



Report to Cabinet

Subject: Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

Date: 2 June 2011

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1. Purpose of the Report

§ To inform Cabinet of the recently amended Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

2. Background

There has been a Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity in some form since 1988. The Code was revised significantly in 2001 to take into account new executive governance arrangements (Leader and Cabinet models etc). This is a statutory code with which the Council is required to comply.

Local authorities are required by legislation to consider the Code in coming to any decision on publicity, which is defined as “any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public or a section of the public”.

The Code covers the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity.

A consultation with local authority organisations on a draft revised Code was carried out in the Autumn of 2010. Following the consultation, further consideration was given to the issue by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, which undertook an inquiry looking at the draft revised Code -

A revised Code was laid before Parliament on 11 February. It was approved by both Houses of Parliament on 30 March and came into force on 31 March 2011 (see appendix 1).

3. The New Code – Key Issues and Implications for Gedling BC

The new code is somewhat shorter than the previous version. It sets out 7 principles for Local Authorities consider when issuing publicity material:

- Be lawful
- Be cost effective
- Be objective
- Be even-handed
- Be appropriate
- Have regard to equality and diversity
- Be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

The main changes in the Code reflect the Coalition Government's concerns around the use of lobbyists and advertising in council newspapers – these issues attracted particular attention during the consultation process.

The Council has never used lobbyists in the manner set out in the Code therefore the revised Code will not impact on the council's operation.

With regard to council magazines and newspapers, Contacts, as currently published, complies with the revised code because: -

- It is clearly branded as a council publication
- It does not seek to emulate or replace a commercial newspaper or magazine
- Its content is almost exclusively about the business, services and amenities of the council and of other local service providers (the only exception being the community news and events pages, though these are often supported by the council).
- It is produced 3 times a year (occasionally 4 times when a consultation special is published). This fits with the proposal that such newspapers/magazines should be produced no more than quarterly.
- It does not include advertising, so therefore does not compete with commercial newspapers to secure such funding.

The new Code also attempts to clarify previously unclear issues about hosting third party publicity, including blogs, but does urge caution on such matters especially in the run up to elections and referenda.

It is felt important for the Council to continue its long-established practice of compliance with the Code. It would seem that there are no specific issues in it that would cause the Council any difficulties in doing so.

It is also important for members to be aware of the Code – therefore, in addition to its inclusion on this agenda, the Code has been brought to the attention of new members as part of the Induction process (at a presentation on Communications on 24 May 2011).

4. Recommendation

To note the revised Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.