

Member 3

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 06 May 2013 23:09
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Publicity Code consultation 2013
Attachments: Publicity consultation responseMay 2013.doc
Dear [REDACTED]

please find attached the response of the Society of Local Council Clerks

Kind regards

Sam Shippen

Sam Shippen (Mrs) FCIS, Fellow ILCM, CMC
External Affairs Officer
Society of Local Council Clerks

[REDACTED]
Society of Local Council Clerks, The Professional Body for Local Council Managers
Professional Supportive Innovative

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16/05/2013

Society of
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Publicity Code Consultation
Council Conduct and Constitutions Team
Department for Communities and Local Government
3/J1 Eland House
Bressenden Place
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SW1E 5DU

4 May 2013

Dear [REDACTED]

Protecting the Independent press from unfair competition Consultation

I am the External Affairs Officer of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) which is the professional body for officers working for Town, Parish, Community and Neighbourhood Councils (local councils) in England and Wales. The SLCC represents clerks and other officers in over 4,200 councils, I write on behalf of those members.

As stated in response to the previous consultation in 2010 on this subject, it is our opinion that the newsletters of local (town & parish) councils are rarely issued in competition with the local press. In fact, many local councils would be pleased to obtain more coverage of the excellent work that they undertake in their local area.

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?

We have no objection to a code of recommended practice, however, using legislation to give the Secretary of State the power to issue direction to an individual council seems contrary to localism and raises concern regarding the centralisation of power with a single elected political individual.

Although the proposals would give greater force to the publicity code, there appears no requirement within the proposals for publications to be forwarded to the Secretary of State, therefore it is unclear how he would become aware of and therefore fairly "regulate" publications. The proposals appear to be a fairly heavy handed method of forcing compliance by a few.

We would be concerned that the Secretary of State could use such powers conferred by the proposed legislation to stop a local council whose residents disagreed with a government policy from supporting those residents, examples which immediately spring to mind include major infrastructure proposals such as HS2, airport expansion and proposals for significant power generation such as nuclear or wind farms. It is our belief that the very core of our democratic process could be compromised by allowing the Secretary of State such control.

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

We do not consider that current Code needs to be altered and therefore our view is that the power of direction should not be needed by the Secretary of State. However, if government consider that the code requires improved enforcement, we would suggest that this be by a balanced panel of some sort rather than a political individual.

Society of Local Council Clerks - The Professional Body for Local Council Managers
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This consultation invites evidence of the circumstances where the code was not met and the implications of this on competition in local media.

Although we are aware of circumstances involving principal authorities, particularly London boroughs, we are not aware of any examples of local councils where the code was not met and therefore are of the opinion that further legislation is unnecessary to be applied to our sector, if applied at all.

The SLCC is happy to work with government to assist in achieving the aims set out in this consultation without the need for the introduction of legislation.

Should you require any additional information in respect of this response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Sam Shippen FCIS, Fellow ILCM, CMC
External Affairs Officer