

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

6 February 2013

Ref: Home Office Alcohol Strategy Consultation:
'Delivering the Government's policies to cut alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour'

Dear Ms May,

I write as Editor of the Newsquest Somerset series of newspapers in response to the consultation on the Home Office Alcohol Strategy with particular reference to the proposal to remove the existing statutory requirement on alcohol licence applicants to advertise their applications in a local newspaper.

If approved, this proposal will jeopardise further the viability of community newspapers such as ours as well as conflicting with the stated objective of the strategy, which is to protect the public and the quality of life in the communities we serve.

My reasons for objecting to the proposals are summarised as follows:

- 1) Any step which restricts the availability of information about licensing applications to the public is opposed to the overall strategy as it hampers the public's ability to learn about such applications and debate them.
- 2) Informing the public in the licensing process is central to the statutory purpose and 'transparency' the Government says it wants.
- 3) Only a local newspaper can provide an effective, independent and trusted platform for both information and discussion in print and online. Only via a local newspaper does genuine public debate take place, certainly far more so than a council website.
- 4) Research by GfK NOP in 2012 shows more than a quarter of adults in the UK had not accessed the internet in the previous 12 months, again emphasising the importance of having licensing information available offline.
- 5) The impact assessment focuses only on the relatively small cost-savings which might be achieved by scrapping the requirement to advertise in local newspapers. These are savings not for the local authority or the taxpayer but for the alcohol industry.
- 6) At a newspaper conference meeting in December 2012, Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, repeated his intention to stick to the commitment made when coming into office not to remove statutory public notices from local newspapers during the lifetime of the Parliament.
- 7) In the recent Leveson Report, Lord Leveson singled out local newspapers for praise and highlighted their commercial vulnerability and the importance to them of advertising revenue. He said: "Their [local papers'] demise would be a huge setback for communities and would be a real loss for our democracy." I urge you to heed his message.

I have also attached a copy of the submission to the consultation by Newsquest as a national group, for your reference.

Yours sincerely,

