

I may not like what they say, but I'll defend their right to say it

A representative from a fellow public sector organisation was utterly dismayed when they heard we didn't have a council newspaper. How on earth did we 'get our corporate message out there' they asked?

There has been a proliferation of public sector newspapers, newsletters, magazines over recent years. First they appeared a couple of times a year, then quarterly and now, some more frequently than that.

It has been said that this type of publication - funded by the taxpayer - can lead to the demise of local newspapers by taking away valuable advertising revenue.

Our local press has an important role to play in our democracy. It can, and frequently does, hold our public servants to account. It helps local people scrutinise the work of public authorities and gives a voice to those, who without a free press, would often remain unheard.

It is difficult to argue a council rag could do a similar job. And the perception is that it will just be full of council propaganda.

Of course there are likely to be occasions when a major issue affecting the whole of the borough requires communication to every household and the best way to do it would be a 'one-off' publication.

So in the 21st century, despite the popularity and accessibility of email, websites and other social media, our local press is still, if not more so, a vital cog in the machinery of democracy.

At times I may disagree with them wholeheartedly, I may even dislike what they print - but I will defend their right to say it and champion their need to be here.

Councillor Mike Heenan

Leader of Stafford Borough Council