

Local Matters



Foreword

"As we enter the age of misinformation supercharged by increasingly sophisticated technology, the role of trusted sources of news and information will become even more important than it is today.

At the core of this is UK local news media – local newspapers and their websites – which serves communities with trusted local journalism on an hourly, daily and weekly basis across a wide variety of platforms, acting as a powerful force for good.

The public appetite for trusted local journalism is not in doubt – 92 per cent of UK adults say they use local media – and the sector is working very hard to serve that need.

Hard hitting campaigns, exclusive news stories which can set the national agenda, and commercial and technical innovations are all being delivered by the sector on a regular basis.

This new report from the NMA highlights some of the brilliant work being done by our local news media, its importance to our democratic society, and some of the actions that policy makers could take to ensure the sector has a truly sustainable future.

By supporting our local news industry, which will play a crucial role keeping communities informed as we approach the general election, we can ensure that our democracy remains robust in challenging and uncertain times.

Government can foster an environment in which local media can thrive by placing the sector at the heart of its levelling up agenda and taking decisive action such as diverting more advertising spend to local news and reining in the BBC's expansion into local markets already well served by commercial providers."

(Danny Cammiade, News Media Association Chairman)

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Relevance, scale and trust

The background of the entire image is a grey puzzle pattern. A single puzzle piece in the upper right quadrant is missing, revealing a dark navy blue color underneath. The text and numbers are overlaid on this pattern.

Local media plays a vital role in everyday lives

92%

of UK adults
say they use
local media



Holding personal relevance and helping readers stay connected

70% agree “local news media are relevant to me personally and help connect me to others.”

Local news media enjoys huge and highly engaged audiences who seek out trusted local journalism across a wide variety of platforms.

There are around

800

local news media titles
published in the UK

Reaching over

42m

GB adults in print and
digital every month

Which is

77%

of the GB
population 15+

73%

of UK adults trust
the news and
information they
see in their local
news media



Newsbrands are a reliable source of news used for fact checking

74%

said they would turn to newspaper websites or apps to verify stories they read on social media.

People are

2.4x

more likely to find news brand sources reliable compared to social media.

Respondents are almost

Twice as likely

to describe print and online newspapers as factual, accurate and trustworthy compared to social media.



With a rise in AI, trust is more important than ever before

Source: YouGov poll September - October 2023 / Sample of 110 MPs /
Newsworks OnePoll survey October 2023 / Nat Rep sample of 2,000 UK adults

67%

of the public agreed the spread of misinformation and fake news was their main concern with AI, ahead of lack of human creativity and judgement (63%), and the loss of human jobs (61%).

75%

of MPs agreed that trusted journalism created by news publishers is critical in minimising the risk of misinformation ahead of a potential general election.

Local news media will play a vital role in the upcoming general election

81%

think local news media will be important in debunking AI-generated misinformation about the general election.

80%

agree local news media will be the most important source for local news about the general election.



Local newspaper circulation positively impacts local election turnout

Local news media acts as a direct catalyst for democratic participation. Local newspaper circulation has a positive and significant effect on local election turnout, actively boosting participation in the democratic process.

Campaigning

USE
your
voice

Local news media gives a voice to people on the issues that matter

Local journalists sit at the heart of communities, reporting on the stories that matter to their readers. They hold those in power to account, shine a light on important issues that would otherwise go unscrutinised, and campaign on a variety of local causes.

91% of the public agree that local news media improves communities by campaigning on issues that matter to residents.



Stop Knives Taking Lives

The Chronicle has called for an end to knife violence in its local area, with Kim McGuinness, the police and crime commissioner for Northumbria Police, backing the campaign.



Save Corby Community Centres

The Northamptonshire Telegraph, along with its Corby edition, launched a campaign to save community centre facilities after the North Northamptonshire Council proposed to cut funding.



United Against Abuse

The Yorkshire Evening Post launched a campaign calling out online abuse after Leeds United footballer Patrick Bamford received several threats after missing a penalty in a match.

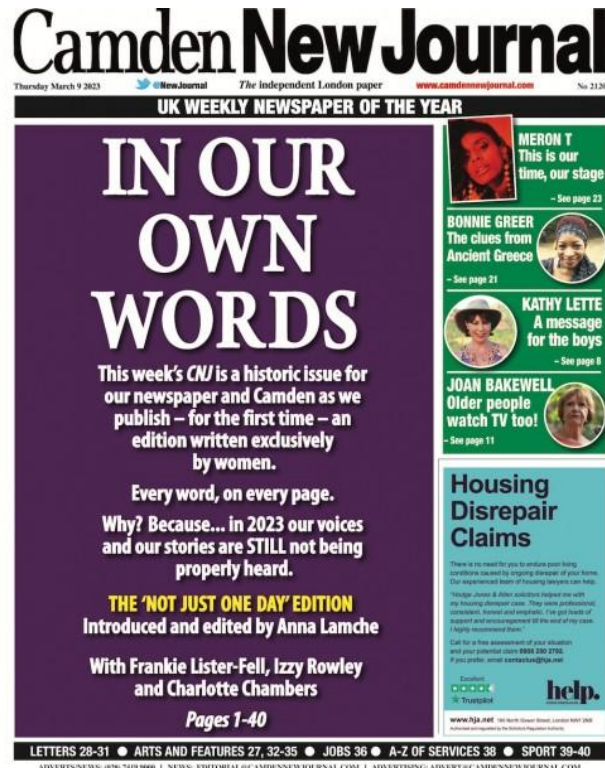


Save Bolton Hospice

Moray Maternity

The Northern Scot has long been a supporter of maternity services in Moray. The Scot continues to campaign, calling for a full consultant-led maternity service at Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin.





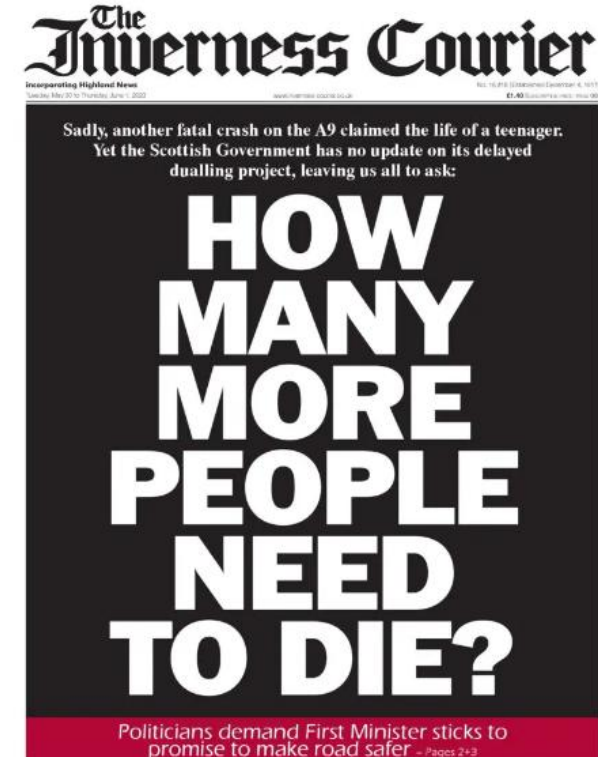
In Our Own Words

The Camden New Journal's special edition to mark International Women's Day 2023 was written entirely by women journalists for the first time. This powerful initiative shines a spotlight on women's voices and stories that are "still not being heard".



Ten Years of Pain

In September 2023, plans to initiate a full inquiry were announced after eight years of campaigning from the Courier on the scandal concerning Sam Eljamel, the former head of neurosurgery at the city's Ninewells Hospital.



Dual The A9

When the Inverness Courier received confirmation that the SNP government would not fulfil its promise to dual the A9 by 2025, the team launched a campaign, which garnered over a million views.

Maidenhead MP Theresa May has revealed in today's @MaidenheadAds she will not be standing at the next General Election.

Maidenhead Advertiser

The voice of the community



Friday, March 8, 2024 No. 8,067 £1.50

Inside: planning inquiry begins for Spencer's Farm appeal



Cookham Design Partnership
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Theresa May to stand down at next election

Former Prime Minister says it was an 'honour and a privilege' to serve as MP



Theresa May is stepping down as Maidenhead's MP after 27 years.

By David Lee
david.lee@newsmedia.co.uk
Illustration: JH

Maidenhead MP Theresa May has revealed she will not be standing at the next General Election.

The former Prime Minister said she has taken the 'difficult decision' to step down from her position after 27 years representing the constituency.

Mrs May, who was first elected as the town's MP in 1997, said her work on issues including modern slavery and human trafficking is taking up increasing amounts of her time and she no longer feels able to represent her constituents with the commitment they deserve.

In an exclusive statement to the Advertiser, the Conservative politician said: "It has been an honour and a privilege to serve everyone in the Maidenhead constituency as the Member of Parliament for the last 27 years.

"Being an MP is about service to one's constituents and I have always done my best to ensure that I respond

to the needs of local people and the local area.

"Since stepping down as Prime Minister I have enjoyed being a back-bencher again and having more time to work for my constituents and champion causes close to my heart including most recently launching a Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

"These causes have been taking an increasing amount of my time.

"Because of this, after much careful thought and consideration, I have realised that, looking ahead, I would no longer be able to do my job as an MP in the way I believe is right and my constituents deserve.

"I have therefore taken the difficult decision to stand down at the next General Election."

The 67-year-old has held several high-profile positions during her time as an MP, including serving as Home Secretary under David Cameron's coalition Government.

Continued on p5

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Local titles play a vital role in communities for breaking news

Theresa May first announced she will stand down
at the next election through the Maidenhead
Advertiser

Theresa May, the former Prime Minister and MP for Maidenhead, announced that she will stand down at the next election through an exclusive statement to her local news brand, the Maidenhead Advertiser.

This announcement serves as a powerful example of the power of local news brands, and the crucial role they play in their communities as a platform for breaking news and information.



Sign our petition: Stop the tragic loss of life in the Channel and open more safe routes for refugees

More Safe Routes for Refugees Petition

Kent Live launched a bid to help refugees, who were putting their lives at risk to cross the English Channel. The petition called on the government to set up safe and legal routes for asylum seekers to help avoid "tragic loss of life".

Has the state of Aberystwyth improved or is the Dirty Old Town dirtier than ever?

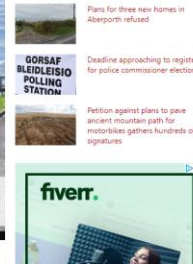
One year ago, visitors called out Ceredigion and Aberystwyth councils over the run-down state of our town. At the peak of summer, when Aber welcomes thousands of visitors a day, is it looking its best once again?

By Dylan Davies | News editor |
Wednesday 23rd August 2023 12:00 pm
X @dylfordnews | dylfordnews@cambrionews.co.uk

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Dirty Old Town

In August 2022, the Cambrian News ran a special report entitled Dirty Old Town, looking at the state of Aberystwyth and calling out what needs to be fixed and improved.

It's time for the Scottish Government to Invest in the West



Invest in the West

The Oban Times launched their campaign 'Invest in the West' in 2023, calling on the Scottish government to increase funding for communities hurt by budget cuts as well as a better focus on specific needs for rural communities across the west coast and islands.



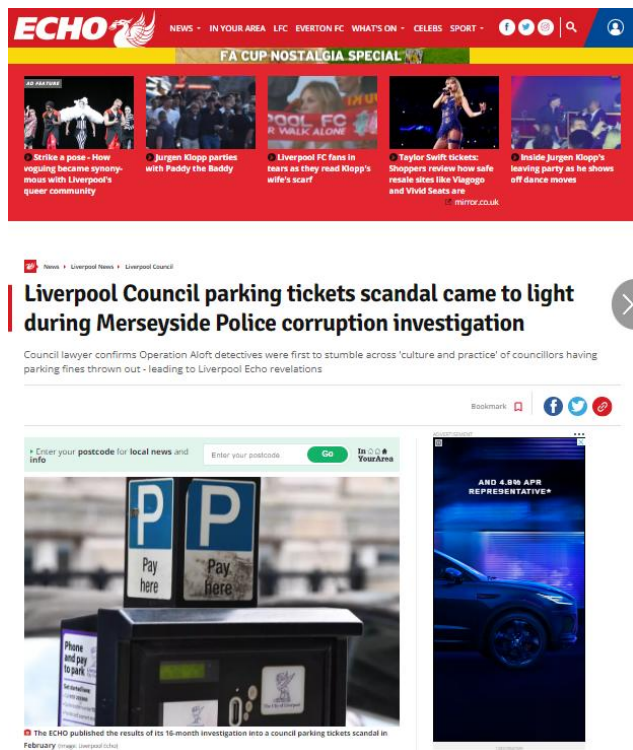
Birmingham Pub Bombings

The Birmingham Mail/Live launched a campaign to seek justice for the families of the 21 people who died in the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings after newspaper's content editor Andy Richards discovered in 2014 that the hearings had never been completed.



No Hungry Kids This Summer

Newsquest launched their 'No Hungry Kids This Summer' campaign across six of their titles to raise £5,000 each for six foodbanks across North-West of England and help stop children in their region from going hungry over the summer. All news brands published the same front page in solidarity.



Council parking ticket scandal

In February 2024, the Liverpool Echo published the results of a 16-month investigation into what has been described as a 'back door' culture that saw elected councillors having parking fines rescinded by officers over a period of years.



Our Communities Together

The Argus collaborated with Community Foundation Wales and involved all of Newsquest's Welsh newspapers, to launch "Our Communities Together" – an appeal to address the cost-of-living crisis.



Illegal Vaping

When visiting three stores in Durham City, Northern Echo reporter Phoebe Abruzzese found that she was able to purchase an illegal device. The investigation was praised by Darlington MP Peter Gibson for shining a light on the sale of contraband products.

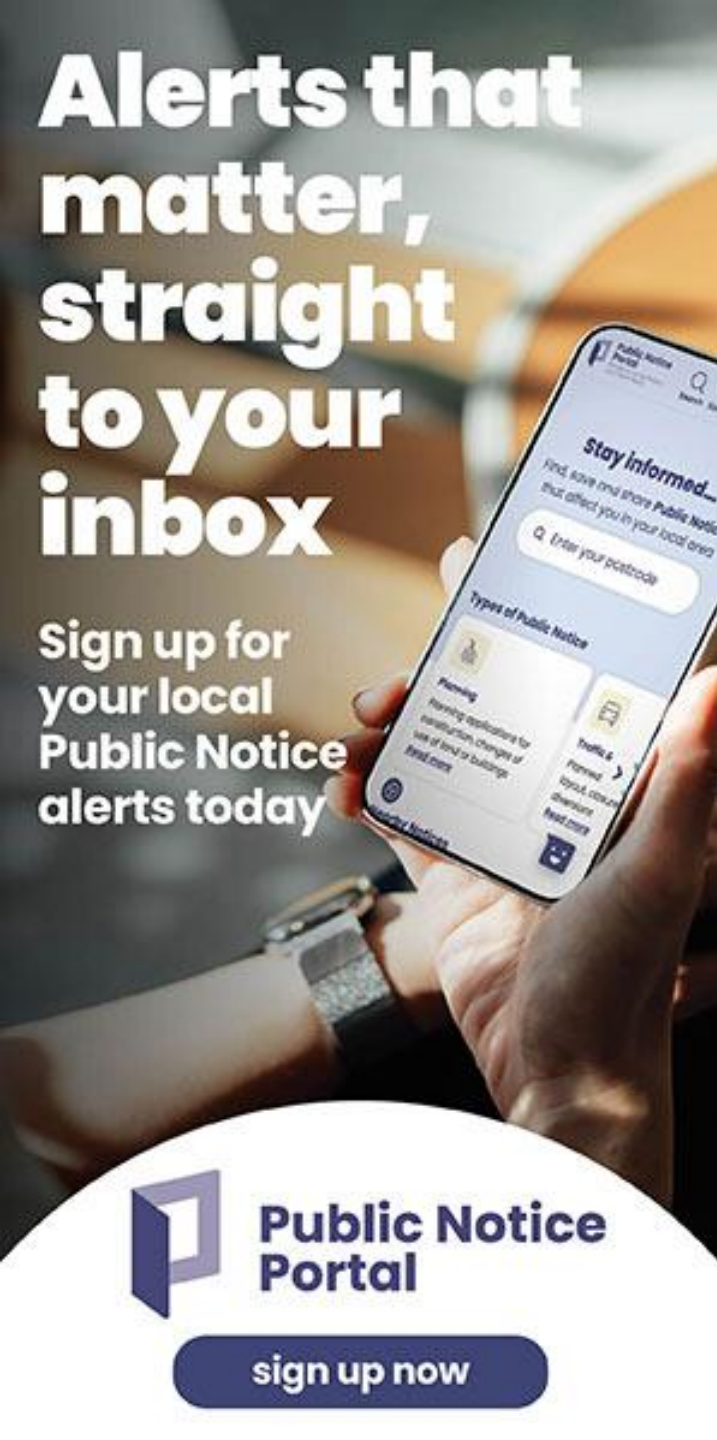
Innovation



This journalism is supported and enabled by a huge amount of innovation by publishers. In its report into the sector last year, Enders Analysis summarised it as:

"Encouraging market innovations are sending a strong signal and building industry confidence. New foundations for consumer relevance and growth are being meticulously crafted."

The report highlighted innovations from the local news media sector including paywalls, the development of non-text formats such as video news sections, sites adopting a newsletter-led approach and audio formats such as podcasts.



**Alerts that
matter,
straight
to your
inbox**

**Sign up for
your local
Public Notice
alerts today**



sign up now

Public Notice Portal

One major innovation from the sector has been the development of the Public Notice Portal – an initiative from the local news media sector to further promote public notices to communities and enhance local democracy by harnessing the sector's massive online audiences. Officially launched in May last year, the portal has been developed by the local news media industry – including Reach plc which built the website – with funding from the Google News Initiative.

REGIONAL THE PRESS AWARDS



THE PNP recently won Digital Initiative of the Year at the Regional Press Awards and has received a nomination for the Association of Online Publishers 2024 Digital Publishing Awards' Best Digital Publishing Innovation.



Local publishers are looking at how AI can add value to their businesses

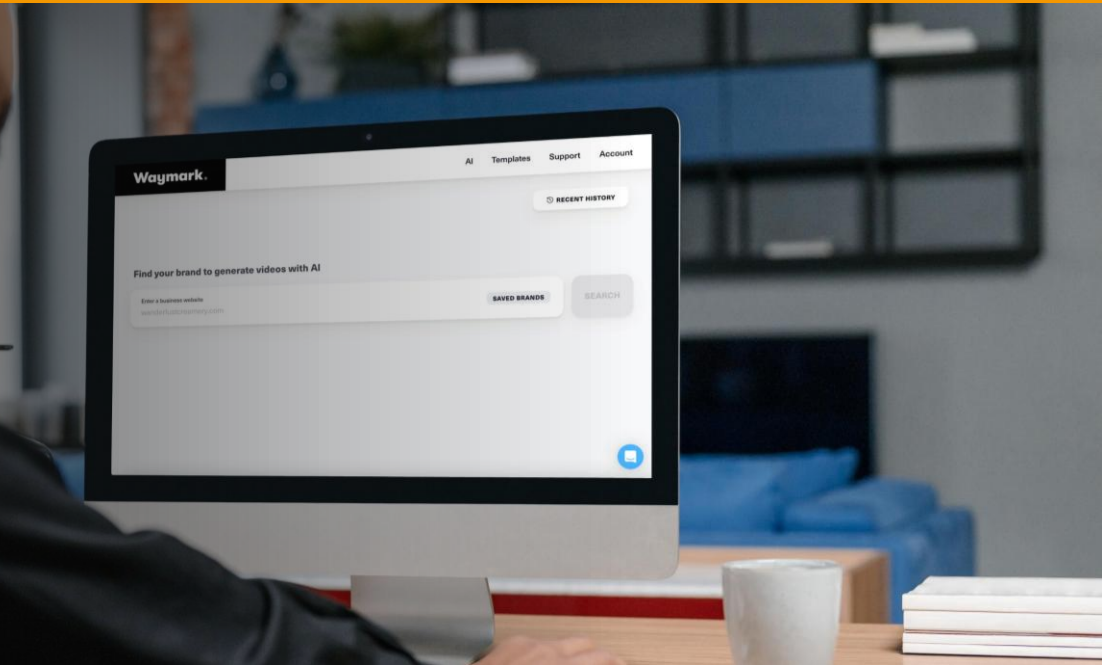
Iliffe Media has announced a new partnership with Smartico to introduce technology to rebuild print advertisements to make them suitable for use on websites. The technology extracts all the relevant data from the print ad and then enriches it with images, data, and text from the web, using a mixture of AI and human work to do so.



National World and Waymark enter partnership

National World and Waymark, a company that uses AI video creation technology, have signed a local advertising deal that will feature Waymark's Generative AI technology to allow National World's digital and regional news outlets to sell affordable video ads to local businesses across the UK.

Through this partnership, National World can now offer its customers the ability to create high-quality commercials with professional voice-over in five minutes or less.




```
attachEvent("onreadystatechange",function(){var u=this.value,t[1]===!1&&e.stopOnFailure?o=u.length:r&&(s=t,c(function(){return u=[],t=0,n=h.call(arguments),l=Array(r);r>t;t++})});</script>
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Newsquest have developed an AI tool called DotDash News creator which can draft, “trusted stories from trusted notes.

This tool is central to our innovative approach, which includes the establishment of a safe ‘human-in-the-loop’ workflow. This critical step ensures that while we leverage the efficiencies of AI, we do so without compromising the quality and integrity of our journalism,” Newsquest said in its entry for digital initiative of the year at the Regional Press Awards.

Newsquest have also created AI-assisted reporter roles, a first in the industry, to utilise this tool. "This has allowed our traditional reporters to shift their focus to 'human touch' journalism and more in-depth content tailored to our loyal audience, enhancing our overall output of compelling, local news."

Reach and WhatsApp

Reach's work to develop direct relationships with readers using WhatsApp was recognised in the Best Idea to Encourage Reader Engagement category at the INMA Global Media Awards in April.

In its entry, published on the INMA website, Reach said: "Changes to Twitter, Facebook, Google and the growth of platforms like TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram have left publishers struggling to drive sustainable revenue streams from large audiences.

"After months of research, building prototype systems and taking learnings from newsletter publishing, Reach launched its first wave of WhatsApp Communities delivering news, sport, entertainment and one-off events directly to thousands of people – with no algorithm."





As the industry prepares to respond to Google's ongoing move to phase out third-party cookies, Amazon has partnered with Reach's proprietary ad tech Mantis to leverage contextual customer data to support more targeted and relevant online advertising.

Mantis is an AI-powered tool originally developed for brand safety to prevent brands from appearing next to potentially harmful or inappropriate content. Reach has continued to develop Mantis's capabilities, allowing it to place ads alongside contextually relevant content, enhancing the precision of targeted advertising. This partnership is among the first of its kind in Europe.



With the rapid growth of digital, publishers have adapted their businesses to respond to rapid changes in the marketplace. Newsquest for example has repositioned its advertising sales teams to be local digital marketing agencies so they can help local businesses with a wide range of digital marketing solutions, including advertising on its websites.

LOCALiQ works with thousands of SMEs throughout the UK helping them get the best out of their marketing and provides a broad range of digital solutions including SEO, online display, video, social, digital PR, as well as paid search.

What the industry needs

There is an enormous amount of expertise within established companies which must not be undervalued

The government recognised this in its response to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's Inquiry into the sustainability of local journalism in 2023:



***“Traditional news providers have a proven record, and the expertise needed, to hold local government and wider public services to account and undertake thorough, expert and robust investigative journalism.** Local news providers perform a vital ‘watchdog’ function concerning the efficiency of public services and the management of local finances, auditing local authority spending and **improving accountability and transparency in local institutions and services, including covering stories that might not be picked up by the national press.** Local news provision brings social, economic and democratic benefits, including through increased local election turnout, community engagement, and by fostering a sense of cohesion and pride in local communities.”*



In his evidence to the House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee Henry Faure Walker, CEO of Newsquest Media Group, made the point that larger publishers can sometimes keep titles going because of economies of scale not available to smaller businesses:

“Scale and large publishers are a very important part of the solution for a healthy local news ecosystem. In recent years, Newsquest has made a number of acquisitions which in many cases has involved us taking on another comparatively small local news business that was in a precarious financial position and was at risk of closing with the subsequent loss of journalism for that local community.

“Through our ownership - through the scale we have in production, technology systems, digital platforms, purchasing, digital skills training, and other back-office functions - we have been able to give those local news titles and their local journalism stability and a much more promising future than the cliff edge these smaller publishers were facing. Our scale also enables us to be able to fund legal resources (and if necessary, litigation) to resist those that would seek to suppress the public's knowledge of their bad deeds.”

1. Rebalance the digital markets

The passage of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act means that the Competition and Markets Authority will have the tools it needs to level the playing field between publishers and platforms. The new regime must empower local publishers to reap the fair rewards for use of their content by platforms, including AI firms who feed off trusted news.

“Weak competition in digital advertising increases the prices of goods and services across the economy and undermines the ability of newspapers and others to produce valuable content, to the detriment of broader society.”

Source: Competition and Market Authority's market study into online platforms and digital advertising 2020

93%

agree Big tech platforms such as Google and Facebook should pay news publishers a fair price for the use of their content or face regulatory action.

Google

Sleep Cycle

Mess

1

f

Facebook

Instagram

Instagram



Sarah Lester, Editor of the Manchester Evening News:

"The next Government has a responsibility to empower regulators that play a key role in bolstering a plural UK press ecosystem. **This includes supporting the Digital Markets Unit to move quickly to guarantee a fair value exchange between Big Tech and trusted news publishers.** The wider public is largely unaware how much influence big tech has on what is served to them to read. It's not an exaggeration to say without action a fundamental part of our democracy is at stake."



78%

think local news media
is the best place
for central government
to advertise in a relevant
and trusted context.

2. Divert more government ad spend into local news media

The government should recognise the importance of local media to devolution and local growth. In 2022, the **government spent less than three per cent of its advertising budget in local news media** compared to 17 per cent spend on Google and Facebook. Some of the funds allocated to the platforms could easily be diverted to local news media.

3. Rein in the BBC's expansionist ambitions

The BBC Charter requires the BBC to “**avoid adverse impacts on competition**” but in recent years the guardrails which are supposed to protect commercial media from harmful market distortions by the BBC have completely failed. The next government must use the Charter renewal period to ensure that the BBC's status as a publicly funded, dominant market actor does not allow the Corporation to further supplant the key role of the commercial local news sector.

89%

agree it is not the BBC's role to replace independent commercial news titles (local newspapers and their websites) in publishing journalism online

Emily Woolfe, Editorial Director, Tindle Newspapers:

"Local journalism is the linchpin of communities: it celebrates successes; mourns with communities; holds authorities to account; challenges the status quo; and offers a connection between people which would be lost without it.

The survival of the regional press industry is vital, but we must restore people's faith in their media - and allow them to recognise that the BBC is not always the best source of news, and social media is frequently far from accurate.

However, the industry must continue to evolve and adapt if it is to survive. It must find new ways to serve its audience, to deliver the news to the audience in the way they are likely to consume it. "





4. Keep public notices in local newspapers

By maintaining the statutory requirement for local authorities to place public notices in printed local newspapers, this will preserve a vital revenue stream for local titles while ensuring that local citizens have access to key information. Local papers are a critical platform for ensuring that the public - particularly the elderly, vulnerable, disenfranchised, those living in rural areas, lower income households and those with low levels of digital literacy – have access to critical information.

41%

of the UK public use local news media in print and digital to view public notices, **making it the number one platform**, ahead of local authority websites (29%), social media (28%) and printed mailouts (26%).

5. Government on tax relief for local journalism

Consideration should also be given to targeted interventions for the local news sector such as **a local journalism tax relief and business rates relief for local titles**, allowing publishers to focus even more investment on putting more journalists on the ground, as they transition their businesses to a digital-first future.





Local Matters

The scale of the local journalism that the sector is delivering is enormous. One local publisher calculated that it produced more than 1,500 stories every day in January – an astonishing output of local news from just one business. **The sector remains very highly trusted by audiences – 42 million people a month in print and digital - and will have a critical role to play in ensuring that misinformation does not corrupt our general election next month.** The sector is playing a critical role in delivering journalism to audiences who want it in ever increasing numbers. With some attention from policy makers, we can ensure that it can continue to do so for many years to come.

#LocalMatters
@newsmediaorg