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25th September 2017

Dear Mr Powell,

I thank you for your continued, if somewhat intermittent, interest in the subject of Hackney Today. However, in the light of the very many challenges currently facing both councils and your department, particularly in the wake of the tragedy of Grenfell Tower, not to mention the issues of huge significance facing Government as a whole, it is remarkable that you have either the time or inclination to trawl through back issues of Hackney Today. Certainly, our time could be better employed than in responding to letters like this.

However, out of courtesy, we will of course provide you with a full and detailed response.

It is hard to imagine how we could be clearer in our explanation of how we sell advertising space. When we say we do not sell space proactively, we mean just that. We do not approach businesses and attempt to sell them space in Hackney Today. If businesses or other agencies approach us and ask to buy space in Hackney Today, then we will of course oblige.

We do not employ either a staff member or an agency to sell space on our behalf. We do, however, employ a financial administrator who serves an entire division of the Council, and about 10% of whose time is spent answering and processing these incoming enquiries. The advertisement from Wandsworth Sash Windows to which you refer came in exactly that way.

The 'advertising' to which you refer on pages 16-18 is not 'sold' at all. It is a free listings service which allows local community groups and businesses to promote their activities to the community at no cost.



This 'What's On?' section of Hackney Today is extremely popular with readers, businesses and the community sector, and one of the many benefits that Hackney Today provides to the public that would be lost by a reduction in frequency.

In answer to your more detailed question; in the year 2016/17, Hackney Today received around £115,000 in external income. The majority of income came from the NHS, regional bodies such as TfL and the London Legacy Development Corporation, and the education sector. The total is lower than in previous years, which is as a direct result of us ceasing the proactive sale of space, in response to DCLG's concerns about unfairly competing with local commercial titles. Despite this, Hackney Today continues to provide excellent value for money as it allows us to carry our own statutory advertising at a far lower cost than would be the case were we to advertise in another title.

We reiterate the point we have made many times that we will consider reducing frequency when DCLG remove the requirements to publish statutory notices in a newspaper. We note that despite the investment of a considerable sum in alternative publication pilots, DCLG have yet to publish the findings of those pilots.

I hope that as well as reading the advertisements, you enjoyed the rest of the 11th September edition of Hackney Today, including the celebration of our diverse communities in the features on the Hackney Carnival and the LGBTQI family picnic, the promotion of the Discretionary Business Rates scheme to local businesses, the information on public space consultations and updates on leisure facilities, the promotion of transparency through the Mayor's Question Time, and the many other articles promoting schools, charities, community gardens and health initiatives.

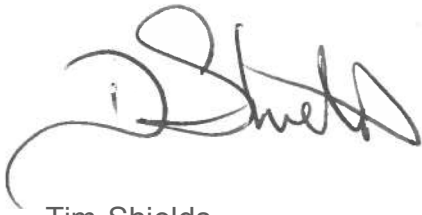
In his post-Grenfell speech to LGA conference, the Secretary of State Sajid Javid gave a speech about what he called 'the crisis of trust' in local government. He said 'our mission has to be local government that is truly engaged with and supportive of communities.' That is something that Hackney would wholeheartedly support, and something you will see reflected on every page of the edition of Hackney Today to which you make reference. It is impossible to see how the Secretary of State's vision can be achieved by forcing Councils to communicate, less frequently, or by your own admission, less effectively, with their residents.

Hackney is a Council that is held up by our peers as a national exemplar of community engagement. Over the past 3 years we have sought and listened to the views of thousands of local residents on the issues that affect them most, from housing and education to community cohesion.

We would like to work with you to share what we have learned, rather continue to be involved in this increasingly meaningless dispute, and we would like to invite you and your colleagues to visit Hackney so we can share our evolving engagement model with you.

I hope that after seven years, and in the light of what we are all trying to achieve, we can put an end to this correspondence and start to interact in a more positive and constructive way that can benefit local government as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Shields'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'S'.

Tim Shields  
Chief Executive