

Appendix 3

Public statement issued by the council regarding Wiltshire Publications

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of Wiltshire Council, said: “Wiltshire Council welcomes being held to account by the press and responds to over 1,400 media enquiries annually. We expect both positive and negative coverage from the media and we welcome robust challenge. However, we also believe that it is important to provide a balanced picture in any coverage so both sides of any story can be covered fairly. In this case we are not being held to account fairly or reasonably.

“Wiltshire Publications has undertaken an ongoing campaign for over two years to put pressure on the council to advertise statutory notices with them. We have consistently provided the same answer to their queries and yet despite our clear communication that we will reevaluate our approach following the Government’s review of relevant legislation, they continued to present a negative narrative – because we have chosen not to advertise with them.

“While it might cost less to place an advert in their publications, it would not save the council money and would be more expensive overall. We would still be required to advertise statutory notices in other publications to ensure we reach a wider audience and meet our legal obligations. This does not represent value for money for residents and would not lead to any cost savings for us.

“Their reporting has not been impartial, as it has failed to include balanced quotes from council representatives, which would have demonstrated that the picture they present does not tell the full story. Two of our councillors provided comments on their initial story and these comments were not included in the article because it did not fit with the narrative of the story; these comments would have given a more balanced view.

“Wiltshire Publications’ approach culminated in the council submitting a complaint to the editor urging them to adopt a more balanced reporting style.

“We advised we would not engage with Wiltshire Publications until we felt an effort was made to adopt a balanced position and requested they address these points with us. It is disappointing that rather than work with us they have chosen to publish a further article which again misrepresents our position.

“While we are not responding directly to them, they are still able to access our press releases which are published on our website and through our social media channels.

However, we respect their right to take the approach they feel is most effective for them. At this time, we do not feel it would be appropriate to review our position.”