

Response to Publicity Code Consultation

1. The association of News Retailing (ANR) is pleased to respond to the “Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity” as recommended by the Secretary of State.
2. ANR represents the news industry interest of Association of Convenience Stores¹ (ACS) which is the campaigning voice of more than 33,500 local shops.
3. Membership of ACS/ANR comprises both retailers and suppliers, and the organisation prides itself on its ability to garner information and knowledge from the sector as a whole. This is then used to provide insight and practical help to benefit all members.
4. Membership consists of: independent community retailers; symbol group retailers such as Spar, Costcutter, Musgrave; multiple retailers such as Mills News, GT News and the Co-op.
5. Local and regional publications form an important part of ANR members’ sales and in many of our members’ shops local titles can often outsell national newspapers. It is therefore important to our members that any unfair competition by local authority newspapers is resisted.
6. ANR’s comments are directed only at the elements within the Code that relate to the publication of local authority free publications or so called newspapers.
7. We agree with the Secretary of State that taxpayer’s money is being wasted and a free press is being undermined by these local authority publications and welcome the Governments commitment to stop this unfair competition.
8. ANR supports the seven principles of the Code that requires local authority publicity to be lawful, cost effective, objective, even-handed, and appropriate, to have regard to equality and diversity, and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.
9. We believe that if local authorities adhere to both the letter and the principle of the Code then the rules to stop unfair competition by local authority newspapers should prove sufficient.
10. We need a strong and vibrant local press as a means of ensuring that the community is able to play an active part in local democracy, not least holding their local representatives to account. It is, therefore, important that local authority publications

¹ For more information www.acs.org.uk

are not designed, either deliberately or by accident, so as to appear to be part of the free press, for instance perceived to be a local newspaper.

11. Balanced and factually accurate council publications that objectively relate council policies and proposals and do not seek to influence and form public opinion would appear to be an appropriate use of local authority publicity.
12. Ensuring that these publications are clearly and unambiguously identified on the front page as products of the local authority is also welcomed and should ensure that they are not mistaken for a local newspaper.
13. Ensuring that local authority titles are published no more frequently than four times a year would appear to be an appropriate use of council resources and should limit any negative impact on local newspapers.
14. Local newspapers engender a sense of community belonging with local news, including announcements such as births, deaths, marriages that can create a necessary social cohesion that benefits the whole community. It is therefore vital that these newspapers are not undermined by overzealous local authorities who distribute their own council publications as 'newspapers' in order to counter any critical, impartial and independent analysis of their performance.
15. ANR welcomes the proposed Code and encourage the Secretary of State to implement it at the earliest opportunity.