

# Midland News Association

*The Midland News Association Ltd.*

*Queen Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1ES*

*Telephone: 01 902 31 31 31*

Alcohol Strategy Consultation  
Home Office  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor Fry  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Redacted  
S40  
Personal Information

21<sup>st</sup> January 2013

To whom it may concern

I am writing to submit my response to proposals to change the advertising of alcohol licence public notices, which were released by the Home Office in a consultation document entitled 'Delivering the Government's policies to cut alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour' published in November 2012.

As managing director of the Midland News Association, Britain's biggest independent news company and publisher of the largest regional newspaper the Express & Star, we are concerned about the effect that these proposals will have on the communities which our newspapers serve.

At present, councils are obliged to place licensing application and variation notices in local newspapers. Under the new proposals, local authorities would not be subject to this obligation and would have the freedom to choose other means.

We believe these proposals represent a serious threat to the public's right to know. People should be kept informed about changes and developments in their locality, many of which will have a direct impact on their lives.

For local democracy to function effectively, the widest possible section of the community should be told of new licences and applications for variations to enable citizens to raise concerns on issues such as potential anti-social behaviour.

We believe the best way to reach the widest possible audience is through local newspapers, which remain the most credible providers of information for readers and advertisers. Readers are used to finding important information in their trusted local newspaper. Relying on site notices or council websites to advertise alcohol licence public notices would severely restrict the general public's opportunity to give their opinions.

Independent research by GFK NOP in 2012 shows that local newspapers and their websites remain by far the best media channel for public notices. GFK found that eight times as many people had read a newspaper in the past week than had looked at their council website (33 million v 4 million adults).



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GFK also found that twenty-nine per cent of all adults had not accessed the internet at all in the last 12 months, meaning that advertising licensing applications online only would exclude 14 million UK residents, including many poorer members of society.

The MNA submitted representations to the Leveson Inquiry to reinforce the unrivalled value we believe newspaper groups such as ours bring to local communities. In his Report, Lord Justice Leveson noted that local newspapers were under financial pressure. He added: "Yet their demise would be a huge setback for communities (where they report on local politics, occurrences in the local courts, local events, local sports and the like) and would be a real loss for our democracy."

Given this acknowledgement of the importance of local newspapers within our democracy, we do not believe the proposals should be introduced. The risk of large sections of the community being excluded from vital information about potential anti-social behaviour is, we believe, too high a price to pay for implementing these measures.

