



Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1 2HQ

22 June 2020

Dear Chancellor

The News Media Association represents the publishers of around 1000 national, regional and local news media titles, reaching an audience of over 49 million adult readers each month in print and online. Readership has soared during the pandemic as the public seeks out trusted news and information, with 40 million readers now turning to news media titles every day.

We have written to you previously to highlight the impact of the crisis on our sector and on local newspapers in particular. As we feared, it has proved to be as swift and severe for our members as it has been for the retail and hospitality sector, with the lockdown having the same effect of pulling down the commercial shutters but without the ability for news media publishers to save costs by temporarily closing down their businesses and sending all their staff home.

There is no immediate prospect of the commercial revenues which fund news journalism swiftly returning to previous levels as the lockdown eases. The news media sector is facing mass redundancies when the furlough scheme comes to an end and the majority of regional and local publishers expect to have to close titles within months if further support is not forthcoming.

A number of publishers, editors and their MPs, including former Prime Minister Theresa May, have written to urge you to extend measures such as the business rates holiday to the news media sector. In your response to Mrs May (copy attached), you list a number of measures which the Government has introduced, including wider business support measures and, specifically for newspapers, extending the limited business rates discount (which was announced before the crisis hit, back in January), the £35m government ad campaign and bringing forward VAT zero rating on e-publications.

It is important to our local members for the Government to understand that, while many of these measures are of course very welcome, they do not all provide support for local publishers. Some, such as VAT zero rating, are in fact currently of very limited benefit to local publishers. It is vital therefore that further support, such as the 100% business rates holiday, is extended to news publishers to help them get through the crisis and onto a more sustainable footing.

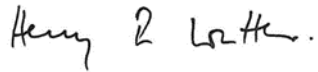
Business rates relief would provide essential ongoing support to news media publishers as the furlough scheme is withdrawn, enabling them to retain as many journalists and other staff as possible until the economy picks up again.



It has been identified by publishers as one of the top priorities needed to help them navigate their way out of the crisis, alongside extending the Government ad campaign beyond the initial three months, and dealing with the underlying issue of compelling the tech giants to pay publishers for use of their content.

The NMA and our members hope that the Government recognises the news media industry's value to the public and the current threat posed to public interest journalism in the UK. We would be happy to provide any further help or information needed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Henry Faure Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Henry Faure Walker
NMA chairman