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From: Shima Tailor [REDACTED]
Sent: 03 May 2013 16:54
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: David Greely
Subject: Publicity Code consultation 2013 [SEC=PROTECT]
Attachments: Enfield Council Response_form_-_Publicity_Code_Consultation.doc
Classification: PROTECT

Dear [REDACTED]

Please find attached Enfield Council's response to the Publicity Code Consultation.

Kind regards

David Greely
Corporate Communications Manager
Enfield Council
mobile: [REDACTED]
tel: [REDACTED]

Classification: PROTECT

Enfield Council - a 4 Star Council and Beacon Authority for Supporting Independent
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16/05/2013

Response form

Publicity Code Consultation 2013

About you

i) Your details

Name:	David Greely
Position (if applicable)	Corporate Communications Manager
Name of Organisation (if applicable)	Enfield Council
Address:	Enfield Council Civic Centre Silver Street Enfield EN1 3XY
e mail:	[REDACTED]
Telephone Number:	[REDACTED]

ii) Are the views expressed on this consultation an official's response from the organisation you represent or your own personal views?

Organisational response

☒

Personal views

☐

iii) Please tick the box which best describes you or your organisation:

District council	
Metropolitan district council	
London borough council	√
Unitary authority/county council/county borough council	
Parish council	
Membership organisation	
Newspaper proprietor	
Newspaper staff	
Business	
Councillor	
Member of the public	
Other	

(please comment):	
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Questions:

1. Views on the proposed legislation are invited, and in particular do consultees see the proposals as fully delivering the commitment to give greater force to the Publicity Code by putting compliance on a statutory basis?

The first observation Enfield Council would make about this consultation is that the scope and scale of the proposals go beyond the topic of the consultation. If this is a consultation concerned with 'protecting the independent press from unfair competition' then it should be focused on consideration of recommendation 28 from the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity relating to the style, content and frequency of council publications. However, the scope of this consultation extends to proposals to provide the Secretary of State with powers to make directions requiring compliance with some or all of the Publicity Code's recommendations'. Enfield Council believes such a wide-ranging remit could have a considerable impact on our freedom to promote the interests of local people.

However, in keeping with the topic of this consultation we will start off by considering recommendation 28. Enfield Council supports a strong local press who report in a fair and balanced manner. Our local press can be critical friends, holding us to account when necessary and helping to explain what we do. In Enfield our local papers are well established and well regarded and play a vital role in keeping our local residents increasingly well informed about the council and council services – second most popular source of council information in our 2012 residents' survey. It is clearly in the interests of the council as well as local residents that the local press continues to contribute to sustaining a vibrant local democracy. Enfield Council is therefore very careful to ensure that its resident magazine does not compete with commercial newspapers.

Enfield Council differentiates its residents publication in look and feel from local newspapers by using clear council branding and packaging it as a council magazine. The content is very different from our local newspapers as the primary focus is information relating to the council and council services, other public or third sector organisations and community issues and events. Local papers, as private companies, are not obliged to provide this comprehensive community information service.

As regards private sector advertising which is so crucial to keeping local papers afloat – Enfield Council spends approximately £150,000 a year on advertising in the local press – including approximately £75,000 on public notices which we are required by law to place with local papers. In contrast we limit the amount of private sector advertising space available in Our Enfield to approximately £6000 a year. Far from providing unfair commercial

competition to the local press, Enfield Council is actually one of their biggest clients.

On this basis Enfield Council can clearly demonstrate that it does not seek to 'emulate commercial newspapers in style or content', provides support to the local press rather than competition, and therefore is not subject to any frequency restrictions (four editions a year) designed to curb those publications that do.

The appropriateness of continuing to use our council magazine as one of our key communications channels with residents is supported when tested against some of the key principles contained within the Publicity Code itself - including cost effectiveness. Whilst Enfield uses a range of different communication channels to reach particular audiences including websites and social media, in the case of matters concerning large sections of the community we need to take into account that a high percentage of our residents are not IT literate or have limited Internet access. Alternatives to using a council magazine might include placing more advertisements in the local press or publishing and distributing multiple information leaflets each time a universal service becomes available or is changed. However, both these options are considerable less cost-effective than publishing a regular newsletter.

The Council magazine, distributed to all 120,000 households in the borough, is therefore the most efficient and cost effective way to keep residents informed of Council services, initiatives and events of borough-wide interest. Without being able to keep residents informed of council developments every two months through the production of a cost effective magazine, Enfield Council would struggle to keep residents well informed on a shrinking budget.

At the same time as offering residents value for money it is important that Enfield Council continues to keep residents well informed. As the Explanatory Memorandum published by CLG alongside the Code states, "For a community to be a healthy democracy, local understanding of the operation of the democratic process is important, and effective communication is key to developing that understanding....In order to hold their local authority to account, the public need to have information about what their council is doing and why it is doing it." As already detailed, Enfield Council has significantly improved levels of residents feeling informed over recent years to 71% (Enfield Residents' Survey 2012). The production and distribution of the bi-monthly magazine has been central to this improvement - residents listing this as their main source of information about the Council for the first time in the 2012 Residents' Survey.

Enfield Council's final observation on recommendation 28 is that Enfield's two main local papers only reach approximately 60,000 residents each - with a high percentage of overlap. Enfield's population has now grown to 315,000. Enfield Council's magazine, which is distributed to all 120,000 households in the borough, therefore provides a reach that the independent press cannot match.

On a wider level Enfield Council is also concerned that the scope of the proposals could prevent local authorities from promoting the interests of the communities we serve, undermining any commitment to localism. As the Secretary of State himself said on 11 June 2010, "localism is the principle, the mantra and defines everything we doNo one in local government signed up to be told what to do for the rest of their lives by Whitehall."

Enfield Council believes that locally elected authorities should be speaking out on issues that matter to the people we represent and promoting the interests of the areas we serve. This viewpoint seems to be supported by the Explanatory Memorandum which says 'Local authority publicity is important to transparency and to localism, as the public need to know what their local authority is doing if they are to hold it to account.' It therefore, seems misguided and contradictory to recommend that local authorities avoid anything likely to be perceived by readers as 'a commentary on contentious areas of public policy'.

Enfield Council is also concerned about the proposal to provide the Secretary of State with the powers to issue directions if he feels that an authority is not complying with a code of practice recommendation. In the case of contentious areas of public policy affecting this borough, such as the proposed closure of services at Chase Farm hospital, this legislation means that communications by Enfield Council representing the concerns of local people, which run counter to Government policy could result in court action being taken, or threatened. We believe this fundamentally compromises our role as local leaders.

It is currently up to an impartial district auditor to determine whether public funds have been misused in breach of the code. Enfield Council believes that this is right and proper.

2. . If there is alternative to the power of direction, how will this meet the aim of improved enforcement of the code?

Enfield Council is happy with the current system whereby an impartial district auditor determines whether public funds have been misused in breach of the code.

3. This consultation invites evidence of the circumstances where the code was not met and the implications of this on competition in local media

N/A