



Wirral Borough Council
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The Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Department for Communities and Local Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

1st August 2016

Dear Mr. Javid

I am writing to request the intervention of the DCLG to enforce the Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity following a decision by the Authority's Cabinet to publish a monthly newspaper and deliver this to all households and businesses in the Borough.

We note that the Department has issued notice to several authorities following similar such publications, notably the Royal Borough of Greenwich. We believe that Wirral Council's publication (up to 34 pages, produced monthly, distribution of 170,000 copies to every household in the parliamentary constituencies of Wirral West, Wirral South, Wallasey and Birkenhead) is in clear breach of the Code. The cost to the taxpayer of producing this publication will be £237,000 per annum, with around 20% of the publication allocated to commercial advertising, thus affecting the independent press and media in the Borough.

When this idea was agreed by Cabinet we were clearly concerned that the proposal would contravene the guidance set out in the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity, specifically the frequency of publication and that it was an inappropriate use of taxpayers' money. We therefore used the appropriate provisions in the Council's constitution to 'Call-in' the decision. I have included our Call-in statement and resolution for your interest but despite garnering the support of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats on the Committee we were unsuccessful in our attempts to refer this back to Cabinet.

I am therefore writing to request action to ensure compliance with the Code of practice on local authority publicity (Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, Part 7, Section 39)

If a representative from your Department wishes to speak to me further or needs any more information they can contact me directly on 07766 725125.

With very best wishes



Councillor Jeff Green
Leader of the Conservative Group
Ward Councillor for West Kirby & Thurstaston

CALL-IN

Decision of Cabinet to be called in:

Date of meeting	Monday 27 th June 2016
Minute number	Cabinet Minute 20
Subject	Keeping Residents Informed

Reason(s) for call-in:

Keeping Residents Informed – Reasons for Call In.

To date the Secretary of State has issued Directions under section 4A of the Local Government Act 1986 to 11 Councils relating to council publications. All 11 Directions have included references to the contravention of frequency of publication specifically: “where local authorities do commission or publish newsletters, newsheets of similar communications, they should not issue them more than quarterly.”

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has spent £48,000 in legal fees defending its publication ‘Greenwich Times’ which the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) argued contravened the Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity. The Greenwich Times was published for the last time by Greenwich Council on 28th June 2016 following an agreement with the DCLG to abide by the Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity. We believe it is a costly miscalculation for the Labour Cabinet to believe it is somehow above Government guidance.

Within the Cabinet report and at the subsequent Cabinet meeting there was absolutely no consideration given to the variety of successful community publications that operate across Wirral. We believe this shows a complete disregard for the years of hard work that a great number of community activists have given to Wirral and jeopardises the invaluable goodwill that the Council relies upon to deliver its significant community engagement agenda.

We believe this is not the time for novices to the newspaper industry to be launching a new print title. Wirral has two established, free, independent newspaper titles the Wirral News - circulation 28,095 copies and Wirral Globe total circulation 97,368 copies (71% of households) The Labour Administration cannot control what these papers print and we are concerned that this may be the driving force behind the creation of this Town Hall Pravda.

The Government has shown it is committed to ensuring that the independent free press does not face unfair competition from municipal publications. We believe Cabinet’s disregard for Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity is tantamount to Labour playing fast and loose with Council Taxpayers money.

Moved by Cllr Chris Blakeley

Seconded by Cllr Lesley Rennie

THIS COMMITTEE REFERS THE DECISION BACK TO CABINET

1) This committee asks Cabinet to write to the Department for Communities and Local Government seeking their view on the proposals for 'Keeping Residents Informed' as per the Cabinet report presented on the 27th June, 2016.

2) This Committee notes and welcomes the offer by Newsquest to work with the Council to fill the perceived gap in provision, and asks that this takes place with them, and other local Newspaper providers with immediate effect.

3) This committee is concerned that should the Town Hall publication go ahead, the Government is likely to serve an injunction on Wirral Council, and the committee is keen to avoid any unnecessary, protracted and expensive legal costs on the Council Taxpayers of Wirral, and also wishes to safeguard the Boroughs independent and vibrant local free press.

Vote:

6 for, 7 against, motion lost.