



**Department for
Communities and
Local Government**

The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP

*Secretary of State for Communities and Local
Government*

**Department for Communities and Local
Government**

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Tel: 0303 444 3450

Fax: 0303 444 3289

E-Mail: eric.pickles@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.communities.gov.uk

15 May 2013

Dear Adrian and David,

I want to offer my support and congratulations for your Local Newspaper Week campaign.

I agree that strong local newspapers are the very bulwark on which our daily life depends, and when they flourish, local democracy succeeds.

Your members' news organisations offer more than just a read-out of local opinion. Their 1,100 local newspapers are the heartbeat of communities, an essential cog in the democratic wheel and exemplary localists. They speak up for their 30 million weekly readers by shining a light on how local taxes are spent and holding local politicians to account.

I'm keen to see local news organisations thrive, but I know that times are tough. Local press faces difficulties, challenged by demographic shifts in how and where people consume media and online competition for advertising.

This has been exacerbated by another problem. The spread of the Town Hall 'Pravda'. This is manifestly unfair because they offer cut price local news, but mixed in with council propaganda that pours taxpayers money down the drain. These free-sheets are often confused for the real thing by residents. I want our news to be told and sold under the masthead of an independent and free press, not through a knock-off Rolex imitation.

So in the week you celebrate the importance of local news I am firmly backing that tradition by introducing new legislation, as part of the Local Audit and Accountability Bill, that will shut down the Pravda printing press and hold councils feet firmly to standards set in the Publicity Code. It says that councils shouldn't be publishing newspapers in direct competition to local press. Too many councils disregarded the current code and too many continued to waste money. This law will stop that happening.

Our commitment to a free and incisive local press has also seen the opening of doors to journalists at council committee and sub-committee meetings and allowing tweeting in those meetings to break stories as they happen.

This bill deserves your vocal support because with these new freedoms against unfair competition, we both can look forward to seeing local newspapers going from strength to strength.

THE RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP