



House of Commons

Digital, Culture, Media and  
Sport Committee

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# Sustainability of local journalism

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**Seventh Report of Session 2022–23**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6188; the Committee's email address is [dcmscom@parliament.uk](mailto:dcmscom@parliament.uk).

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# Contents

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<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 The State of Local Journalism</b>	<b>7</b>
The Importance of Local News	7
Changing Business Models	8
The challenges for local news publishers	9
Innovation	11
<b>2 Support for local news</b>	<b>13</b>
The Role of the BBC	13
The Local Democracy Reporter Service	14
Support from the Digital Platforms	16
Government Support	17
An innovation fund for news	18
Statutory Notices	19
Consolidation	21
Philanthropy	24
<b>3 Local Television and Radio</b>	<b>28</b>
Local Television	28
Local Radio	29
BBC Local Radio	31
<b>4 The role of online platforms</b>	<b>33</b>
Digital Platforms and Local News	33
Digital Markets Unit	34
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Formal minutes</b>	<b>39</b>
Tuesday 17 January 2023	39
Members present:	39
Adjournment	39
<b>Witnesses</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Published written evidence</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament</b>	<b>43</b>

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## Summary

Local journalism is vital to democracy, enabling people to hold local government and public services to account for decisions that can affect their everyday lives. It can also help to build community cohesion, support local economic activity, and provide an entry route into journalism as a profession.

Yet hundreds of local newspaper titles have closed in the past two decades. News publishers' traditional print revenues have collapsed as people increasingly read news online. The smaller audiences for local news make shifting to digital business models based on online advertising or subscriptions particularly difficult. Despite this, in this inquiry we have encountered many new local news publishers with a variety of innovative business models, demonstrating that the sector has a sustainable future if it is properly supported to adapt to the new market.

We examine existing support for local journalism, including the BBC's Local Democracy Reporter Service, initiatives by the big tech platforms, and the revenue from statutory notices. While these forms of support are welcome, they are not enough to stop the decline of local journalism. We call on the Government to fully implement the recommendation of Dame Frances Cairncross' Review and establish an innovation fund for news. We also recommend that the Government explore ways to make it easier for local news publishers to achieve charitable status, and to encourage more philanthropic funding into the sector.

Our inquiry has found that existing support for local journalism tends to go to the largest, multi-title news publishers. The local news market is highly concentrated, with the largest three publishers owning more than two thirds of all local newspaper titles. Consolidation within the sector has ensured the survival of many titles, but we recommend the Government works to ensure that more support for local journalism reaches smaller publishers, many of whom are driving innovation that could help sustain the sector as a whole.

We examine the journalism provided by local TV and radio, and welcome indications from the Government that provisions concerning both will be included in the forthcoming Media Bill. We recommend the Government expands the Community Radio Fund to enable more community radio stations to conduct journalism. Near the end of our inquiry, the BBC announced proposals for its local radio stations to share more content as part of its wider Digital First strategy. We are concerned that this will diminish the unique localness of the BBC's current services and urge the Corporation to reconsider these plans.

Finally, we consider the role of Google and Meta. Both companies fund schemes to support news organisations or train journalists. Most local news publishers use these platforms to draw web traffic to their own sites, which underpins their digital revenues. But as others, including the Competition and Markets Authority, have found, the market dominance of these platforms and news publishers' reliance on them has created an imbalance of power meaning publishers cannot properly negotiate a fair commercial relationship. Forthcoming digital markets legislation and codes of conduct will be vital in addressing this. We call on the Government to avoid the mistakes of other countries and ensure that its new pro-competition regime does not exclude smaller local news publishers.

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## Introduction

1. Local journalism is vital to democratic society. Accurate, trustworthy reporting on local councils, courts and other public bodies enables people to hold those in power to account for decisions that affect their everyday lives. Local news publishers can also help people to feel connected and get involved with their communities. Through this, local journalism can increase turnout at elections, create economic value by encouraging people to buy local, and foster a sense of cohesion and pride of place.<sup>1</sup>

2. Technological developments of the past few decades have fundamentally altered the market for journalism. Print circulations have declined as people increasingly consume their news online, from smartphones and via social media feeds.<sup>2</sup> With declining print revenues, news publishers have had to adopt business models based on online advertising, digital subscriptions, or both. But their smaller audiences and more limited reach compared to their national counterparts means many local publishers find sustaining themselves from either particularly difficult.<sup>3</sup>

3. Consequently, local journalism has declined in the past two decades. More than 320 local newspaper titles closed between 2009 and 2019, a trend likely to have been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Those local news organisations that have survived often operate with diminished resources and fewer journalists. There are many negative consequences to these trends: a measurable decrease in participation in civic life within local communities without local news provision,<sup>5</sup> a lack of coverage of public interest news stories, and less scrutiny of local government and public services.<sup>6</sup> Worryingly, it is the most deprived communities in the UK where local news is most likely to be limited or absent, compounding the disadvantages such areas face.<sup>7</sup>

4. The difficulties affecting local journalism are exacerbated by imbalances of power in the market for local news. As we have heard in this inquiry, government and industry support for local journalism tends to disproportionately benefit the larger, corporate publishers at the expense of new titles. And the sector suffers from the overwhelmingly dominance of the big tech platforms, namely Google and Meta, in the online advertising market.<sup>8</sup> News publishers are increasingly reliant on these platforms to reach audiences but are unable to effectively negotiate with them for fair remuneration for their content.

5. In 2018, the Government asked Dame Frances Cairncross to conduct a review into the future of journalism in the UK. The Review was published in 2019 and set out the various challenges posed to journalism by the digital transition and recommended a series of potential solutions (see Box 1 below). In its response to the Review, published at the start of 2020, the Government agreed to take most of these recommendations forward. Nearly

1 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#)); Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#)); Local and Community Media Network, MeCSSA ([SLJ0029](#))

2 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism*, (12 February 2019), p39–42

3 Ibid.

4 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#))

5 Ibid.

6 Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#)); Independent Community News Network (ICNN) ([SLJ0036](#))

7 Local and Community Media Network, MeCSSA ([SLJ0029](#))

8 Competition and Markets Authority, *Online platforms and digital advertising: market study final report* (1 July 2020)

three years on, in the wake of the pandemic and other profound political and economic changes, we wanted to assess what progress had been made since the Cairncross Review and to look specifically at local journalism and how its future can be secured.

**Box 1: The Cairncross Review and the government’s response**

In 2018 Dame Frances Cairncross was appointed to chair a review to examine the sustainability of high-quality journalism in the UK. The review was published in February 2019 and made nine recommendations to the government:

1. New codes of conduct, overseen by a regulator, to rebalance the relationship between online platforms and publishers
2. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to conduct a market study of the online advertising market
3. A news quality obligation for online platforms, to be set out in statute
4. The development of a government media literacy strategy
5. A review by Ofcom of the BBC’s market impact and role; and for the BBC to do more to help local publishers
6. An innovation fund focused on improving the supply of public interest news
7. New forms of tax relief for news publishers
8. Expanding the BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS)
9. Establishment of an Institute for Public Interest News.

The Government responded to the review in January 2020. It accepted that codes of conduct may be useful; asked the CMA to conduct a market study; agreed that platforms should take steps to help users identify the reliability of news sources; agreed to publish a media literacy strategy; welcomed Ofcom’s decision to conduct a review into the BBC’s news output; launched a pilot news innovation fund, run by Nesta; said the Chancellor would consider potential tax incentives for publishers; and supported expansion of the LDRS. The government acknowledged the value of the proposed Institute for Public Interest News but said it was not appropriate for government to take forward.

Sources: Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.10–11; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, *Government response to the Cairncross Review: a sustainable future for journalism* (January 2020)

**Our inquiry**

6. We launched our inquiry in February 2022 and received over sixty pieces of written evidence. We held four oral evidence sessions, hearing from local journalists and others working in the industry at small independent titles, large multi-title publishers, and local TV and radio; from Google and Meta, the BBC, academics, and the Minister of State for Media, Data and Digital at DCMS, Julia Lopez MP. We also visited the School of Journalism at Cardiff University, to gain insights into the talent pipeline for local journalism, and the office of BBC Cymru to understand how BBC support schemes for local news organisations operate outside of London. We would like to thank all those who contributed and gave evidence to this inquiry.



# 1 The State of Local Journalism

## The Importance of Local News

7. Evidence we received for this inquiry was consistent in emphasising the importance of local journalism to democracy. A key aspect of this is the oversight and scrutiny provided by its reporting of local government, courts, and other public services.<sup>9</sup> The decisions of these institutions can often have more immediate and obvious impact on people's everyday lives than those made at the national level.<sup>10</sup> Local journalism allows communities to hold those in power to account for these decisions and, in respect of local court reporting, ensures open justice.<sup>11</sup> In theory, this watchdog function could be carried out by anybody but, in practice, successful examples of citizen journalism are rare. Local media outlets need expertise and professionalism to have credibility in the community, and there are ethical and legal aspects to journalism which are only learned in professional news environments or via appropriate professional and higher education courses.<sup>12</sup> Local journalism also helps to facilitate and encourage civic participation, including in elections; government-commissioned research has shown a positive and significant correlation between the daily circulation of local newspapers and turnout at local elections.<sup>13</sup>

8. A key focus of the Cairncross Review was ensuring the sustainability of *public interest news*,<sup>14</sup> especially into abuses of power in both the public and private sphere; and the reporting on the daily activities of public institutions, particularly those at the local level.<sup>15</sup> The Review noted that these forms of journalism can fail to engage the public, are expensive to carry out (particularly in respect of investigative journalism), and, consequently, have suffered most in the overall decline of journalism.<sup>16</sup>

9. Local journalism can bring benefits other than the provision of public interest news. This includes building community cohesion and pride of place by signposting local initiatives, businesses, charities, and events. We heard from local publishers who highlighted how their journalism helps to bridge divides and increase understanding between multicultural communities.<sup>17</sup> It can also create economic value at the local level, as local news publishers mainly display adverts from local businesses and can, therefore, encourage people to spend money within their communities.<sup>18</sup> Some submissions drew a connection between this and efforts to level up the UK.<sup>19</sup>

9 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#)); News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#)); Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#))

10 Professor Steven Barnett ([SLJ0042](#))

11 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#)); Dr Bernhard Gross; Mr Marcus Keppel-Palmer; Dr Sally Reardon; Dr Tom Smith ([SLJ0021](#))

12 Professor Steven Barnett ([SLJ0042](#))

13 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#))

14 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.16–17

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid. p18–22

17 Social Change Initiative ([SLJ0040](#)); Greater Govanhill CIC ([SLJ0031](#)); Citizen News & Media Limited ([SLJ0034](#)); Social Streets C.I.C ([SLJ0011](#))

18 Local and Community Media Network, MeCSSA ([SLJ0029](#)); Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#))

19 Nub News ([SLJ0009](#)); Local TV Network ([SLJ0035](#)); Christopher Nieper Foundation ([SLJ0022](#))

10. Finally, local journalism plays an important role within the industry of journalism itself. Local news titles have traditionally served as an important source of stories for the national media and provided a route into journalism for those from less well-off backgrounds.<sup>20</sup>

11. The reduction of local news provision can lead to measurable negative impacts for communities. These include declining turnout at elections and increasing levels of polarisation and misinformation.<sup>21</sup> It can also mean the decisions of local government are made without appropriate public scrutiny. In 2019, 63% of Local Authority District (LAD) areas in Great Britain were not covered by a single daily local paper, up from 45% in 2007.<sup>22</sup> And while most LAD areas still have coverage from local newspapers publishing on a less frequent (usually weekly) basis, the majority are served only by one title, underlining the precarity of local journalism in many areas.<sup>23</sup> Reporting from local courts has declined significantly as well.<sup>24</sup> A study from 2019 found that less than 1% of all Magistrate Court cases in England and Wales were reported on in the 401 local newspapers that were surveyed.<sup>25</sup> In the next section, we set out the main reasons why the provision of local news has declined.

## Changing Business Models

12. The market for journalism has been profoundly altered by technological developments of the past two decades. As it has become easier and cheaper to access news online, especially since the launch of the smartphone in the late 2000s, people have increasingly stopped buying newspapers.<sup>26</sup> According to OFCOM, after television (79%) the internet is the now most-used source of news by UK adults (73%), with half using social media (49%) and/or other websites and apps to access news. Only 32% use print newspapers.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, print circulation figures for nearly all newspapers been falling since the mid-2000s.<sup>28</sup> Average daily print circulation of local newspapers in 2019 was at 31% of 2007 figures, while weekly print circulation was at 39% of 2007 figures.<sup>29</sup> This has led to a fall in print revenues, from newspaper sales and particularly from advertising. Total UK newspaper circulation revenue fell from £2.2 billion in 2007 to £1.7 billion in 2017, while advertising revenue fell from £4.6 billion to 1.4 billion in the same period.<sup>30</sup>

13. The shift to online news consumption and the decline in print revenues has forced news publishers to rapidly transition to business models based on digital advertising, subscriptions, or some combination of both. We heard how recent inflation-driven increases in newsprint costs—as much as 100% for some publishers—have only added to this imperative.<sup>31</sup> The basic problem for news publishers has been that neither digital

20 National Council for the Training of Journalists ([SLJ0044](#)); Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#));

21 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#)); Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#))

22 Plum Consulting, [Research into recent dynamics of the press sector in the UK and globally](#) (May 2020), p.6

23 Ibid, p.34

24 Dr Richard Jones ([SLJ0013](#)); Dr Bernhard Gross; Mr Marcus Keppel-Palmer; Dr Sally Reardon; Dr Tom Smith ([SLJ0021](#))

25 Dr Bernhard Gross; Mr Marcus Keppel-Palmer; Dr Sally Reardon; Dr Tom Smith ([SLJ0021](#))

26 Dame Frances Cairncross, [The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism](#) (February 2019), p.25

27 Ofcom, [News Consumption in the UK: 2021](#) (27 July 2021), p.2

28 Statista, ["Newspaper industry in the United Kingdom - statistics & facts"](#) (18 November 2022) [accessed 16 December 2022]

29 Plum Consulting, [Research into recent dynamics of the press sector in the UK and globally](#) (May 2020), p.6

30 Ibid, p.20

31 [Q14](#); Professional Publishers Association (PPA) ([SLJ0024](#))

advertising nor subscription-based business models have made up for the loss of print revenue. Highlighting the shortfall, Owen Meredith, CEO of the News Media Association, told us that for publishers a print reader is worth about eight times a digital reader.<sup>32</sup>

14. With regards to online advertising, the challenge for news publishers is that it is inherently less valuable than in print as the supply of advertising space online is near limitless. News publishers enjoyed almost a monopoly of print advertising, but online they must compete for advertising revenue not only with other websites, but also social media and streaming platforms.<sup>33</sup> And in the online advertising market, those who can offer targeted, personalised adverts based on user data have a significant advantage.<sup>34</sup> The large online platforms, particularly Google and Meta, are able to gather highly detailed data about their users, which has helped them achieve overwhelming dominance of the online advertising market. Of the nearly £14 billion spend on digital advertising in the UK in 2019, around 80% was spent on Google and Meta (then Facebook).<sup>35</sup> News publishers have been unable to compete with the level of advert targeting these companies can provide. In addition, as detailed in the Cairncross Review, the online advertising market can be difficult for news publishers to navigate and involves a greater number of intermediaries (many of which are owned by Meta and Google) in each transaction, potentially reducing the share of revenue reaching publishers.<sup>36</sup>

15. Many news publishers have also struggled to implement online subscriptions. A prominent example of this was when News UK introduced a £2 per week online subscription for *The Sun* in 2013, before abandoning it two years later after a significant drop in online readership.<sup>37</sup> The underlying problem for news publishers is that the number of people who pay for online news is low: in the UK in 2021, it was just 8% of consumers.<sup>38</sup> Of those people willing to pay for news, most only take out a subscription with a single news publisher.<sup>39</sup> The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism has highlighted the ‘winner takes most’ dynamic this creates in the subscription market, where a small number of news publishers hold the vast majority of subscribers; in the UK, this group mostly consists of national publications such as the *Financial Times* or *The Daily Telegraph*.

### **The challenges for local news publishers**

16. Adapting to the new market has been particularly difficult for local news publishers, for several reasons. First, they have tended to rely more on serving classified adverts (i.e., for goods, services or job vacancies in a local area) as a source of revenue compared to other news publishers and have lost out to online competitors like Gumtree or Facebook Marketplace that can provide a more targeted and search-based service.<sup>40</sup> Research by

32 [Q10](#)

33 Dame Frances Cairncross, [The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism](#) (February 2019), p.42

34 *Ibid*, p.44–45

35 Competition and Markets Authority, [Online platforms and digital advertising: market study final report](#) (1 July 2020), p. 9

36 Dame Frances Cairncross, [The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism](#) (February 2019), p.57–62

37 [“Sun’s internet paywall scrapped by Rebekah Brooks”](#), *BBC News* (October 2015) [accessed 12 December 2022]

38 Nic Newman et al., [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021](#) (June 2022), p.14

39 *Ibid*.

40 Dame Frances Cairncross, [The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism](#) (February 2019), p.47; Google ([SLJ0055](#))

Accenture has indicated that the loss of classified advertising revenue has made up more than half the overall loss of newspaper revenue between 2003 and 2018.<sup>41</sup> The total loss of advertising revenue for local publishers has been stark: 70% between 2010 and 2020.<sup>42</sup>

17. Second, successfully navigating and engaging with the online advertising market, setting up a subscription service, or devising other forms of business model innovation requires a level of technical and financial resource that smaller local news publishers can often lack.<sup>43</sup> This is then compounded by the aforesaid fall in revenues from print. Professors An Nguyen and Daniel Jackson of Bournemouth University described to us how the decline in traditional revenue sources can lead to a risk-averse attitude towards innovations that might not have an immediate business benefit, but which could offer sustainability to local news publishers in the long term.<sup>44</sup>

18. Third, both online advertising and subscription-based business models reward scale. National news publishers have a potential audience of millions and need only to reach a fraction of this to generate sufficient revenue.<sup>45</sup> Publishers that receive more visits to their websites can charge a higher premium for adverts to be hosted there.<sup>46</sup> By definition, local news audiences are much smaller, particularly for “hyper-local” organisations that publish news for a small town or just a postcode. The potential revenue that can be made from these smaller audiences via either advertising or subscriptions is much less. The Public Interest News Foundation set out the problem of scale for local news publishers with regards to subscriptions:

Our research found that some audiences would be willing to pay an average of £1.30 per month for quality independent local news. On this basis, it would take 1,000 paying subscribers to generate annual revenue of £15,600. Let’s say that a sustainable operation requires a minimal staff team of six: an editor; two reporters; a salesperson; and an administrator. According to the latest ONS data, average salaries in the UK are roughly £31,000. So, in order to build a small team of six people on average salaries, plus employers’ contributions and overheads, a news publication would require a budget in the region of £250,000. In order to generate annual subscriptions revenue of £250,000, a publication covering a typical local authority district would need to convert almost 10% of the population into paying subscribers (and a much higher proportion in smaller areas). This is an ambitious target, even for the most successful independent local publications.<sup>47</sup>

19. With falling revenues, local news publishers are left with fewer resources to conduct effective journalism, and the quality of the stories they publish and their relevance to local communities can decline.<sup>48</sup> The economics of digital advertising may contribute to this trend, as sensationalised news content designed to drive visits to a publisher’s website (“clickbait”) is incentivised to increase revenue.<sup>49</sup> In response to the declining quality

41 Google (SLJ0055)

42 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (SLJ0041)

43 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.47

44 Bournemouth University (SLJ0014)

45 Public Interest News Foundation (SLJ0049)

46 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.42

47 Public Interest News Foundation (SLJ0049)

48 The Mill (SLJ0038); Bournemouth University (SLJ0014)

49 The Bristol Cable (SLJ0015); Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.42

of their local paper, many people choose to stop buying it and often also no longer visit the publisher's website. The publisher's revenues fall further, and the downward spiral continues, often until the publisher is forced to close or merge with another.<sup>50</sup> More than 320 local newspaper titles closed between 2009–2019.<sup>51</sup> One submission surmised that this means the UK has fewer local newspapers than any time since the 18th century.<sup>52</sup>

## Innovation

20. Despite the challenges affecting the local news market, during this inquiry we have received evidence from multiple local news publishers that have been established within the last few years, often explicitly seeking to reverse the decline in local news provision in their communities. These news publishers operate with a variety of innovative business models. For example, *The Bristol Cable* is a co-operative newspaper founded in 2014 which runs a paid membership scheme where members contribute a minimum of £1 per month.<sup>53</sup> The paper publishes a free quarterly print magazine, and online content several times per week, which is also free to access.<sup>54</sup> *Nub News* is an online-only hyperlocal news publisher launched in 2019 with websites reporting on more than 40 towns and suburbs across England and Wales.<sup>55</sup> Its commercial revenues come from sponsors and partnership-based advertising with local businesses.<sup>56</sup> *The Mill* is a newspaper covering Greater Manchester, founded in 2020. It publishes free content via a Substack mailing list, with further content for subscribers, who pay £7 per month.<sup>57</sup> It raises additional revenue from partnership-based advertising with local businesses.<sup>58</sup> The paper has recently launched two similar newsletters in Sheffield (*The Tribune*) and Liverpool (*The Post*).<sup>59</sup> And Social Spider CIC publishes five publications covering different areas of London. It generates revenue from a combination of print and online advertising, membership donations, and consultancy work for other independent local new publishers.<sup>60</sup>

21. There were some common themes in the approaches taken by the new independent publishers we heard from. They tend to take a “reader first” approach that focuses on producing quality, often long-form, journalism with a high degree of relevance to their local communities.<sup>61</sup> This helps to build a loyal readership base willing to pay for subscriptions and makes the publisher a more attractive partner for local business advertising.<sup>62</sup> Some have explicitly avoided serving online programmatic display adverts due to concerns that this can encourage the production of clickbait content or disrupt the reader experience on their websites.<sup>63</sup> We heard that there is a growing view within the sector that allowing unlimited free access to online content, as part of a focus on generating digital advertising

50 [Q97](#)

51 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#))

52 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0004](#))

53 *The Bristol Cable* ([SLJ0015](#))

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Nub News* ([SLJ0009](#))

56 *Ibid.*; “*Nub News: The hyperlocal news platform which now employs 32 journalists in UK*”, *Press Gazette*, 17 June 2021 [accessed 16 December 2022]

57 *The Mill* ([SLJ0038](#))

58 *Ibid.*; “*About*”, *The Mill* [accessed 16 December 2022]

59 *The Mill* ([SLJ0038](#))

60 Social Spider Community News, “*Business Model*” [accessed 16 December 2022]; [Q244](#)

61 *The Bristol Cable* ([SLJ0015](#)); *The Mill* ([SLJ0038](#))

62 *Nub News* ([SLJ0009](#)); Social Streets C.I.C ([SLJ0011](#))

63 [Q97](#); *Nub News* ([SLJ0009](#))

revenue, is generally not a viable business model, and research has documented a shift by local news publishers to paid content online.<sup>64</sup> But, as discussed in the previous section, making subscriptions viable at the local level can be extremely difficult.

22. We also heard about the precarity of many start-up local news publishers. Jonathan Heawood, Chief Executive of the Public Interest News Foundation, said that median turnovers in the emerging independent sector are between £30,000 and £40,000 per year, which are not sustainable in the long term.<sup>65</sup> The Independent Media Association, which represents more than 50 titles, found from surveying its members that nearly 90% had an annual turnover below £80,000.<sup>66</sup> Adam Cantwell-Corn, co-founder of *The Bristol Cable*, noted that even though the paper is often viewed as a frontrunner within the sector in terms of innovation, quality, and turnover, it is “extremely vulnerable”.<sup>67</sup> A significant proportion of both oral and written evidence to us stressed the need for short and long-term support for the sector to give emerging as well as more established publishers breathing space to develop viable business models and grow their revenues.<sup>68</sup> We examine options for supporting local journalism in the next chapter.

23. Established multi-title publishers also described how they have been adapting their business models to the changing market. Newsquest Media Group, which publishes around 165 local titles across the UK, said it has had success building a local digital advertising and marketing agency style service for SMEs, with 52% of its total advertising now digital.<sup>69</sup> It also now has over 50,000 subscribers across its portfolio.<sup>70</sup> Reach plc, which publishes some 130 national and local news titles said it is also undergoing a transition towards a digital-based business model, though 75% of its revenues continue to come from print.<sup>71</sup> The company highlighted several examples of its own self-funded innovation and collaborations with partners, including the development of the InYourArea local news aggregator platform.<sup>72</sup> However, as we also discuss in the next chapter, much of the evidence we received was critical of the corporate publishers, arguing they have presided over a reduction in the quality of journalism from their titles to maximise profits.<sup>73</sup>

**24. Despite the collapse in revenues and the immense challenges facing those titles remaining in the market, there are many encouraging examples of innovation by local news publishers. These demonstrate that, provided the right support is given, the sector can be revived and can have a sustainable future.**

64 Dr Marc Edge (SLJ0020); Joy Jenkins, “Publish less, but publish better: pivoting to paid in local news”, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (24 September 2020) [accessed 16 December 2022]

65 Q91

66 The Independent Media Association (SLJ0048)

67 Q74

68 Ibid; Q91; The Bristol Cable (SLJ0015); Dr Marianne Colbran (SLJ0066); Dr Marc Edge (SLJ0020); Public Interest News Foundation (SLJ0049); News for All (SLJ0050); Bournemouth University (SLJ0014); West Leeds Community Media (SLJ0018); Newham Voice CIC (SLJ0026); Flyover Media CIC (SLJ0037); Greater Govanhill CIC (SLJ0031); Bylines Networks Limited (SLJ0045); IMPRESS (SLJ0012); Independent Community News Network (ICNN) (SLJ0036); Society of Editors (SLJ0008); Clear Sky Publishing Limited (SLJ0006); News Media Association (SLJ0017); Midland News Association (SLJ0007); Baylis Media Ltd (SLJ0002)

69 Newsquest Media Group (SLJ0057)

70 Ibid.

71 Reach plc (SLJ0054)

72 Ibid.

73 Media Reform Coalition (SLJ0032); Public Interest News Foundation (SLJ0049); Bedford Independent (SLJ0063); The Bristol Cable (SLJ0015); The Mill (SLJ0038); Dr Marc Edge (SLJ0020); National Union of Journalists (SLJ0023)

## 2 Support for local news

### The Role of the BBC

25. We were told that a further difficulty local news publishers face in establishing viable business models is the free-to-access news services provided by the BBC. The News Media Association explained that:

[It] is difficult for publishers' titles to gate their content behind a paywall to build a digital subscription model when the BBC is running similar content on its website for free, often lifting or reproducing stories that originate from local newspapers without attribution.<sup>74</sup>

These points were echoed by Reach plc and Newsquest,<sup>75</sup> while the Local TV Network raised similar concerns with respect to commercial local news broadcasters:

The resources that [the BBC] brings to bear and the ability to provide 'ad-free' local news poses a challenge to other local news providers and has the potential to risk plurality in the provision of local news if not carefully considered.<sup>76</sup>

26. It is noteworthy that people's willingness to pay for news, and particularly for local news, online is seemingly much lower in the UK compared to other countries. In Norway, 45% of people either pay to access specific news stories or hold a subscription with a provider; in the United States the figure is 21%, but in the UK it is only 8%.<sup>77</sup> And of those that hold online news subscriptions in the UK, just 3% do so for a local news publication.<sup>78</sup> Newsquest argued that this disparity can largely be attributed to the presence of freely available online news offered in the UK by the BBC.<sup>79</sup>

27. However, other evidence, including from smaller, independent publishers, was much less concerned about the impact of the BBC's news provision for local news sustainability.<sup>80</sup> This may reflect how many independent publishers operate at a more hyper-local level, and so face less overlap with the BBC's local news provision. Some independent publishers indicated that the BBC's operations were complementary to their own activity.<sup>81</sup> For example, *The Bristol Cable* said that they had successfully partnered with the BBC to produce major stories, though they noted that on all occasions it was the *Cable* that approached the BBC.

28. We also received evidence showing that the decline of local news in the UK is seen in countries that have no major public service broadcasters at the local level, such as the

74 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#))

75 Reach plc ([SLJ0054](#)), Newsquest Media Group ([SLJ0057](#))

76 Local TV Network ([SLJ0035](#))

77 Nic Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 (June 2022)*, p.14

78 Ibid.

79 Newsquest Media Group ([SLJ0057](#))

80 The Independent Media Association ([SLJ0048](#))

81 The Bristol Cable ([SLJ0015](#)); Bristol Branch, National Union of Journalists ([SLJ0003](#)); National Union of Journalists ([SLJ0023](#)); The Independent Media Association ([SLJ0048](#))

United States.<sup>82</sup> There is academic research which indicates that the availability of free online news in general does not necessarily reduce people's willingness to pay for news content from commercial providers.<sup>83</sup>

29. In its evidence to us, the BBC said that its delivery of local news was an integral part of the fulfilment of its royal charter commitment to serve and reflect the communities of the UK.<sup>84</sup> It stated that it does not envisage producing significantly more local news stories, with the focus being on ensuring those stories produced travel quickly across the BBC's various media platforms. The BBC also emphasised its work to collaborate with and support the local news sector, most notably through its local news partnerships and the Local Democracy Reporter Service (LDRS). The Government's Mid-Term Review of the BBC, announced in May 2022, will include an evaluation of the BBC's impact with regard to commercial radio and local news sectors.<sup>85</sup>

### **The Local Democracy Reporter Service**

30. The BBC's Local News Partnership (LNP) scheme was launched in 2017 as the result of an agreement between the Corporation and the News Media Association. It was developed by the BBC "in recognition of the fact that, as commercial news providers face increasing financial challenges, it is more difficult for them to find the resource to provide coverage of local democratic institutions and processes".<sup>86</sup> The LNP is funded by the BBC from the licence fee, at a cost of up to £8 million per year.<sup>87</sup> Over 170 media organisations representing more than 1,000 news titles or outlets are now signed up, giving them access to the following:

- News Hub: this offers partner media organisations access to BBC video material shortly after transmission for use online.<sup>88</sup> The content is subject to terms and conditions, including that the BBC is branded, and that it serves the primary purpose of the News Hub to enhance the quality and relevance of local journalism.<sup>89</sup>
- Shared Data Unit: this was set up to support the development of data journalism across the local news industry. The Unit creates large-scale data investigations in the form of data packs that partner organisations can access to create content. The Unit also provides training to local journalists in data journalism.<sup>90</sup>
- Local Democracy Reporter Service (LDRS): The BBC funds the salaries of 165 journalists, who are allocated to local news providers to give coverage of local councils and other public services. The journalism produced by the reporters is made available for free to the BBC.<sup>91</sup>

82 Professor Steven Barnett (SLJ0042); BBC (SLJ0010)

83 Richard Fletcher and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "Paying for Online News", Digital Journalism, vol 5 (2016), pp.1173–1191

84 Q203; BBC (SLJ0010)

85 "BBC review to focus on impartiality and 'levelling up' job opportunities", DCMS press release, 26 May 2022

86 BBC (SLJ0010)

87 BBC, *A Review of the BBC Local News Partnership* (June 2020), p.6

88 BBC, "News Hub" [accessed 16 December 2022]

89 BBC, *A Review of the BBC Local News Partnership* (June 2020), p.9

90 BBC (SLJ0010)

91 BBC, *A Review of the BBC Local News Partnership* (June 2020), p.9



31. Evidence to this inquiry that focused on the LDRS and was broadly supportive of the Service. Several submissions noted the positive impact that the Local Democracy Reporters have had in increasing coverage of local councils and other public services. Nub News told us that “the LDRS enables us to provide contemporaneous, detailed coverage of important decisions that are relevant for our local communities”.<sup>92</sup> Newsquest said that the scheme has enabled it “to provide a level of news coverage of some local authorities and public institutions that otherwise would not have been done”.<sup>93</sup> The Local TV Network said the scheme was valuable among its members.<sup>94</sup> And the BBC itself highlighted several cases where LDRS coverage had brought important stories to light that may otherwise have been missed.<sup>95</sup> Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director of Nations at the BBC, spoke to some of the achievements of the LDRS, while noting the scheme could not be a solution to the problems affecting local journalism as a whole:

It has delivered about 250,000 stories so far, focused on local authorities in all four nations. It has delivered major stories, whether it is on PPE procurement or corruption or fraud in local authorities. It has told some uncomfortable stories that have made national headlines. While there are differences between the BBC’s position and the NMA’s position on some aspects of our activity, on the LDRS there is a remarkable degree of consensus that this has worked, with one caveat—it was never the solution to the financial challenges facing the commercial sector. It has helped and it has restored equality and depth to local authority reporting, but it will not turn around the structural challenges facing our commercial partners.<sup>96</sup>

32. However, we also heard concerns about the functioning of the LDRS. Some evidence noted that it is unclear whether local democracy reporters are directly replacing journalists who are being made redundant at news providers.<sup>97</sup> Concerns were also raised that local democracy reporters are not always used for their intended purposes and pressured by editors to pursue stories outside of the LDRS’s remit.<sup>98</sup> In an analysis for the British Journalism Review in 2020, two academics interviewed one LDRS reporter who supported the scheme but believed that publishers could “exploit the service for their own ends”, and discovered another who wanted to voice criticism but felt “too nervous to speak”.<sup>99</sup> The Cairncross Review heard similar concerns about the LDRS, and was critical of the BBC’s “fairly light touch” evaluation of the scheme.<sup>100</sup> The BBC’s subsequent internal review in June 2020 recommended, among other things, further steps to “improve the awareness of the rules and expectations” for both contract holders and reporters.<sup>101</sup>

33. We also heard complaints that the allocation of LDRS reporters disproportionately benefits the largest news publishers. Of the 165 reporters allocated in July 2021, Reach

92 Nub News ([SLJ0009](#))

93 Newsquest Media Group ([SLJ0057](#))

94 Local TV Network ([SLJ0035](#))

95 BBC ([SLJ0010](#))

96 [Q205](#)

97 Professor Steven Barnett ([SLJ0042](#)); Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#))

98 Flyover Media CIC ([SLJ0037](#)); Professor Steven Barnett ([SLJ0042](#))

99 Steven Barnett, Roy Greenslade, “*Not the way to use our money*”, *British Journalism Review*, Vol 31 (2020), pp. 43–49

100 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.100

101 BBC, *A Review of the BBC Local News Partnership* (June 2020), p.34

Plc took 75, Newsquest 28.5, and JPI Media (now National World) 35.5.<sup>102</sup> The Local TV Network said the LDRS also tends to focus on print content, and it could do more to support the needs of audio and video journalism.<sup>103</sup>

34. The BBC committed to funding the Local News Partnership until the end of its current Charter in 2027.<sup>104</sup> However, in light of the announcement by the then Culture Secretary, Nadine Dorries, in January 2022 that the licence fee would be frozen until 2024 (to be followed by its abolition in 2027), some of those who wrote to us questioned whether the LDRS would be protected as the BBC looks for savings.<sup>105</sup> In evidence to the Public Accounts Committee in January 2022, Tim Davie, when questioned about LDRS, said “I am not going to ring-fence. [The BBC’s support for local news] is a priority, but you will not get from here that every area of the BBC has protected status.”<sup>106</sup> But in oral evidence to us (in June 2022) Rhodri Talfan Davies said that “we are going to maintain and ringfence all our content spend on local services”.<sup>107</sup> Julia Lopez MP, Minister of State for Media, Data, and Digital Infrastructure at DCMS noted that the £8 million per year cost of the LDRS and wider Local News Partnership represents a small proportion of the BBC’s £3.8 billion annual licence fee income.<sup>108</sup>

**35. The LDRS has had a positive impact on local journalism by enabling important local news stories to get coverage where otherwise they might not. But more could be done to expand the service across different media platforms and to give access to a wider range of news providers. The BBC must also ensure that partner news providers use Local Democracy Reporters for their intended purposes. The LDRS should be protected under forthcoming Charter negotiations, and we encourage the BBC to explore ways to widen the scope of the service.**

## Support from the Digital Platforms

36. Much of the evidence received for this inquiry was critical about the impact of the large tech platforms, particularly Google and Meta, on local journalism. We address these arguments in Chapter 4. In their evidence, both companies highlighted specific schemes they have launched to support the local news sector.

### Meta Community News Project

37. In 2018, Meta (then Facebook) launched the Community News Project in partnership with Newsquest, JPI Media (now National World), Reach, Archant, the Midland News Association, and the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ). Under the project, the NCTJ oversees the recruitment of trainee community journalists and places them in local newsrooms on a two-year scheme. 139 reporters have been recruited so far. The initial investment was £4.5 million.<sup>109</sup> At the end of 2021, Meta announced that

102 BBC, *Local Democracy Reporting Service list of contract awards 2021*, p.2

103 Local TV Network (SLJ0035); Local TV Network (SLJ0062)

104 BBC, “New Local Democracy Reporting Service contract holders revealed” [accessed 16 December 2022]

105 Bristol Branch, National Union of Journalists (SLJ0003)

106 Oral Evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 26 January 2022, HC (2021–2022) 995, Q70

107 Q197

108 Q301

109 Meta (SLJ0056)

they were investing an additional £5.9 million for a further two years. The number of publishers involved in the programme would rise to 23 and the number of trainee places increase from 82 to 100.<sup>110</sup>

### Google News Initiative

38. Google describes itself as “one of the world’s biggest financial supporters of journalism”. Its support to local journalism includes the Google News Initiative (GNI). To date, the GNI has provided around £14 million to over 80 projects in the UK through partnerships with news organisations.<sup>111</sup>

39. Evidence suggested that the assistance provided by the tech giants was helpful but limited, especially when considered against the wider effects of the Google and Meta duopoly on the local news sector. It was argued that funding provided by the GNI has largely taken the form of one-off grants directed at innovation but with little long-term benefits for the sustainability of local news publishers.<sup>112</sup> Additionally, some evidence claimed that both schemes primarily help the largest multi-title publishers.<sup>113</sup>

### Government Support

40. Existing government support for news publishers includes various forms of tax relief. The Value Added Tax Act 1994 provides for the zero rating of goods newspapers, journals and periodicals.<sup>114</sup> The Cairncross Review recommended extending the zero-rating of VAT to digital newspapers and magazines, including digital-only news publications, to encourage the development of digital business models.<sup>115</sup> The Government expedited this in April 2020 to support publishers during the Covid-19 pandemic, and it is still in place.<sup>116</sup> It has been estimated that this measure has generated an additional £50m for the industry, though so far that has been concentrated among titles with established digital subscriptions.<sup>117</sup> The Public Interest News Foundation said the measure had made little or no difference to publishers serving small local communities.<sup>118</sup> In 2016, the business rates relief scheme was introduced, under which local news publishers receive a £1,500 business rate discount for property they use as office space. The scheme was extended and will now apply for an additional five years, until 31 March 2025.<sup>119</sup> The News Media Association notes that although the rate relief has proved useful, publishers have found that the amount they are able to save is modest.<sup>120</sup>

110 Meta ([SLJ0056](#)); National Council for the Training of Journalists ([SLJ0044](#))

111 Google ([SLJ0055](#))

112 Clear Sky Publishing Limited ([SLJ0006](#))

113 Ibid; Social Streets C.I.C ([SLJ0011](#))

114 Value Added Tax Act 1994, [Schedule 8, Part II, Group 3](#)

115 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.99

116 HM Treasury, [“Vat scrapped on E-publications”](#), (30 April 2020) [accessed 12 December 2022]

117 [“News industry set for £50m-a-year boost from VAT cut on digital publications”](#), *Press Gazette*, May 26 2020 [accessed 16 December 2022]

118 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#))

119 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#))

120 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#))

### *An innovation fund for news*

41. The Cairncross Review recommended that the Government launch an innovation fund for the news industry.<sup>121</sup> It argued that the declining revenues of news publishers and the difficulty of developing new business models meant there was a clear case for targeted public support. It called for the fund to be focused on innovations that would have industry-wide benefits and improve the supply of public interest news. The Government accepted the recommendation and in October 2019 launched the £2 million Future News Pilot Fund (FNF), administered by Nesta. The pilot fund ran until June 2020, with investment targeted at new technologies, start-ups, and innovative business models.<sup>122</sup> It received 178 applications and issued grants to 20 projects.<sup>123</sup>

42. Several submissions said the FNF was a missed opportunity, focusing on too broad a range of projects with grants that were too small to make real change.<sup>124</sup> The National Council for the Training of Journalists said “there was a sense that the FNF was a case of simply tinkering at the edges, with no obvious co-ordination of broader industry interests”.<sup>125</sup> Clear Sky Publishing said that the fund was largely directed at “innovation” rather than creating a sustainable platform for local news publishers.<sup>126</sup> The News Media Association expressed disappointment that the FNF did not include established news media publishers.<sup>127</sup> Reach PLC said that the FNF showed “distinct bias towards exceptionally small scale, niche-focused programmes that offered little or no learnings that could be scaled up to have an impact across the whole of the regional news landscape.”<sup>128</sup> In the project review Nesta acknowledged that “we’ve only been able to support the tip of the iceberg and what we’ve tapped into is an ambitious, creative and diverse field of innovation”.<sup>129</sup> They called for a sustained investment in news innovation of £10 million a year for the next decade. This was the same amount and timespan as recommended in the Cairncross Review, which said that public support for journalism “should be generous enough to make a difference”.<sup>130</sup> The Cairncross Review also noted that in 2015 Nesta had managed a fund of around £2 million to encourage innovation in news gathering, but which was too small to have much impact.<sup>131</sup>

43. DCMS has not announced a follow up to the FNF pilot nor an alternative source of funding. In written evidence, the Department told us that they “continue to explore options for additional fiscal measures to support the sector”.<sup>132</sup> The Minister admitted there was “probably some merit” to the criticisms that had been directed towards the Fund and acknowledged that any future intervention would need to have “clearer criteria”

121 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.97

122 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (SLJ0041)

123 Nesta, “*The Future News Pilot Fund: meet the grantees*”, [accessed 19 December 2022]

124 Public Interest News Foundation (SLJ0049); National Council for the Training of Journalists (SLJ0044); News Media Association (SLJ0017); Reach plc (SLJ0054); Clear Sky Publishing Limited (SLJ0006); Media Reform Coalition (SLJ0032)

125 National Council for the Training of Journalists (SLJ0044)

126 Clear Sky Publishing Limited (SLJ0006)

127 News Media Association (SLJ0017)

128 Reach plc (SLJ0054)

129 Nesta, *Future News Pilot Fund, End of programme report* (12 August 2020), p.36

130 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.97

131 Ibid.

132 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (SLJ0041)

and be “more substantial”.<sup>133</sup> On whether a follow up fund would be launched, she told us “We are aware of NESTA’s recommendations and we are looking at whether there is value in developing a more substantial fund with more targeted interventions.”<sup>134</sup>

**44. The Government’s response to the Cairncross Review recommendation to set up an innovation fund for public interest news was welcome. But the Future News Pilot Fund was neither substantial nor long-term enough to make a significant difference, and there has been no follow up. The Government should build upon the Future News Pilot Fund and create a long-term public interest news fund with a remit to support innovation.**

### Statutory Notices

45. Local authorities are statutorily required to publish notices about certain types of legal proceedings (such as planning applications) in local printed newspapers. This is to help bring such notices to the attention of a wide local audience. In practice, the money spent by councils on advertising the notices acts as a form of subsidy to local newspapers. For many, it is an essential source of revenue.<sup>135</sup> With the increased use of the internet and digital platforms to access information, there have been various proposals over recent years to reform the statutory notice system so local authorities are no longer required to place notices in newspapers. Most recently, the Government’s proposed reforms to the planning system in England, published in 2020, included lifting the requirement and leaving it at councils’ discretion on whether they continued to publish statutory notices in newspapers, as part of a wider effort to encourage greater digitisation within the planning system.<sup>136</sup> The News Media Association (NMA) was highly critical of this, arguing that lifting the mandatory requirement would have damaging effects for many local newspapers and diminish public engagement with planning decisions.<sup>137</sup> The NMA did acknowledge notices could be made more digitally accessible, and pointed to a project it has launched to develop an online public notices portal with a Google News Initiative grant of £1 million.<sup>138</sup> The NMA’s concerns echoed those of our colleagues on the (then) Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, who noted the continuing importance of printed notices in digitally-deprived communities, and concluded that the requirement to publish notices in newspapers should be retained across all councils.<sup>139</sup>

46. However, some evidence noted that start-up news publishers can miss out on the revenue stream available from statutory notices because of requirements around the frequency that a newspaper is published.<sup>140</sup> Many new entrants to the local news market are digital-only or are published in print monthly or quarterly; rules around publishing

133 [Q288](#)

134 [Q290](#)

135 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.85; News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#))

136 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *White Paper: Planning for the future* (August 2020)

137 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#))

138 *Ibid.*

139 Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, First Report of Session 2021–22, *The future of the planning system in England*, HC 38, para 88

140 Clear Sky Publishing Limited ([SLJ0006](#)); Progress Publishing (Bedford Independent) ([SLJ0033](#)); [Q230](#)

statutory notices, many of which predate the internet, require print publication on a more frequent basis.<sup>141</sup> David Floyd, Director of Social Spider CIC, highlighted these concerns and explained how existing rules can deter new entrants to the local news market:

The issue is that because of a law from sometime in the 1870s perhaps, you can only get public notice advertising if you are classified as a newspaper based on being published every 26 days or more frequently. If you are a monthly paper, you cannot get that income. In the London Borough of Waltham Forest, for example, we publish 15,000 copies of the Waltham Forest Echo. The rival Newspress publication sells around 2,000 copies and employs no local journalists. We employ three local journalists. The rival publication gets an average of £90,000 a year in public notice advertising from the local council. We get nothing. Its £90,000 a year public notice advertising budget is more than the entire operational budget of our newspaper in that area. If we could get even a slice of that money, we could put it directly into local journalism. It is a barrier for new entrants if they are not going to make the leap to weekly publication, irrespective of whether or not it has original journalism in it.<sup>142</sup>

The Bedford Independent raised similar concerns, and noted how publication in digital-only titles could be cheaper for local councils:

Currently our local authority, Bedford Borough Council, recommends that public notices and licence applications are only placed in print titles. This means very few people actually see them, yet local businesses and taxpayers are forced to pay high costs set by the one printed title in the area. This puts strain on local businesses and the public purse, while digital publications also miss out on a fair share of this revenue, that they could offer at a lower rate.<sup>143</sup>

When we put these points to the Minister, she indicated an openness to reviewing the criteria around how notices are awarded:

Given how fluid the industry is and how there are more publications coming online, questions probably need to be asked about the reach and audience levels of different publications and how that is measured and determined in the rules that govern public notices. I am very happy to look into this in greater detail.<sup>144</sup>

**47. Statutory notices in local newspapers remain an important means of keeping the public informed and a vital revenue stream for many local news publishers. But the criteria used by some councils to determine where notices are published appear to be outdated. We recommend that the Government review existing rules and practices for placing statutory notices in local newspapers and whether local councils need guidance on how to measure the reach and audience levels of news publications in a digital age.**

141 Newspaper Libel and Registration Act 1881, [section 1](#)

142 [Q230](#)

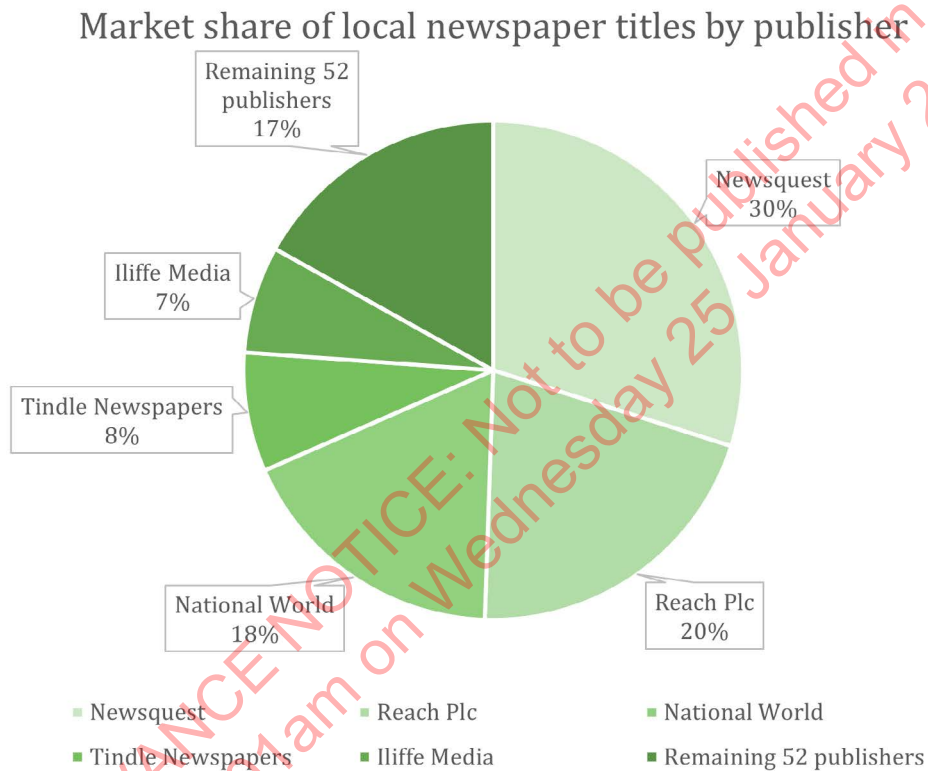
143 Progress Publishing (Bedford Independent) ([SLJ0033](#))

144 [Q329](#)

*This should include an assessment of how the revenue stream from statutory notices can be made more easily accessible for new entrants to the local news market. The Government should set out the progress of this review in its response to this report.*

## Consolidation

48. The local news sector is highly concentrated. The three largest publishers, Newsquest Media Group Limited, Reach Plc, and National World, between them own more than two-thirds of all UK local newspaper titles.<sup>145</sup> A full breakdown of ownership of titles across different publishers is given by the chart below:



Source: Media Reform Coalition, [“Newsquest’s acquisition of Archant—bad news for local journalism”](#), (March 2022) [accessed 16 December 2022]

49. Much of the evidence we received from independent news providers or bodies representing them was critical of these largest publishers, arguing that they have presided over a decline in the quality of local news produced by their titles. This was partly attributed to cuts to the number of staff working at titles to maximise earnings or replacing journalists with other roles.<sup>146</sup> Another factor cited was a loss of local knowledge by journalists as titles are merged and base their operations outside of the areas they report on.<sup>147</sup> Criticism was also directed at the business models of the largest publishers, which often focus on generating large amounts of content with a wide reach to increase online advertising revenue.<sup>148</sup> Journalists at the corporate publishers can be expected to produce multiple stories per day, with targets or other incentives for them to maximise audience engagement with each story. For example, according to the National Union of Journalists

145 Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#))

146 Dr Marc Edge ([SLJ0020](#)); The Mill ([SLJ0038](#))

147 [Q128](#)

148 Bournemouth University ([SLJ0014](#))

(NUJ), staff at Newsquest must reach 500,000 page views per month on their stories to qualify for bonuses.<sup>149</sup> Such pressures or targets encourage journalists to produce quick-to-write, sensationalist stories that can be published across multiple titles at the expense of in-depth journalism focused on individual communities.<sup>150</sup> The NUJ also noted that low pay for journalists at the larger publishers has been a longstanding issue for its members, and significant numbers were considering leaving their jobs.<sup>151</sup> Reach plc told us that its minimum salary for a trainee journalist was £21,500; for a senior journalist it was £25,000 and £30,000 for content editors (salaries are higher for staff based in London).<sup>152</sup> For comparison, the pay award for Reach's CEO in 2021 was £4 million.<sup>153</sup>

50. Many independent news publishers we heard from also argued that the corporate publishers overwhelmingly, and disproportionately, benefit from the various forms of industry and government support for local journalism, despite some of them being highly profitable companies. This included the funds and schemes run by the online platforms and the BBC's LDRS.<sup>154</sup> As noted above, in the latest allocation of local democracy reporters in 2021, 139 (84%) of the 165 journalists went to Newsquest, Reach plc, or JPI Media (now National World).<sup>155</sup> Social Streets CIC, an independent news publisher based in Tower Hamlets, cited their difficulties in accessing grant funding:

We are ignored by the major journalism funds and have been ineligible or rejected from a multitude of journalism initiatives including the Google News Innovation Fund, the Meta Community Journalism Project and the BBC Democracy Reporter Scheme. Our case study: The Google News Innovation Fund was designed to support plucky independent publishers that are embedded and active in the local community such as Social Streets C.I.C. Yet our application was rejected and we later discovered that another publishing company had been awarded funding for exactly the same idea as ours. That company was Reach plc.<sup>156</sup>

51. Indirect forms of support also mostly tend to go to the larger publishers. According to the Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS), a self-regulatory body for news publishers in the UK, the revenue from statutory notices is worth around £50 million per year, the vast majority of which goes to the largest publishers.<sup>157</sup> The same applies to revenues from government advertising.<sup>158</sup> For example, during the coronavirus pandemic the Government launched a £35 million three-month advertising partnership with the news industry called "All in, All together". This was praised for offering an important revenue stream for struggling publishers, but very few independent titles qualified.<sup>159</sup> In oral evidence, the Minister acknowledged the frustrations of independent publishers on this point, but noted the Government's duty to ensure value for money:

149 National Union of Journalists ([SLJ0023](#))

150 [Q138](#)

151 National Union of Journalists ([SLJ0023](#))

152 Reach plc ([SLJ0065](#))

153 National Union of Journalists ([SLJ0023](#))

154 Clear Sky Publishing Limited ([SLJ0006](#)); Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#)); West Leeds Community Media ([SLJ0018](#)); Independent Community News Network (ICNN) ([SLJ0036](#)); Dr Marc Edge ([SLJ0020](#))

155 BBC, "[New Local Democracy Reporting Service contract holders revealed](#)" [accessed 16 December 2022]

156 Social Streets C.I.C ([SLJ0011](#))

157 IMPRESS ([SLJ0012](#))

158 IMPRESS ([SLJ0012](#)); Nub News ([SLJ0009](#))

159 IMPRESS ([SLJ0012](#)); Independent Community News Network (ICNN) ([SLJ0036](#)); Professor Steven Barnett ([SLJ0042](#))



From the Government’s perspective, there is a tension between spending taxpayers’ money, for which they have to show a significant value for money, and the ability of smaller publishers to demonstrate that they have the audience reach and demonstrate that value for money if there is government spend on it.<sup>160</sup>

The Independent Community News Network argued, however, that decisions about the allocation of Government advertising spending in news outlets should be made not just in terms of a publication’s reach, frequency of publication, whether it is online or in print, or simply because that title has been used previously, but in terms of quality and local relevance of content.<sup>161</sup>

52. The largest multi-title publishers denied arguments that they are compromising journalistic quality for the sake of higher profits. Newsquest said that their titles are typically read by more than 75% of adults in their respective local communities each month and this demonstrates customer loyalty and satisfaction with the journalism produced.<sup>162</sup> Reach told us they were employing more journalists than before the Pandemic and working from home arrangements had allowed their journalists to become more embedded in their communities.<sup>163</sup> They said that in addition to 15 regional hubs, they have multiple smaller bases for their titles and there is no link between the hubs and how stories appear in their publications.<sup>164</sup> Reach also argued that government and funders tend to wrongly assume that large multi-title publishers lack innovation, and funding schemes can be biased towards new, independent publishers.<sup>165</sup> They cited the NESTA Future News Pilot Fund as an instance of this. Owen Meredith, CEO of the News Media Association, told us that consolidation provided economies of scale that meant titles could survive financially:

I think the consolidation within the industry is incredibly important in order to protect the viability of individual titles, and I think that many of those titles who are part of networked groups would simply not be viable without the ability to share back office costs of HR, finance, marketing, procurement power and so on. There is certainly an important role for consolidation within the market, and potentially further consolidation, because of the economies of scale that that brings, which then supports titles operating on the ground in individual communities.<sup>166</sup>

53. Ofcom has a duty to maintain plurality of providers of TV and radio services and to review the media ownership rules framework (listed under section 391(2) of the Communications Act 2003), every three years.<sup>167</sup> The latest review was published in 2021. One rule under the framework, the Media Public Interest Test, allows the Secretary of State for DCMS to intervene in qualifying mergers. A “special merger situation” arises when one of the parties to the merger is a government contractor controlled by a UK entity, or one of the parties has a 25% share of supply of newspapers or broadcasting in

160 [Q303](#)

161 Independent Community News Network (ICNN) ([SLJ0036](#))

162 Newsquest Media Group ([SLJ0057](#))

163 Reach plc ([SLJ0065](#)); [Q133](#)

164 Reach plc ([SLJ0065](#))

165 Reach plc ([SLJ0054](#))

166 [Q12](#)

167 Communications Act 2003, [section 391](#)

the UK.<sup>168</sup> Ofcom recommended no changes to this rule and noted that “we consider that merger activity could be beneficial for sustainability and that there could be a risk that local papers may exit the market rather than merge if merger control is too onerous”.<sup>169</sup>

54. The point was made to us that independent news publishers are not against the large multi-titles, but just want a more equitable share of opportunities and funding. Paul Hutchinson, co-founder of the *Bedford Independent* said:

We do not need to have a battle between independents and larger publishers. If you look at it from a supermarket versus independent shop perspective, towns thrive more when they have both. If you just have one, it becomes boring—I suppose that is the best way of putting it. Therefore, we need to make sure that independent publishers are given the same sort of thought as the big publishers.<sup>170</sup>

55. This sentiment was echoed by Karl Handcock, CEO of Nub News, who told us “that level playing field is really all I am asking for. If there is funding to be had, make sure it is given out equally”.<sup>171</sup>

**56. We recognise that consolidation within the local news industry has ensured the survival of titles that otherwise would have closed. But we are concerned that some of the approaches of the largest publishers appear to be compromising the quality the local journalism produced by their titles. We are also concerned that the largest publishers take a disproportionate share of the support available for local journalism, to the detriment of smaller publishers and those entering the market. This may be stifling much needed innovation that could benefit the sector as a whole. We recommend that the Government conducts an audit of public money that supports the local news sector. This should be followed by an analysis of whether this money can be more fairly distributed and better used to promote innovation. We also recommend that the Government considers ways to facilitate improved engagement between smaller local news publishers and private organisations providing support for local journalism. The Government should provide an update on the progress of this work in its response to this report.**

## Philanthropy

57. We heard suggestions that enabling more philanthropic donations to local news publishers would be a valuable way of supporting the sector.<sup>172</sup> An obvious means of doing so would be to make it easier for local news organisations to gain charitable status. The Charity Commission does register news organisations as charities, but journalism itself is not recognised as a charitable purpose in law, and the Commission has said that to achieve charitable status a news organisation must show the journalism that it funds or carries out is a means to achieving an existing charitable purpose.<sup>173</sup> The Charities Act 2011 provides for twelve distinct charitable purposes, including the advancement of

168 Enterprise Act 2002, [section 59](#)

169 Ofcom, [The future of media plurality in the UK](#) (17 November 2021), p.20–21

170 [Q165](#)

171 [Q256](#)

172 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0004](#)); The Bristol Cable ([SLJ0015](#)); Professor Steven Barnett ([SLJ0042](#)); Progress Publishing (Bedford Independent) ([SLJ0033](#))

173 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0004](#))

citizenship, the development of communities, and education.<sup>174</sup> The Charitable Journalism Project told us that journalism “sits awkwardly somewhere between these three aims.” Because of this, in practice, very few news organisations have gained charitable status. The process for doing so can be long and may require expensive legal advice beyond the means of many smaller publishers.<sup>175</sup> During this inquiry we have come across only one example of a local news provider that is a registered charity: the *Burngreave Messenger*, in the Burngreave Ward of Sheffield. The paper is delivered free to over 9000 households in the area and its trustees are Burngreave residents.<sup>176</sup> Its editor, Polly Perkins, spoke of the value of providing information to underserved communities on a charitable basis:

The social impact of the Burngreave Messenger is absolutely enormous for our area. We have massive digital deprivation in Burngreave. It is one of the most deprived wards in the country, in the top 10%. For example, during the covid-19 pandemic a lot of the people in our community simply would not have known where to go and get vaccinated or tested and we could let them know. This lands on everyone’s doorstep, so there is no question of the people in Burngreave not knowing where to get vaccinated and tested. It also meant that we could carry articles written by members of vaccine-reluctant communities about why people should get vaccinated. We were able to carry valuable health messaging that could not otherwise have been carried.<sup>177</sup>

The paper also provides opportunities for young people in the area to get involved in local journalism. Ms Perkins noted that this initiative would be very difficult to be affordable for local journalism that is not charity-led.<sup>178</sup>

58. Research has documented the growing prevalence of local “news deserts” in the UK: where the provision of information about the local area is limited, absent, or comes only from less trusted or verifiable sources like social media.<sup>179</sup> These areas often coincide with and link to wider forms of deprivation and can arise following the closure of commercial news publishers or their withdrawal from the area. Matt Abbott, Deputy Director of the Independent Community News Network, cited one extreme example of this:

There was a news project called the Port Talbot Magnet that was developed after there was previously about 15 journalists in Port Talbot and they all just disappeared over the course of a decade. The newspapers pulled out and they had nothing left, so they started the Port Talbot Magnet. Unfortunately, it was not a success because of the stark deprivation in the area of Port Talbot. They tried to run a membership model and a reader revenue model, but it was not successful. Before they went in there and produced this publication, it was found in a PhD thesis that people were getting their news from graffiti that was perhaps daubed under a bridge that a road had been closed.<sup>180</sup>

174 [Charities Act 2011, Section 3](#)

175 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0004](#))

176 [“About us”, Burngreave Messenger](#) [accessed 16 December 2022]

177 [Q264](#)

178 [Ibid.](#)

179 Charitable Journalism Project, [Local News Deserts in the UK](#) (June 2022)

180 [Q264](#)

The Charitable Journalism Project argued that for such areas, where there is deprivation of information on the one hand, and a lack of commercial local news provision on the other, the charitable function that local news organisations could provide is particularly obvious.<sup>181</sup>

59. Charitable status can give financial benefits to news organisations. The various tax breaks for charities can provide extra income. Many philanthropic organisations will only donate to registered charities; by becoming one, a news publisher can unlock access to wider sources of funding.<sup>182</sup> The Charitable Journalism Project said it had “gathered assurance over the last couple of years that there are philanthropic funders who would be prepared and keen to fund journalism, if the regulatory environment enabled them to do so”.<sup>183</sup> The injection of philanthropic funds into the local news sector could also help stimulate innovation that would benefit the whole sector.<sup>184</sup> Charitable status is also a reputational gain for publishers, as they can point to their regulation by the Charity Commission as assurance of appropriate governance and editorial standards.<sup>185</sup> Some local news publishers who submitted evidence to us said they would benefit from being able to access greater philanthropic funding.<sup>186</sup> The UK Community Radio Network said that achieving charity status could also help with the sustainability of community radio stations and enable them to conduct more local journalism.<sup>187</sup>

60. In other countries, particularly the US, philanthropic funding for local journalism is much greater than in the UK, which is at least in part because it is easier for news organisations to gain charitable status or its equivalent.<sup>188</sup> The *Bristol Cable* noted that much of its funding comes from two major US-based philanthropic organisations as it cannot secure such funding domestically.<sup>189</sup> George Brock of the Charitable Journalism Project told us that the Charity Commission was beginning to be more flexible on the question of whether news organisations could register as charities.<sup>190</sup> Ways the Government could intervene on the question include amending the Charities Act 2011 to explicitly recognise journalism, or certain forms of journalism, as a charitable purpose. Alternatively, under provisions in the same Act, the Attorney-General could make a “reference” to the Charity Tribunal, which has the power to clarify and develop charity law.<sup>191</sup>

61. However, the Public Interest News Foundation told us that many news organisations do not want to become charities because it could mean limiting their freedom of expression.<sup>192</sup> Charities are constrained in various ways in terms of their political and campaigning activity. They cannot exist for a political purpose, and in the political arena they must stress their independence and not give support to a political party, nor to a candidate or politician.<sup>193</sup> In addition, and as the Cairncross Review noted, charitable status would not

181 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0061](#))

182 The Bristol Cable ([SLJ0015](#))

183 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0004](#))

184 Ibid.

185 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0061](#))

186 Progress Publishing (Bedford Independent) ([SLJ0033](#)), The Bristol Cable ([SLJ0015](#)); West Leeds Community Media ([SLJ0018](#))

187 UK Community Radio Network ([SLJ0052](#))

188 Professor Steven Barnett ([SLJ0042](#))

189 The Bristol Cable ([SLJ0015](#)); [Q122](#)

190 [Q268](#)

191 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0004](#))

192 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#))

193 Charity Commission for England and Wales, “[Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities](#)” (7 November 2022) [accessed 19 December 2022]

benefit many other publishers as they are commercial endeavours.<sup>194</sup> Some of those who wrote to us recommended, instead, that the Government develop an alternative form of tax relief that would have some of the benefits of charitable status, such as being able to claim Gift Aid on donations.<sup>195</sup>

**62. Access to more philanthropic funding could help ensure the sustainability of the local news sector. Many, though not all, local news publishers would benefit from charitable status, but this is currently very difficult for news organisations to achieve. We recommend that the Government, in its response to us, indicates what options it might consider to make it easier for local news organisations to achieve charitable status. We also recommend that the Government assess ways to encourage more philanthropic donations to local news publishers for whom charitable status would not be appropriate.**

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194 Dame Frances Cairncross, [The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism](#) (February 2019), p.87

195 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#)); Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#))

## 3 Local Television and Radio

### Local Television

63. Local TV services launched in 2013 and are recognised by statute as designated public service channels for the purposes of securing prominence on electronic programme guides. Licence fee funding was allocated to launch and establish local TV, but licensee groups are now self-sustaining. The services are broadcast on a Freeview multiplex, jointly owned by the local TV licensees. They are regulated by Ofcom and provide services across 34 locations.<sup>196</sup> David Powell, Chair of the Local TV Network, stressed the importance of local TV to community building and democracy: “If you want to have pride in place, local TV can give you pride in place”, and for holding local government to account: “local TV has an immediacy that local media cannot do”.<sup>197</sup> According to the Local TV Network, over five million viewers watch local TV each month on Freeview.<sup>198</sup> However, Mr Powell also told us that “local TV is very much an afterthought” for both the government and Ofcom.<sup>199</sup>

64. Currently, local TV gets no grant funding. Mr Powell noted that some individual stations have local arrangements, including with the Arts Council England, but that “it is a bit hit and miss”.<sup>200</sup> Notts TV, which broadcasts across Nottinghamshire, has received a subsidy from Nottingham Trent University and, in exchange, provides work placements for its students. But it noted a general “press bias” in application processes for public funding and from the social media companies.<sup>201</sup> The Local TV Network stressed that the sector “is not seeking direct subsidy for local TV. However, it does seek to be treated in a manner comparable to other non-BBC public service channels with reserved access to the major broadcasting platforms and appropriate prominence, together with proportionate regulatory requirements targeted at maintaining local news and current affairs”.<sup>202</sup> Local TV is eligible for the LDRS; Notts TV qualified in the latest round of contract allocations, though it was the only TV news provider to do so.<sup>203</sup>

65. The Government has stated that the upcoming Media Bill will ensure that public service content is prominent, available, and easily accessible across a range of platforms.<sup>204</sup> The Government’s 2022 broadcasting White Paper committed to make changes to the local TV licensing regime to enable the extension of the local TV multiplex licence until 2034 and subject to the same conditions that apply to the national digital terrestrial television multiplexes.<sup>205</sup> The Government also said it would consult on options for the

196 Local TV Network ([SLJ0035](#))

197 [Q63](#)

198 Local TV Network ([SLJ0035](#))

199 [Q63](#)

200 [Q49](#)

201 Notts TV ([SLJ0039](#))

202 Local TV Network ([SLJ0062](#))

203 Notts TV ([SLJ0039](#)); BBC, *Local Democracy Reporting Service list of contract awards 2021*, p.2

204 HM Government, *Queen’s Speech 2022: background briefing notes*, (10 May 2022), p.41

205 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, *Up next—the government’s vision for the broadcasting sector*, CP 671, 28 April 2022

renewal or relicensing of individual local television services at the same time.<sup>206</sup> The Local TV Network said that a decision to relicense rather than renew TV licenses would disrupt investment planning and lead to significant financial uncertainty for the sector.<sup>207</sup>

## Local Radio

66. Many commercial radio stations are broadcast at a regional or local level, and most provide news and information output, much of which is in the forms of updated bulletins at regular points throughout the day.<sup>208</sup> Research by Radiocentre has found that on average commercial radio stations broadcast 23 news and sport bulletins each day. For the vast majority of stations, each bulletin is required to provide a combination of national and regional or local stories.<sup>209</sup> Local commercial radios stations increased their commitment to news and information significantly during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, broadcasting 25% more news bulletins on average that lasted 28% longer.<sup>210</sup> However, the Media Reform Coalition argued that the sector lacks plurality: 70% of the UK's 279 local commercial analogue stations are owned by Bauer Radio or Global, who along with Wireless Radio also control three quarters of the national commercial DAB market.<sup>211</sup> And the news broadcast by most stations tend to come from packages from Independent Radio News (IRN), which are produced by Sky News in its centralised newsrooms, which, the Coalition argued, results in a lack of localness.<sup>212</sup>

67. The UK also has a growing number of community radio stations. The Communications Act 2003 provided for the regulatory framework for this category of radio services, and there are now over 300 licensed community radio stations across the UK, serving communities of interest or of location.<sup>213</sup> Most cover very small areas, with a maximum radius of 5 km, and are run on a not-for-profit basis, often by volunteers.<sup>214</sup> The UK Community Radio Network (UKCRN) said that there is a wide approach to journalism across the sector. Some stations conduct no journalism at all, others take news packages from nationally syndicated news sources such as IRN, while some produce their own journalism and news programming, including website-based journalism and engagement on social media platforms.<sup>215</sup> Martin Steers, Chair of the UKCRN, told us that community radio stations often do not have the necessary skills or resources to conduct local journalism, particularly in the context of Ofcom regulation:

Because community radio is regulated by Ofcom, community radio stations are even more conscious because of often the lack of formal accredited qualifications and quite often the lack of paid resource within community radio from an editorial point of view. There are a number of community radio stations that do not go near local journalism because of that fear of getting it wrong and then facing sanctions or facing the wrath of Ofcom.<sup>216</sup>

206 Ibid.

207 Local TV Network ([SLJ0062](#))

208 Radiocentre ([SLJ0053](#))

209 Ibid.

210 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, *Digital Radio and Audio Review* (21 October 2021), p.12

211 Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#))

212 Ibid.

213 UK Community Radio Network ([SLJ0052](#)); The Community Radio Order 2004 ([SI 2004/1944](#))

214 Ofcom, "Community radio" [accessed 19 December 2022]

215 UK Community Radio Network ([SLJ0052](#))

216 [Q4](#)

68. Mr Steers also told us that there is also very little funding for journalism in the community radio sector.<sup>217</sup> He noted that some councils do fund community radio stations for their output, but this could raise concerns about political interference.<sup>218</sup> No BBC LDRS journalists have been allocated to local radio stations.<sup>219</sup> Funding is available from the Community Radio Fund (CRF), which is run by Ofcom. The Fund was established in 2005 and, according to a 2021 evaluation report commissioned by DCMS, its grants have provided a lifeline to smaller stations and boosted their growth. The evaluation described how these stations have, in turn, helped to improve lives in the communities they serve.<sup>220</sup> But Mr Steers noted that the CRF is just under £500,000 per year, and has not increased in the last 15 years. The Fund was originally set up to support for around a dozen radio stations, but now there are closer to 350 eligible stations, with the number set to rise further with the roll out of small-scale DAB across the country.<sup>221</sup> The evaluation report notes that between 2016 and 2020, Ofcom provided full or partial awards to only 37% of applications to the CRF.<sup>222</sup> In oral evidence, the Minister commended the CRF's overall effectiveness and said that the Department was looking at options to expand it.<sup>223</sup>

69. The Digital Radio and Audio Review was published in October 2021. It was commissioned by the Government and undertaken in consultation with the industry and examined the challenges radio will likely face in the future from new technologies and changing listening habits.<sup>224</sup> One of the key concerns raised was the risk to radio broadcasters from unregulated distribution, via online and smart speaker platforms, which account for an increasing share of listening.<sup>225</sup> Radiocentre noted how this is a risk recognised across the entire sector, and that both commercial radio and the BBC had highlighted to the government the importance of new legislative protections.<sup>226</sup> The Government's Broadcasting White Paper was published in April 2022, and trailed the announcement of a Media Bill in that year's Queen's Speech.<sup>227</sup> We were dismayed to learn that provisions for radio were not to be included in the bill; the Broadcasting White Paper noted only that the government would continue to engage with the radio industry to gain a better understanding of the policies and practices of smart speaker platforms.<sup>228</sup> Following her oral evidence, the Minister wrote to us to say that the Department had made progress on the recommendations of the Digital Radio and Audio Review concerning radio, which, coupled with the fact that, to date, the Media Bill has not been introduced to Parliament, opens the opportunity for provisions concerning radio to be contained in the bill in "due course".<sup>229</sup> In oral evidence to us, on 6 December 2022, the new Secretary of State, Michelle Donelan, also said that the Department was looking to include radio prominence in the bill.<sup>230</sup>

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217 [Q45](#)

218 [Q47](#)

219 Local and Community Media Network, MeCSSA ([SLJ0029](#))

220 Wavehill, [Evaluation of the Community Radio Fund, Final Report](#) (December 2021), p.5

221 [Q48](#)

222 Wavehill, [Evaluation of the Community Radio Fund, Final Report](#) (December 2021), p.5

223 [Q306](#)

224 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Digital Radio and Audio Review](#) (21 October 2021)

225 Radiocentre ([SLJ0053](#))

226 *Ibid.*

227 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Up next—the government's vision for the broadcasting sector](#), CP 671, 28 April 2022

228 *Ibid.*, p.9

229 [Letter from Julia Lopez MP, Minister of State for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure, relating to local journalism oral evidence follow up](#), 24 October 2022

230 Oral evidence taken on 6 December 2022, HC (2022–23) 158, [Q250](#)



70. We welcome the Government's indication that there will be support for local TV in the forthcoming Media Bill and are glad that provisions concerning radio now also look to be included. We also welcome the Minister's indication that the Community Radio Fund (CRF) will be increased to reflect the growth of the sector. *We recommend that the Government should explore how the expanded CRF, as well as other existing journalism support schemes, could be used to help community radio conduct more local journalism.*

### **BBC Local Radio**

71. The BBC has 39 local radio stations in England, reaching 5.7 million listeners each week.<sup>231</sup> On 1 October 2022, the BBC announced proposals for these stations to share more content and broadcast less programming unique to their area.<sup>232</sup> All 39 stations will continue with their own dedicated local programming from 6am to 2pm on weekdays, but after those times unique local programming will be reduced.<sup>233</sup> However, all live sport programming and local news bulletins will be protected. The changes for part of the BBC's wider Digital First strategy and will see the BBC redirect £19m from broadcast services to online and multimedia production. It will create multi-media news operations across the country, bringing together its local news teams across radio, TV, and online. Overall, the plan would reduce BBC local staffing in England by around 48 posts. Greater programme sharing will lead to 139 fewer roles in audio teams, but the BBC will create some 131 additional roles across local news services, including 11 investigative reporting teams.<sup>234</sup>

72. The proposals have drawn widespread concern, including from many fellow Parliamentarians.<sup>235</sup> In particular, questions have been raised about how the sharing of content across larger areas and regions will dilute the sense of localness that has set the BBC's local radio services apart from the commercial sector.<sup>236</sup> The NUJ has also raised concerns about how the plans may affect specialist output.<sup>237</sup> We questioned Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director of Nations and Jason Horton, Director of England at the BBC on 1 December 2022. Mr Davies defended the BBC's approach, arguing that the Corporation needed to balance the needs of its existing radio audience with the information and news needs of the rest of local communities.<sup>238</sup> He also underlined that the commitment to local news bulletins across the day,<sup>239</sup> and said that the proposals would enable the BBC to increase its overall local news provision:

231 [HC Deb, 1 November 2022, c763](#)

232 [BBC, "BBC sets out plans to transform its local services to deliver greater value to communities across England", \(31 October 2022\) \[accessed 19 December 2022\]](#)

233 [Ibid.](#)

234 ["BBC confirms it will cut 48 jobs in local radio overhaul", \*The Guardian\*, 31 October 2022 \[accessed 19 December 2022\]](#)

235 [National Union of Journalists, "#KeepBBCLocalRadioLocal", 8 November 2022 \[accessed 19 December 2022\]; \*HC Debate, 8 December 2022, c573\*](#)

236 [Ibid.](#)

237 [National Union of Journalists, "#KeepBBCLocalRadioLocal", 8 November 2022 \[accessed 19 December 2022\]](#)

238 [Oral evidence taken on 1 December 2022, HC \(2022–23\) 382, \[Q205\]\(#\)](#)

239 [Ibid, \[Q143\]\(#\)](#)

Right now, I do not think that our local online services are where they need to be. They need to be more consistent and more investigative; they need to draw on our specialists and on the local democracy reporter scheme that we run. We need to deliver a trusted, seven-day-a-week local online news service, and that is not where we are right now.<sup>240</sup>

73. **We echo the concern expressed by colleagues across the House and beyond about the BBC's proposed changes to local radio provision. Sharing content across larger areas and regions risks undermining the sense of localness that has, until now, made BBC local radio distinct. The BBC's plans to direct more resources to its online local news services may risk harming commercial news publishers, whose sustainability is already precarious. While we recognise that the latest license fee settlement is difficult for the BBC, we do not consider that the strategy for digital first should come at the expense of local radio and recommend that the Corporation reconsiders its plans.**

## 4 The role of online platforms

### Digital Platforms and Local News

74. Google and Meta are by far the largest companies operating in the online search and social media markets, respectively, and were the focus of discussion of the role of online platforms in our inquiry, as well as the Cairncross Review and other reports in this area. Evidence we received highlighted the benefits local news publishers get from Google and Meta, including as a means for local journalists to find stories and to engage with local community groups.<sup>241</sup> Some submissions noted the positive impacts that have come from the platforms' various initiatives to support journalism, such as Meta's Community News Partnership and the Google News Initiative, discussed in Chapter Two of this report.<sup>242</sup> The platforms have also made efforts to increase access to local news organisations via their services. In 2019, Google developed an algorithm change to better capture original local news.<sup>243</sup> In 2021, it launched a dedicated carousel of local reporting that is triggered whenever the platform finds local news relevant to a search query.<sup>244</sup> Also in 2021, Meta added a Local News section to Facebook News.<sup>245</sup>

75. Most local news publishers are reliant on both platforms to draw online traffic to their own content.<sup>246</sup> That web traffic underpins the revenue publishers can make from digital advertising or new subscriptions. Many publishers also use the platforms' various products and services to sell advertising space and collect user data.<sup>247</sup> Google has a more than 90% share of the UK search engine market, while Meta's platforms (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) have a 73% share of the social media market as of 2020.<sup>248</sup> The platforms' market dominance and news publishers' reliance upon them has led to widespread concerns that an unfair imbalance of power exists between the two, which means publishers have little choice but to accept the commercial terms stipulated by the platforms.<sup>249</sup> Many local news publishers we heard from said this commercial relationship does not represent a fair value exchange.<sup>250</sup> They argue that the platforms extract considerable revenue and data from user interaction with news content, without paying for it. For example, we were pointed to recent research estimating that news content created by UK publishers generates approximately £1 billion for Google and Meta every year, of which only a very small amount goes back to news publishers.<sup>251</sup>

76. News publishers also complain that referral traffic through social media has the least propensity to spend time with or pay for a news service, making it harder for them to monetise their content or build brand loyalty.<sup>252</sup> Unannounced changes to the platforms'

241 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#)); The Independent Media Association ([SLJ0048](#)); Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) ([SLJ0027](#));

242 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#)); Flyover Media CIC ([SLJ0037](#))

243 Google ([SLJ0055](#))

244 Ibid.

245 Meta, "Facebook News rolls out local news section in UK", 13 April 2021 [accessed 19 December 2022]

246 Reach plc ([SLJ0054](#)); Notts TV ([SLJ0039](#)); The Independent Media Association ([SLJ0048](#))

247 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.59–62

248 Competition and Markets Authority, *Online platforms and digital advertising: market study final report* (1 July 2020) p.10, 121

249 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.57–74

250 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#)); News for All ([SLJ0050](#))

251 Q140; News Media Association, "New Academic Paper Find News Content Drives £1bn In Annual UK Revenues For Tech Platforms", 13 May 2022 [accessed 20 December 2022]

252 Enders Analysis Limited ([SLJ0043](#))

algorithms, which can affect the prominence of news content and the amount of traffic it receives, is another area of contention. Newsquest described how “a tweak of the algorithm by Facebook can result in a significant traffic drop for us. We are therefore beholden to the power of their algorithm for much of our digital audience and for much of our programmatic advertising revenues”.<sup>253</sup> The Media Reform Coalition described cases where algorithm changes intended to combat disinformation had led to content from smaller news publishers being penalised in Google’s search rankings. The underlying assumption to this filtering was that a news publisher’s size reflected its trustworthiness, which the Coalition argued was particularly inappropriate for local news.<sup>254</sup> Smaller publishers have also reportedly had legitimate content removed from the platforms with no reason given nor recourse to appeal.<sup>255</sup>

77. The platforms contend that they make little, if any, revenue from news and that publishers’ content represents a very small proportion of the total content they host. John Severinson, Head of News Partner Development for Europe at Meta, told us that “Meta does not profit from news content”, and emphasised how news and news links are highly substitutable on Meta’s platforms.<sup>256</sup> In written evidence, Meta said that news links account for about 4% of all content viewed on Facebook’s news feed.<sup>257</sup> Tom Morrison-Bell, Government Affairs and Public Policy Manager at Google, said that the revenue that the company makes from adverts next to news-related queries is less than \$20 million.<sup>258</sup> Google also highlighted the licensing agreements it has reached with 203 UK local news publishers as part of the Google News Showcase, under which it pays for some of the publishers’ content.<sup>259</sup> And both companies emphasised the considerable value their platforms deliver to news publishers in the form of web traffic and advertising tools.<sup>260</sup> Yet such points would seemingly lend support to the overall argument that the platforms need publishers far less than the publishers need them, and that, therefore, an imbalance of power exists between the two. As the Cairncross Review stated, this unbalanced relationship means that “it is increasingly difficult for publishers credibly to threaten to remove their content—and without that threat, they cannot easily negotiate terms for the distribution of their content”.<sup>261</sup>

## Digital Markets Unit

78. The Cairncross Review recommended that the Government develop new codes of conduct to govern the platforms’ commercial relations with news publishers, under the oversight of a regulator.<sup>262</sup> The Review also called for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to conduct a market study of the online advertising sector.<sup>263</sup> The call for a market study echoed those from *Which?*, the Furman Review, and the House of Lords Communications Committee.<sup>264</sup> The Government responded positively to both

253 Newsquest Media Group (SLJ0057)

254 Media Reform Coalition (SLJ0032)

255 Ibid; The Independent Media Association (SLJ0048)

256 Q210

257 Meta (SLJ0056)

258 Q214

259 Google (SLJ0055)

260 Q210; Q215; Meta (SLJ0056); Google (SLJ0055)

261 Dame Frances Cairncross, *The Cairncross Review: A sustainable future for journalism* (February 2019), p.71

262 Ibid, p.91

263 Ibid, p.93

264 Competition and Markets Authority, *Online platforms and digital advertising: market study final report*, (1 July 2020) p.36

recommendations and asked the CMA to conduct the market study, which was published in July 2020.<sup>265</sup> The CMA concluded that Google and Meta benefited from unfair advantages such that potential rivals could no longer compete on equal terms and that this was harming competition in the digital advertising market, to the detriment of news publishers among others.<sup>266</sup> The CMA recommended that the Government establish a new pro-competition regulatory regime for online platforms. This would be underpinned by a Digital Markets Unit (DMU), which would be empowered to enforce a code of conduct governing platforms designated with “strategic market status”, as well as to undertake pro-competitive interventions.<sup>267</sup>

79. The Government established the DMU in April 2021 on a non-statutory basis.<sup>268</sup> Its full powers, as well as other aspects of the new regulatory regime will require legislation, which the Government said it would bring forward as soon as parliamentary time allows.<sup>269</sup> The Queen’s Speech in May 2022 announced the introduction of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill in draft form.<sup>270</sup> Some of the evidence we received expressed frustration about the delay to the implementation of the legislation, to which pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft bill would only add.<sup>271</sup> Both the News Media Association and Professional Publishers’ Association highlighted that, in the interim, news publishers would continue to face the difficulties of operating in an unfair market.<sup>272</sup> In response to calls from several quarters, including our colleagues on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee,<sup>273</sup> to expedite the passage of the bill, the Autumn Statement, published on 17 November, announced that the Government would bring forward the bill in the third (i.e. current) Parliamentary session.<sup>274</sup>

80. Some evidence raised concerns about the how the codes of conduct between platforms and publishers, to be overseen by the DMU, will operate in practice in respect of smaller publishers.<sup>275</sup> The Australian News Media Bargaining Code, enacted in early 2021, was cited as demonstrative of some of the pitfalls the UK should avoid.<sup>276</sup> The code enables publishers to negotiate collectively with platforms for payment for their news content. If news publishers and platforms cannot agree, an independent arbitration process is triggered.<sup>277</sup> However, eligible publishers must have an annual turnover of at least AUS\$150k (c.£80k), and platforms can avoid designation under the code if they reach agreements relating to news content with publishers. This has enabled Google and Meta to make commercial deals with larger news publishers, but smaller publishers have been excluded.<sup>278</sup> In March 2022, independent news publishers in Australia instigated a

265 *Ibid.*

266 *Ibid.*, p.5

267 *Ibid.*, p.5, 328

268 Competition and Markets Authority, “[Digital Markets Unit](#)”, 7 April 2021 [accessed 16 December 2022]

269 *Ibid.*

270 HM Government, *Queen’s Speech 2022: background briefing notes* (10 May 2022), p.34

271 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#)); Professional Publishers Association (PPA) ([SLJ0024](#))

272 *Ibid.*; News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#))

273 Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2022–23, *Post-pandemic economic growth: state aid and post-Brexit competition policy*, HC 759, para 206

274 HM Treasury, *Autumn Statement 2022*, CP 751, November 2022, p.35

275 Authors Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) ([SLJ0030](#)); Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#))

276 *Ibid.*

277 Australian Competition & Consumer Commission, “[News media bargaining code](#)” [accessed 19 December 2022]

278 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#)); Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#)); Independent Community News Network (ICNN) ([SLJ0036](#))

“news freeze”, during which they published no content, in protest against this.<sup>279</sup> Advice to DCMS on the application of a UK code of conduct produced by the CMA and Ofcom, acknowledged the risk of the smaller publishers being disadvantaged and outlined some general principles to avoid this.<sup>280</sup> In oral evidence, the Minister appeared confident that smaller publishers would not be excluded from the UK version of the code:

The CMA is very mindful of the needs of smaller publishers and, building on the Australian example, would be open to collective bargaining. We understand that there is some concern about the power mismatch. That is precisely what the CMA approach is designed to address. It looks at the issues of competition and intervenes to address any clear imbalance of power. I do not see that it would disadvantage the smaller publications.<sup>281</sup>

**81. We are glad that the Government appears to be expediting the introduction of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill, which will be vital to redressing the unbalanced relationship between the large digital platforms and local news publishers (among many others). It is important that any code of conduct and collective bargaining mechanisms provided for by the bill do not lead to the exclusion of smaller news publishers. We recommend that clear and explicit provisions for ensuring smaller publishers are fairly remunerated be included in the Government’s new pro-competition regime.**

279 [“Australian indie publishers ‘freeze news’ in protest at exclusion from big tech bargaining”, Press Gazette, 21 March 2022 \[accessed 19 December 2022\]](#)

280 Ofcom and Competition and Markets Authority, [Platforms and content providers, including news publishers](#), (November 2021), p. 64

281 [Q283](#)

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## The State of Local Journalism

1. Despite the collapse in revenues and the immense challenges facing those titles remaining in the market, there are many encouraging examples of innovation by local news publishers. These demonstrate that, provided the right support is given, the sector can be revived and can have a sustainable future. (Paragraph 24)

## Support for local news

2. The LDRS has had a positive impact on local journalism by enabling important local news stories to get coverage where otherwise they might not. But more could be done to expand the service across different media platforms and to give access to a wider range of news providers. The BBC must also ensure that partner news providers use Local Democracy Reporters for their intended purposes. *The LDRS should be protected under forthcoming Charter negotiations, and we encourage the BBC to explore ways to widen the scope of the service.* (Paragraph 35)
3. The Government's response to the Cairncross Review recommendation to set up an innovation fund for public interest news was welcome. But the Future News Pilot Fund was neither substantial nor long-term enough to make a significant difference, and there has been no follow up. *The Government should build upon the Future News Pilot Fund and create a long-term public interest news fund with a remit to support innovation.* (Paragraph 44)
4. Statutory notices in local newspapers remain an important means of keeping the public informed and a vital revenue stream for many local news publishers. But the criteria used by some councils to determine where notices are published appear to be outdated. *We recommend that the Government review existing rules and practices for placing statutory notices in local newspapers and whether local councils need guidance on how to measure the reach and audience levels of news publications in a digital age. This should include an assessment of how the revenue stream from statutory notices can be made more easily accessible for new entrants to the local news market. The Government should set out the progress of this review in its response to this report.* (Paragraph 47)
5. We recognise that consolidation within the local news industry has ensured the survival of titles that otherwise would have closed. But we are concerned that some of the approaches of the largest publishers appear to be compromising the quality the local journalism produced by their titles. We are also concerned that the largest publishers take a disproportionate share of the support available for local journalism, to the detriment of smaller publishers and those entering the market. This may be stifling much needed innovation that could benefit the sector as a whole. *We recommend that the Government conducts an audit of public money that supports the local news sector. This should be followed by an analysis of whether this money can be more fairly distributed and better used to promote innovation. We also recommend that the Government considers ways to facilitate improved engagement*

*between smaller local news publishers and private organisations providing support for local journalism. The Government should provide an update on the progress of this work in its response to this report. (Paragraph 56)*

6. Access to more philanthropic funding could help ensure the sustainability of the local news sector. Many, though not all, local news publishers would benefit from charitable status, but this is currently very difficult for news organisations to achieve. *We recommend that the Government, in its response to us, indicates what options it might consider to make it easier for local news organisations to achieve charitable status. We also recommend that the Government assess ways to encourage more philanthropic donations to local news publishers for whom charitable status would not be appropriate. (Paragraph 62)*

### Local Television and Radio

7. We welcome the Government's indication that there will be support for local TV in the forthcoming Media Bill and are glad that provisions concerning radio now also look to be included. We also welcome the Minister's indication that the Community Radio Fund (CRF) will be increased to reflect the growth of the sector. *We recommend that the Government should explore how the expanded CRF, as well as other existing journalism support schemes, could be used to help community radio conduct more local journalism. (Paragraph 70)*
8. We echo the concern expressed by colleagues across the House and beyond about the BBC's proposed changes to local radio provision. Sharing content across larger areas and regions risks undermining the sense of localness that has, until now, made BBC local radio distinct. The BBC's plans to direct more resources to its online local news services may risk harming commercial news publishers, whose sustainability is already precarious. *While we recognise that the latest license fee settlement is difficult for the BBC, we do not consider that the strategy for digital first should come at the expense of local radio and recommend that the Corporation reconsiders its plans. (Paragraph 73)*
9. We are glad that the Government appears to be expediting the introduction of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill, which will be vital to redressing the unbalanced relationship between the large digital platforms and local news publishers (among many others). It is important that any code of conduct and collective bargaining mechanisms provided for by the bill do not lead to the exclusion of smaller news publishers. *We recommend that clear and explicit provisions for ensuring smaller publishers are fairly remunerated be included in the Government's new pro-competition regime. (Paragraph 81)*



# Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 17 January 2023**

## **Members present:**

Kevin Brennan

Steve Brine

Clive Efford

Rt Hon Damian Green

Dr Rupa Huq

Simon Jupp

Rt Hon Damian Green took the Chair, in accordance with the Resolution of the Committee of 10th January 2023.

Draft Report (*The sustainability of local journalism*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 81 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No.134.

## **Adjournment**

Adjourned till Thursday 19 January at 9.30 am.

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## Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Tuesday 17 May 2022

**Owen Meredith**, Chief Executive, News Media Association; **David Powell**, Chair, Local TV Network; **Martin Steers**, Co-Founder, UK Community Radio Network [Q1-71](#)

**Adam Cantwell-Corn**, Co-Founder, The Bristol Cable; **Jonathan Heawood**, Executive Director, Public Interest News Foundation; **Michelle Stanistreet**, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists [Q72-123](#)

### Tuesday 28 June 2022

**Professor Natalie Fenton**, Founder, Media Reform Coalition; **David Higginson**, Chief Audience Officer, Reach plc; **Paul Hutchinson**, Co-founder, Bedford Independent [Q124-175](#)

**Rhodri Talfan Davies**, Director of Nations, BBC; **Tom Morrison-Bell**, Government Affairs and Public Policy Manager, Google; **John Severinson**, Head of News Partner Development, Europe, Meta [Q176-224](#)

### Thursday 07 July 2022

**Maria Breslin**, Editor, Liverpool Echo; **David Floyd**, Director, Social Spider CIC; **Karl Hancock**, Chief Executive, Nub News [Q225-259](#)

**Matt Abbott**, Deputy Director, Independent Community News Network; **George Brock**, Chair, Charitable Journalism Project; **Polly Perkins**, Editor, Burngreave Messenger [Q260-274](#)

### Tuesday 18 October 2022

**Julia Lopez MP**, Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; **Robert Specterman-Green**, Director, Media & Creative Industries,, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [Q275-331](#)

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## Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SLJ numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Authors Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) ([SLJ0068](#))
- 2 Authors Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) ([SLJ0030](#))
- 3 BBC ([SLJ0064](#))
- 4 BBC ([SLJ0010](#))
- 5 Barnett, Professor Steven ([SLJ0042](#))
- 6 Baylis Media Ltd ([SLJ0002](#))
- 7 Bedford Independent ([SLJ0063](#))
- 8 Bournemouth University ([SLJ0014](#))
- 9 Bristol Branch, National Union of Journalists ([SLJ0003](#))
- 10 Bylines Networks Limited ([SLJ0045](#))
- 11 Channel 4 ([SLJ0058](#))
- 12 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0061](#))
- 13 Charitable Journalism Project ([SLJ0004](#))
- 14 Christopher Nieper Foundation ([SLJ0022](#))
- 15 Citizen News & Media Limited ([SLJ0034](#))
- 16 Clear Sky Publishing Limited ([SLJ0006](#))
- 17 Colbran, Dr Marianne ([SLJ0066](#))
- 18 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ([SLJ0041](#))
- 19 Edge, Dr Marc ([SLJ0020](#))
- 20 Enders Analysis Limited ([SLJ0043](#))
- 21 Flyover Media CIC ([SLJ0037](#))
- 22 Google ([SLJ0055](#))
- 23 Greater Govanhill CIC ([SLJ0031](#))
- 24 Gross, Dr Bernhards; Keppel-Palmer, Mr Marcus; Reardon, Dr Sally; and Smith, Dr Tom ([SLJ0021](#))
- 25 IMPRESS ([SLJ0012](#))
- 26 ITN ([SLJ0051](#))
- 27 Impact Media ([SLJ0047](#))
- 28 Independent Community News Network (ICNN) ([SLJ0036](#))
- 29 Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) ([SLJ0027](#))
- 30 Jones, Dr Richard ([SLJ0013](#))
- 31 Local TV Network ([SLJ0062](#))
- 32 Local TV Network ([SLJ0035](#))
- 33 Local and Community Media Network, MeCSSA ([SLJ0029](#))

- 34 McSweeney, Mr Declan ([SLJ0001](#))
- 35 Media Reform Coalition ([SLJ0032](#))
- 36 Meta ([SLJ0056](#))
- 37 Midland News Association ([SLJ0007](#))
- 38 National Council for the Training of Journalists ([SLJ0044](#))
- 39 National Union of Journalists ([SLJ0023](#))
- 40 Newham Voice CIC ([SLJ0026](#))
- 41 News Media Association ([SLJ0017](#))
- 42 News for All ([SLJ0050](#))
- 43 Newsquest Media Group ([SLJ0057](#))
- 44 Notts TV ([SLJ0039](#))
- 45 Nub News ([SLJ0009](#))
- 46 Professional Publishers Association (PPA) ([SLJ0024](#))
- 47 Progress Publishing (Bedford Independent) ([SLJ0033](#))
- 48 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0059](#))
- 49 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0060](#))
- 50 Public Interest News Foundation ([SLJ0049](#))
- 51 Radiocentre ([SLJ0053](#))
- 52 Reach ([SLJ0065](#))
- 53 Reach plc ([SLJ0054](#))
- 54 Real Media ([SLJ0046](#))
- 55 Rocket Sports Internet Limited ([SLJ0005](#))
- 56 Scottish Newspaper Society ([SLJ0019](#))
- 57 Social Change Initiative ([SLJ0040](#))
- 58 Social Streets C.I.C ([SLJ0011](#))
- 59 Society of Editors ([SLJ0008](#))
- 60 The Bristol Cable ([SLJ0015](#))
- 61 The Independent Media Association ([SLJ0048](#))
- 62 The Mill ([SLJ0038](#))
- 63 UK Community Radio Network ([SLJ0052](#))
- 64 VIEWdigital ([SLJ0028](#))
- 65 West Leeds Community Media ([SLJ0018](#))

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## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

### Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Amending the Online Safety Bill	HC 271
2nd	Promoting Britain abroad	HC 156
3rd	Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda	HC 155
4th	What next for the National Lottery?	HC 154
5th	Economics of music streaming: follow-up	HC 874
6th	Current issues in rugby union	HC 1018
1st Special	Major cultural and sporting events: Government Response to Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 452
2nd Special	Influencer Culture: Lights, camera, inaction?: ASA System and CMA Responses to the Committee's Twelfth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 610
3rd Special	Influencer Culture: Lights, camera, inaction?: Government Response to the Committee's Twelfth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 687
4th Special	Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP	HC 801

### Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	The future of UK music festivals	HC 49
2nd	Economics of music streaming	HC 50
3rd	Concussion in sport	HC 46
4th	Sport in our communities	HC 45
5th	Pre-appointment hearing for Information Commissioner	HC 260
6th	Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the Charity Commission	HC 261
7th	Racism in cricket	HC 1001
8th	The Draft Online Safety Bill and the legal but harmful debate	HC 1039
9th	Major cultural and sporting events	HC 259
10th	Another pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the Charity Commission	HC 1200

Number	Title	Reference
11th	Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of Ofcom	HC 48
12th	Influencer culture: Lights, camera, inaction?	HC 258
1st Special Report	The future of public service broadcasting: Government Response to Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 273
2nd Special Report	Economics of music streaming: Government and Competition and Markets Authority Responses to Committee's Second Report	HC 719
3rd Special Report	Sport in our communities: Government Response to Committee's Fourth Report	HC 761
4th Special Report	The future of public service broadcasting: Ofcom Response to Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 832
5th Special	The Draft Online Safety Bill and the legal but harmful debate: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth	HC 1039

### Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	The Covid-19 crisis and charities	HC 281
2nd	Misinformation in the COVID-19 Infodemic	HC 234
3rd	Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS sectors: First Report	HC 291
4th	Broadband and the road to 5G	HC 153
5th	Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the BBC	HC 1119
6th	The future of public service broadcasting	HC 156
1st Special Report	BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2018–19: TV licences for over 75s Government and the BBC's Responses to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 98
2nd Special Report	The Covid-19 crisis and charities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019–21	HC 438
3rd Special Report	Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors: First Report: Government Response to Committee's Third Report of Session 2019–21	HC 885
4th Special Report	Misinformation in the COVID-19 Infodemic: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 894