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Media Statement

29 January 2014

Further response to Inside Out re: Real Whitby claims

Lisa Dixon, Scarborough Borough Council's Director of Democratic and Legal Services said:

"We wrote to the internet service provider that hosted the Real Whitby website asking them to consider terminating the website hosting service they provide to Real Whitby on the basis that content on the site repeatedly breached the service provider's own terms and conditions.

"This was not an attempt to "shut down" Real Whitby as claimed, but to remind the website service provider that the owner of the website in question was clearly in breach of its terms and conditions by publishing, allowing others to publish and by failing to remove comments made by others on the website where those comments were malicious, harmful, abusive and defamatory toward employees of Scarborough Borough Council and other individuals. Since issuing the letters in question, we have received significant correspondence from members of the public supporting the council's stance, some from persons who would not reveal their identity due to fear of reprisals from Real Whitby.



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"Our previous experience of dealing with the vast amount of correspondence this council receives from Real Whitby has resulted in our responses being taken out of context or twisted followed by a further barrage of emails, with selective elements put into the public domain without consent or context, all of which have on numerous occasions caused great distress to our staff.

"The contributors that have sought to gain credibility for their articles by describing themselves as 'investigative journalists' should work within the same parameters as journalists working for the traditional media and ensure any article is factually accurate, as well as being fair, balanced and even-handed. The fact that Real Whitby does not behave in this manner and that a high proportion of the material they publish is inaccurate, misleading and defamatory, led us to take a more general approach to tackling the nature of the Real Whitby website content rather than replying and listing every single breach. We also consider that it is self-evident to any reasonable and responsible person, as to which parts of the material may be considered malicious, harmful, abusive and defamatory.

"For the record, since 2009 the council has received over 120 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests from four Real Whitby contributors alone. This is in addition to the hundreds of emails sent to the council from them on a range of matters including unproven allegations of collusion regarding paedophilia, corruption on the part of employees and wrongdoings concerning dignitaries of the Borough of Scarborough. We do not consider that this is in the spirit or remit of true investigative journalism.

"Whilst fully endorsing the principles of openness and transparency behind the FOI legislation, we are concerned about the disproportionate amount of public money and officer time that the council is compelled to spend on dealing with the hundreds of emails that they send us in addition to their FOI requests and the continuing genuine distress which their actions cause to employees of this council and other public organisations."

- ENDS -



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