

Subject: Response to Consultation on the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authority Publicity

Date of Meeting: 16 November 2010

Report of: Strategic Director, Resources

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 In September the Government consulted on a new Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity to replace the existing Code, and invited comments from interested parties
- 1.2 This report sets out the background to the consultation, the principal elements of the proposed new Code, and the Council's response.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

- 2.1 That the Governance Committee notes the report, the consultation document (see Appendix 1) and the Council's response (see Appendix 2).

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- 3.1 The Government's stated reasons for consulting on a new Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity are as follows:
 - (i) The Government's belief that existing rules on local authority publicity have resulted in taxpayers' money being wasted and the free press being undermined; and the Government's wish to see funds diverted away from local authority newspapers into frontline services.
 - (ii) The press should not face competition from a local authority publication passing itself off as a newspaper.
 - (iii) There is no need for local authorities to use professional lobbyists to get their point across to Government.
 - (iv) Good, effective publicity aimed at improving public awareness of a council's objectives is acceptable. The underlying objective of the new Code is to ensure proper use of public funds for publicity, and to provide guidance on content, dissemination and timing.
- 3.2 The proposed new Code (set out at the back of the consultation document – see Appendix 1) includes the following key provisions:

- (i) Local authority publicity should adhere to seven principles, the need to be:
 - lawful
 - cost effective
 - objective
 - even-handed
 - appropriate
 - have regard to equality and diversity
 - be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity
- (ii) Printed or web-based local authority newspapers:
 - (a) must not appear more frequently than once a quarter;
 - (b) must only include material that is directly related to the business, services or amenities of the authority or other local service providers;
 - (c) should be clearly marked as being published by the local authority.
- (iii) Local authorities should not incur expenditure on private lobbyists, nor have stalls at party conferences with the aim of lobbying Government.

3.3 Subject to the consultation, the Government intends by the end of November 2010 to lay before Parliament the revised code which will come into force once it is approved by both Houses of Parliament.

3.4 The Council's response to the consultation is reproduced at Appendix 2.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1 The Government's consultation period was 29 September to 10 November. As there was no scheduled meeting of the Governance Committee during that time, the Council's draft response was circulated to Group Leaders for comment, prior to submission.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

5.1 The draft response outlines the potential financial impact of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The elements of the proposed new code are being considered alongside proposals to improve value for money in communications activity throughout the Council.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley

Date: 02/11/10

Legal Implications:

5.2 Under section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986, the council must, in coming to any decision on publicity, have regard to any code of recommended practice issued by the Secretary of State (under that same section) as regards the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. The consultation relates to a revised code issued under this section 4.

- 5.3 Paragraphs 5 to 9 of the proposed new Code (set out at the back of the consultation document, at Appendix 1 of this report) detail the other legislation governing the use of publicity by local authorities.

Lawyer Consulted:

Oliver Dixon

Date: 26/10/10

Equalities Implications:

- 5.4 The council's response makes the Government aware that reducing the publication frequency of City News could make it harder for those without access to the internet to find out about council services and activities.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.5 None arising directly from this report

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.6 None arising directly from this report

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.7 If the Government confirms its proposal to restrict council newspapers to a quarterly publication, the council will need to consider alternative channels for publicising information about its services at more frequent intervals, consistent with the new Code.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The council will need to work within the bounds of the new Code in the methods it uses to inform local people about council services and to publicise opportunities to get involved in local governance.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Consultation on Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity
2. Council response to the consultation (to follow)

Documents In Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None

