**LOCAL NEWSPAPER RATE RELIEF POLICY**

1. **Background**

1.1 The Government announced in the 2016 Autumn Statement that it would provide a discount of up to £1,500 per annum for 2 years from 1 April 2017, to office space occupied by local newspapers.

1.2 As this is a temporary measure for the 2017/18 and 2018/19 financial years only, the Government is not changing the rules on when a property becomes eligible for relief. Instead it is providing the relief by reimbursing local authorities that use their discretionary relief powers (under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988) to grant relief in prescribed circumstances.

1.3 The purpose of the relief is to assist local newspaper publishers as they adapt to industry changes from print to digital and maintain a local physical presence.

1.4 Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 5 September 2017 (decision 99/2017) to adopt the discretionary rate relief scheme for local newspapers in line with Government guidelines.

1. **Properties to benefit from relief**

2.1 The property must be occupied by a local newspaper title and wholly or mainly used as offices for journalists and reporters

2.2 The local newspaper may be a chargeable or free publication

2.3 Only one discount is available per local newspaper title and per property

2.4 Local council newspapers, On-line only publications and local magazines are excluded from this scheme.

1. **Amount of relief to be paid**

3.1 The limit under this scheme is £1,500 per annum for up to 2 years.

3.2 Eligibility for the relief and the relief itself will be assessed and calculated on a

daily basis.

1. **Process for awarding relief**

4.1 There is no application form. Applicants should apply for the relief by e-mailing the business rates team at [rates@medway.gov.uk](mailto:rates@medway.gov.uk)

1. **State Aid relief**

5.1 State Aid is support from public bodies which has the potential to distort competition and effect trade between member states of the European Union.

* 1. Any form of discretionary rate relief may amount to State Aid.
  2. State Aid is generally prohibited, but there are exceptions and aid is allowed under the ‘de-minimis’ rules. For most businesses this currently means €200,000 over 3 years from ALL sources.
  3. The Council will require an applicant to demonstrate their compliance with these legal requirements and any permitted exemptions. Each case will be considered based on the ratepayer’s individual circumstances in full consideration of the state aid rules.

1. **Appeals**
   1. Appeals against a refusal to grant relief will be dealt with as follows:

* Initial review by the Revenues and Benefits Service Manager
* Second stage review by the Chief Finance Officer