

Caroline Russell AM



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Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
London SE1 2AA

Dear Sadiq,

Protecting local press from unfair competition from council freesheets

It has been brought to my attention that the local press in Hackney are facing unfair competition from a council freesheet.

The fortnightly publication from the council not only diverts advertising revenue away from the Hackney Citizen but the frequency of its publication directly contravenes guidance from the Department of Communities and Local Government. [1]

The Government released a statement on 2 December naming Hackney as one of the small minorities of councils in non-compliance with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. [2]

In your oral update at the 14 September Mayor's Question Time [3] you expressed concerns about the threat of redundancies that many journalists are facing in south London local weekly papers, and acknowledged their vital scrutiny role in holding politicians and decision makers to account.

Local newspapers also have an important role in celebrating local culture and achievements, as well as exposing illegal business practices and criminal activity, not only a local champion, public information service but also an active deterrent against crime. [4]

In light of the financial challenges local papers face do you think it is fair that Hackney Council's taxpayer funded fortnightly freesheet, Hackney Today, is now competing commercially with Hackney Citizen by carrying advertisements for local businesses?

The Hackney Citizen, which currently employs three full time staffers and one part time member of staff, is now facing an uncertain future, in part because of this unfair competition.

They are a small independent local paper and are not part of a big publishing group, so are in a particularly vulnerable position.

In the 2016 budget the then Chancellor announced a new £1,500 business rates discount for office space occupied by local newspapers as they adapt to new technology and changing circumstances.

Given the importance of a thriving local press and the threats this sector currently faces, will you look at what other support you can offer in the next review of your economic development strategy?

Yours sincerely



Caroline Russell

London Assembly Member, Green Party Group

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5670/1878324.pdf

[2] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-action-to-help-local-newspapers-tax-breaks-and-action-on-council-newsletters>

[3] <https://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s59329/Transcript%20of%20Item%203%20-%20Mayors%20Report.pdf>

[4] <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/dec/04/local-justice-is-being-murdered-by-cuts-and-closures>