

NEWS STAFF2

From: Janice Shillum [REDACTED]
Sent: 15 April 2013 13:00
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Publicity Code consultation 2013

Dear Sir

I wholeheartedly support the Government's intention to introduce legislation to provide the Secretary of State with powers to make directions requiring one or more local authorities to comply with some or all of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity's recommendations.

As a member of the Chartered Institute of Journalists' Council and Professional Practices Board and acting Vice Chair of the Freelance Branch committee I have campaigned alongside the Institute to curtail the publishing of local government 'newspapers', many of which are no more than publicity and/or vanity sheets and most of which have severely affected traditional local press in the areas where they have been published.

In my own borough, the office of the local Guardian was closed down and redundancies made after Waltham Forest Council launched WFN (Waltham Forest News) and Anthony Longden, Managing Editor of Newsquest north and east London told me during my investigations in 2010 that "there is no question at all that the Council's [Waltham Forest's] decision to launch its own 'newspaper' and withdraw virtually all of its advertising from the Guardian Series delivered a mortal blow to the Guardian Series."

I have been protesting against WFN since it began fortnightly publication in 2008. I have written to my MP Iain Duncan Smith, the Council's Chief Executive and Chris Robbins, Leader of the Council (several times), spoken to my Ward Councillors and requested information on the cost of producing and distributing the 'paper' from the Council's Director of Governance & Law under the Freedom of Information Act. These were quoted to me as follows: 2008/9 £563,036.34, 2009/10, £543,200. For 2011/12 I was quoted a very confusing budget of £482,600 that showed both a predicted profit of £33,200 and also a predicted loss of the same figure.

It has been stated by Waltham Forest Council that all costs of WFN are offset by advertising but since currently most advertising is internal between Council departments these are still costs to the Council Tax payers of this Borough. In 2010 the paper was accepting recruitment advertising and stated that in 2008/9 28% of advertising came from external advertisers. The list of public sector partners who pay to run advertising in WFN included local schools and colleges, the Metropolitan Police, GLA, Waltham Forest Housing Association and north London Waste Plan. The budget for the Editor and Advertising Officer for 2009/10 was quoted as £86,500 including salary and costs. Design, printing of the newspaper and its fortnightly distribution are managed through separate external contracts.

Only last week I heard from one of my Ward Councillors that the true cost of WFN which continues to be published and distributed on a fortnightly basis in defiance of Government guidelines that state it should be no more than quarterly, is still in excess of £500,000 per year and that another Councillor recently discovered a vast pile of undelivered copies of WFN quietly

16/05/2013

rotting in Epping Forest. This wilful waste of resident's money at a time when three libraries have been closed in this Borough and all reference books, CDs and DVDs have been removed from those that remain to 'lower costs', not to mention the cuts in services for the old and disabled, is a disgrace and the continued defiance of Government Guidelines must be addressed in law.

I should also mention that WFN is nothing more than a publicity vehicle for the Council, no unpopular subject is ever addressed, no Court or Council reports featured. The latter are also sadly lacking in the local Guardian and Chingford Times who now do not have the budget or the reporters to cover them. So apart from wasting, over the past four years or so, in excess of £2million of tax payer's money, this particular fortnightly Council 'Pravda' is most certainly undermining local democracy and therefore national democracy is also at risk.

Your faithfully

Janice Shillum MLOJ

This email was received from the INTERNET and scanned by the Government Secure Intranet anti-virus service supplied by Vodafone in partnership with Symantec. (CCTM Certificate Number 2009/09/0052.) In case of problems, please call your organisation's IT Helpdesk.

Communications via the GSI may be automatically logged, monitored and/or recorded for legal purposes.

Correspondents should note that all communications to Department for Communities and Local Government may be automatically logged, monitored and/or recorded for lawful purposes.
