

Cllr Jon Hubbard

A Strong Independent Voice for Melksham

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Cllr Graham Wright
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
Wiltshire Council
County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
BA14 8JN

20th November 2024

Dear Graham

Request to Address the Council's Decision Regarding Wiltshire Publications at the Next Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting

I am writing to formally request that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee address the recent decision by Wiltshire Council to cease press support for Wiltshire Publications and the broader implications of this action at the next available meeting.

This matter raises serious concerns regarding transparency, due process, and the standards used by the Council to engage with the media. In particular, I would like the Committee to consider and scrutinise the following:

1. **Decision-Making Process**
 - What policies or constitutional rules were followed when the decision was made to cease engagement with Wiltshire Publications?
 - What advice was given to the political leadership, and on what basis was this advice formed?

2. **Assessment of Alleged Bias**
 - What methodology was used to assess allegations of bias in Wiltshire Publications' reporting?
 - Over what period was this assessment conducted, and who carried out the evaluation?
 - What benchmarks or recognized systems were used to determine whether the publication met the Council's standards for impartiality?

3. **Letter Sent to Wiltshire Publications**
 - The letter sent by the Council to Wiltshire Publications states: *"We urge you to adopt a more professional and balanced reporting style in the future as, currently, we do not feel able to engage with your publications. Constructive dialogue is essential for our working relationship, and when we see impartiality in*

your coverage and clear efforts to present a balanced picture, we will review our position.”

- How is the Council measuring whether Wiltshire Publications meets this standard for balance and impartiality?
- What framework is being used to guide this review?

4. **Complaints Process**

- Wiltshire Publications has reportedly been unable to file a formal complaint regarding the Council’s actions due to the Council’s assertion that corporate bodies cannot lodge complaints.
- What mechanisms are in place to allow businesses or organisations to challenge Council decisions that affect them?
- Does the current complaints process require revision to ensure it is inclusive and fair?

Given the potential implications of this matter on freedom of the press, transparency in decision-making, and the reputation of Wiltshire Council, it is essential that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertakes a thorough review. This will help restore public confidence in the Council’s ability to act fairly and in accordance with its own principles and policies.

I would be grateful if you could confirm whether this issue will be added to the agenda for the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Please let me know if further information is required to support this request.

Below you will find the necessary 10 names required to formally call an issue in for Scrutiny to investigate.

With kindest regards



Cllr Jon Hubbard
Melksham South

Call in supported by:

Cllrs Jon Hubbard, Ian Thorn, Gavin Grant, David Bowler, Clare Cape, Liz Alstrom, Helen Belcher, Ross Henning, Stewart Palmen, Carole King, Sam Charleston