

**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**17 October 2023**

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**Item 15 – Members’ Questions**

**From Cllr Jon Hubbard – Melksham South**

**To Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Military-Civilian Integration, Heritage, Arts, Tourism, Health and Wellbeing**

**Question (23-23)**

Like council’s across the country budgetary pressures mean we should be exploring all options for saving money and getting best value for money wherever possible.

Could the leader therefore help me understand why it appears that it is the policy of this council to place statutory notices that affect communities in Melksham and Westbury in the Wiltshire Times newspaper rather than in the local newspapers serving those areas which charge just 25% of the price being paid?

The distribution of the Melksham News alone exceeds that of the Wiltshire Times, so therefore it is without doubt that the number of residents within the local community that will be affected by a statutory notice who actually see the advert will be significantly higher should the more local paper be used.

We speak as a council about wanting to support local businesses yet here are preferring to place our statutory advertising with an American conglomerate rather than a Wiltshire based local family business.

Why are we not taking up this opportunity to support a local business and place advertisements for Melksham and Westbury in the local papers for those towns, and indeed investigate similar options for other town’s with local newspapers such as Warminster.

More coverage, less cost, supporting local business – I struggle to understand the reasons not to?

**Response:**

Thank you for your question. This issue has been previously raised with us by the Editor of the Melksham News, the Mayor of Melksham Town Council and Councillor Jonathan Seed.

Wiltshire Council's practice of placing statutory notices in a paid-for newspaper is based on legal advice. This advice reflects the wording in the relevant legislation, the likelihood that paid-for newspapers are read (based on a reasonable assumption that some people may not choose to read a free paper that is sent to them), and that paid-for newspapers have a circulation which has been confirmed by the Audit Bureau of Circulations. We do not believe the Melksham Independent News are using this industry standard method.

We also can't assume that certain Traffic Regulation Orders will only affect people in Melksham. People drive through on a regular basis and those residents are unlikely to see the Traffic Regulation Order in the local free newspaper, but more likely to see it in a paper with a wider county-coverage.

To ensure we are providing value for money, we know the Government has consulted on making alterations to traffic regulation order (TRO) (see link below) processes and requirements and they are analysing feedback on that. We propose to review our current policy considering the outcome of that consultation.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/traffic-regulation-orders-changes-to-publishing-requirements-and-special-events-order-approvals>