



LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

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Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
DCLG, Fry Building,
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister

Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

I am writing to thank you for your letter of the 19th April. We have entered into significant correspondence with the Government on this issue, and Waltham Forest's Director of Governance and Law has written to the Permanent Secretary for DCLG to set out the Council's position.

Waltham Forest News is valued by the Council and its community for many reasons. However I want to just want to take the opportunity to raise one with you. Waltham Forest News plays a vital role in enabling this Council to carry out its Prevent duty and promote cohesion. The importance of this agenda continues to grow as does the threat to our communities: recent events in Europe show just how important it is to maintain and nurture relationships with and between communities to avoid conflict and alienation.

As you will know, Waltham Forest is designated as priority area for Prevent by the Home Office. I know I do not need to detail the recent cases which have peppered the borough's recent history with these issues.

Despite often vocal local opposition, the Council have always strongly supported the Government's Prevent programme, and are considered one of a handful of best practice boroughs. Indeed the Council was successful in accessing around £500,000 of additional European funding to increase its anti-extremism work in schools.

The Prevent agenda has always been challenging, however in the past year since the Prevent duty was agreed it has become particularly controversial. In December 2015, the Waltham Forest Council of Mosques withdrew its support for the programme, making our challenge even greater.

We have always used Waltham Forest News as our key channel to promote work in this area, in particular to promote cohesion across all of our communities. The Home Office are currently working very positively with local government to debunk myths about the programme and promote positive coverage.

Our Chief Executive, Martin Esom, is Chair of the London Prevent Board and is currently working to deliver a Home Office communications initiative across London. In coming weeks we will be hosting a Home Office and London Councils seminar for communications professionals to support them in communicating Prevent. Critically, local and national newspapers do not, and it appears will not, carry positive Prevent stories. In fact the opposite is true and recent negative and often misleading stories only serve to undo Central and Local Government work.

Waltham Forest News has a circulation of more than 97,000. The next highest circulating ABC audited newspaper is Waltham Forest Guardian with a circulation of just 3,678 and which has never – to our knowledge – carried a positive story on the Prevent programme and has a low circulation amongst priority communities.


The Government should be in no doubt that we communicate with our community on issues such as Prevent and cohesion via Waltham Forest News. Should we stop publishing, we will lose the ability to give timely and specific information on these issues with no alternative communications channel available. These issues cannot be successfully dealt with on a quarterly basis or via a paper with a circulation of fewer than 3,600 in a population of over 260,000. The Home Office and DCLG seem to be at odds in the outcomes you are seeking from us, and unrealistic in the ways in which these can reasonably be delivered.

In a London borough with high levels of population churn, and competition for residents' attention, we are convinced that the absence of a regular Council voice would be damaging to cohesion. Our research shows that 85% of people who read Waltham Forest News agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together, compared to 71% of those who do not read the paper.

The recent knife attack in Leytonstone (5th December 2015) is an example of how regular community information plays an important role in a community such as ours. The incident - which was initially linked to extremism - illustrates the value and importance of Waltham Forest News. Not only were we able to provide our residents with clear facts about the attack following sensationalist reporting in the national media, but more importantly we were able to reassure residents and promote cohesion which is a vital tool in preventing extremism.

With the forthcoming Anti-Extremism Bill and Louise Casey's review, which this Council has contributed to, the focus on cohesion is set to grow at both a national and local level. The Government should be clear that without the Council's regular publication, our ability to promote community cohesion would be compromised.

Yours sincerely



Chris Robbins
Leader of the Council