Reply) of the FT Editorial Code of Practice, which provide that:
  - “1(1) *The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures.*
  - ...
  - 2(1) *A fair opportunity for reply to inaccuracies must be given when reasonably called for”*
7. Notwithstanding the allegation which opens the substantive rebuttal being that the journalist ‘either misrepresented or misunderstood’ Gifted Deposit, I have struggled to find in the short passage from the article that was an unequivocal statement of fact, capable of bearing misrepresentation or misunderstanding.
8. In their own words, Gifted Deposit is a form of crowdfunding site with which we are all familiar: produce a video for your book/project/charity campaign to entice donors, they donate money through the website, which takes a small cut for administrative costs. Beyond this, Gifted Deposit will also host plenty of free information on being a first-time-buyer (Government schemes, mortgage products etc).

9. While the tone is acidic, and the journalist clearly unimpressed with the concept, I cannot find any ‘misrepresentations’ or other factual inaccuracies in the Article. The co-founders’ own substantive letter confirms that the charge to users will amount to 5% of the money donated, which they say is in-line with other charity platforms (and other web-based services) which incur set-up costs and require administration.
10. There is no doubt that the scorn poured on the business might have injured the feelings of its co-founders, but this is (as pointed out by the editor) quite clearly a comment piece, with the basis for the comment set out in terms. There are no errors of fact which can, or have been, be identified. Accordingly, there is no ‘inaccuracy’ for the purposes of Clause 1(1).
11. If there is no ‘inaccuracy’, then the reasonable right to reply to inaccuracies under Clause 2(1) also falls away. Essentially, the FT (like any other newspaper) is under no obligation to print responses to every article from the subject of that article, unless the article in question has been found to be in error. It may do, but I will rarely (if ever) interfere in the exercise of that discretion.
12. I have finally considered whether there has been a breach of the Policy Guidance which requires those in FT editorial to be respectful to complainants when dealing with complaints at first instance. I find that in this case there has not been any breach. The Letters Editor is a particularly busy position, at the FT as at many newspapers, and giving a full, reasoned explanation in respect of every letter which she decides not to run would be to treble her workload for no apparent gain to the FT (or even most of its correspondents). Her response, indicating that the letter would not be published was certainly to the point, but it was not rude nor disrespectful so as to breach the Code.
13. Accordingly, having found no breaches of the FT Editorial Code, this complaint is dismissed.

**GREG CALLUS**  
**Editorial Complaints Commissioner**  
*Financial Times*  
**14 April 2016**