

Mapping changes in local news 2015-2017

More bad news for democracy?



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Foreword



Michelle Stanistreet

NUJ general secretary

Local newspapers, websites and associated apps are read by 40 million people a week, enjoy a high level of trust from their readers and are the lifeblood of local democracy.

It is local journalists who break important stories, often with a national significance, as well as providing readers with vital, entertaining local information. They hold local politicians and businesses to account.

They write human interest stories about the young girl with cancer who raised money for charity or the real ale fans who saved the local pub from the property developers – supplying part of the glue which holds local communities together.

Yet, the sector is in crisis.

According to the *Press Gazette*, there has been a net loss of almost 200 newspapers in the UK since 2005 and during this period the number of journalists has halved. Numerous daily titles have gone to weekly publication and many weekly titles no longer have dedicated editorial teams.

The revenue of the vast majority of media organisations (81%) continues to come from print readership, with 12% coming from digital, a News Media Association survey found. However, the industry is closing its newspapers and pursuing digital-only strategies without a business model which will replace and enhance print revenue.

The Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power, at King's College London produced a report in 2016 showing that the decline in newspapers and the dominance of the market by a small number of publishers has had a serious impact on democracy, providing many readers with very little choice when it comes to choosing their local newspaper and leaving more than two-thirds of Local Authority Districts not served by a local daily.

This follow-up study produced by the Media Reform Coalition for the NUJ's Local News Matters Week, shows the general trend of closures and mergers continues and highlights a more pronounced hollowing-out of those that remain due to job losses. This very much reflects the experience of NUJ members, many of whom spend their working lives at risk from repeated redundancies or are left struggling to do their jobs well in under-resourced newsrooms.

The union's Local News Matters campaign is about reclaiming a vital, vigorous press at the heart of the community it serves, owned and operated in the public interest. Our members are celebrating the work they do and the campaigning journalism they champion in a series of events.

This new research will play a vital role in persuading politicians in our national parliaments and assemblies to act to stem this devastating decline.

It shows exactly why we need a short, sharp, national, parliamentary inquiry into the state of local news.

The union is calling for local newspapers to become community assets to prevent newspaper titles closing overnight and to give potential new owners, including local co-operatives, the time to put together a bid for a paper. Further research is needed to investigate new models for local journalism, levies, tax breaks and other measures to fund community media.

Local news matters; if we do not fight to protect local journalism, democracy will be the casualty.

Key findings

Regional Press Changes November 2015 – March 2017

- ▶ **UK regional newspapers saw a net loss of 9 titles between November 2015 and March 2017**, with 22 titles closing and 13 launching. Two daily news sources were lost – the Nuneaton News and MK Web, the online output of OneMK – so the number of Local Authority Districts (LADs) in the UK with no daily local newspaper coverage rose to 273 (of 406 across the whole UK). Five LADs suffered a loss of plurality through closures, and were reduced to single-publisher monopolies, **increasing the number of local monopolies to 170 out of 380 in England, Wales and Scotland**. In combination with previous research, this identifies 1,103 local newspaper titles in the UK as of March 2017.
- ▶ **The effect of closures and new title launches on plurality has been small**. Although three new publishers have entered the market, the five largest publishers – Trinity Mirror (226 titles); Johnston Press (213 titles); Newsquest (211); Tindle (126) and Archant (75) account for 77.1% of all local newspapers in the UK – a net reduction of 2.2% from November 2015 figures.
- ▶ In addition to the net loss of titles, there were **30 separate instances of announced job cuts over the 17-month period involving the loss of 418 jobs**. Newsquest, with 12 announcements affecting 139 jobs, led the way, followed by Trinity Mirror (at least 102 jobs) and Johnston Press (100 jobs). As well as job cuts, reorganisations affected a further 83 jobs, and six newspaper office closures were recorded, with journalists in some instances being moved long distances away from the communities they serve.
- ▶ The purchase of Local World by Trinity Mirror has both led to a substantial **reduction of plurality across the local press** (overall, and in particular geographical areas), and a programme of newspaper closures, staff cuts and office closures across the acquired titles. In total: six Local World newspapers have closed (including one daily, the Nuneaton News); there were eight instances of job cuts affecting at least 62 jobs, and likely many more among photographers; and two Local World offices have been closed – in Hertfordshire and Leicester.
- ▶ **Some evidence has emerged pointing to deeper problems in the local newspaper industry**: the decision by Johnston Press to sell, close or cut less profitable local publications while at the same time investing heavily to enter the national newspaper market; criticisms that some local papers no longer provide sufficient court and council reporting; local reporters criticising publishers over a perceived reliance on clickbait to attract audiences; smaller publishers handing off loss-making titles to non-profit groups; and newspapers devoting large amounts of space to online content with little or no local relevance.
- ▶ **The BBC deal for 150 new local reporters, completing negotiations which began in September 2015, fails to offset the loss of over 400 journalists (and probably significantly more) from the largest publishers during approximately the same period**. The use of £8m annually of the publicly-funded licence fee – is a fraction of the combined operating profits of the largest local publishers – and the scheme will not address the existing structural problems relating to the provision of local public interest journalism and the lack of plurality, proliferation of job cuts and lack of investment by the industry's largest commercial players.



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Local newspaper provision across the UK

The picture in 2015

Research conducted in late 2015 by the Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power at King's College London confirmed that there were significant disparities in local newspaper coverage across the United Kingdom, including large areas with no local daily print newspaper, and many local districts covered by only a single print news provider.¹

On the decline of local daily newspaper coverage, the research noted that as of October 2015 **two-thirds of Local Authority Districts (LADs) in the UK (271 out of 406) were not served by a local daily newspaper. These districts encompassed over half the UK's population**, and disproportionately covered rural areas, where other sources of local journalism – such as local television channels or hyperlocal news sites – were either not available (local TV) or not evenly distributed (hyperlocals). Of those that were covered by a daily local newspaper, 82 were directly served by a paper located within the community, while 53 were covered by local dailies based in adjacent or nearby Local Authority Districts.

The research also found that 43% of the 380 LADs in England, Scotland and Wales were served by a single regional newspaper publisher providing one or more titles. Therefore, **the UK regional newspaper market contained 165 local monopolies**. Analysis of local newspaper digital output also found that lack of plurality was often not affected when online news provision by regional titles was taken into account.²

These local monopolies reflected the dominance of five newspaper publishers who accounted for 80% of the then-recorded 1,112 local newspapers published throughout the United Kingdom, while the remaining one-fifth of titles were provided by 58 smaller publishers.

Overall, the research showed that the UK's local newspaper market in 2015 was highly concentrated, with a tiny group of dominant publishers at the national level, while at the local level many areas experienced monopoly coverage by a single publisher. Though the number of individual titles was very high in absolute terms – over 1,000 titles – few of these provided daily coverage, while the volume of newspapers alone does not take into account other factors, such as editorial staffing levels and working practices, affecting how local communities are served by local journalism.

The story since 2015

The research conducted here updates the key figures from 2015 regarding the volume and coverage of local newspapers – from closures, launches, mergers and their implications for plurality in the local newspaper market as well as coverage of localities within the UK. It also looks in more depth at other indicators of local news provision in the interim period: staff cuts, reorganisations and office closures, and developments in the transition from print to digital. As well as this, the consequences of some of the major developments in local news provision over the past 17 months will be considered: the purchase of Local World by Trinity Mirror; the move by Johnston Press to hive off some of its less profitable titles, and testimony from some local journalists and editors about working practices, workloads and pressures on journalistic output within the largest publishers. It will also consider the deal between the BBC and local news publishers for the Corporation to fund 150 local news journalists.

Newspaper Closures and Launches November 2015 – March 2017

Titles Closed: 22
Titles Launched: 13

LADs losing daily news sources: 2
(*Nuneaton and Bedworth; Milton Keynes*)

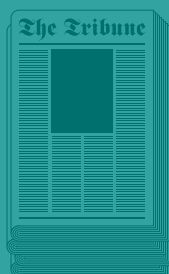
LADs reduced to single-publisher monopolies: 5
(*St Helens, Ryedale, Coventry, Milton Keynes, Crawley*)

Local News Plurality November 2015 – March 2017

No. of local newspapers: 1,103 (-9)
No. of local publishers: 66 (+3)

Proportion of titles published by big five:

- Trinity Mirror: 20.5%
- Johnston Press: 19.3%
- Newsquest: 19.1%
- Tindle: 11.4%
- Archant: 6.8%
- COMBINED: 77.1% (-2.2%)



¹ Ramsay, Gordon and Martin Moore (2016) *Monopolising Local News: Is there an emerging local democratic deficit in the UK due to the decline of local newspapers?* London: King's College London, <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/CMCP/local-news.pdf>

² See methodology section (pp18-25) in *Monopolising Local News* for details on how publisher & newspaper geographical coverage was calculated

Local Newspaper Closures November 2015 – March 2017

According to information compiled by Press Gazette, Hold the Front Page, and the National Union of Journalists, 22 local newspapers closed in the 17-month period between November 2015 and March 2017. This was offset by 13 launches. The closure of the Nuneaton News and the newspaper and website of OneMK left two Local Authority Districts – Nuneaton and Milton Keynes respectively – with no local daily paper, thus increasing the number of LADs with no daily local newspaper coverage to 273. Figure 1 shows the geographical areas of the UK covered by a daily local paper – shaded areas denote daily newspaper coverage.

In five LADs the closure of one or more local titles meant the area was served by a single publisher:

- ▶ St Helens (closure of the St Helens Reporter): becomes Johnston Press monopoly
- ▶ Ryedale (closure of the Malton and Pickering Mercury): becomes Newsquest monopoly
- ▶ Coventry (closure of the Coventry Times): becomes Bullivant monopoly
- ▶ Milton Keynes (closure of OneMK and MK Web): becomes Johnston Press monopoly
- ▶ Crawley (closure of the Crawley News): becomes Johnston Press monopoly

The majority of the UK is not served by a local daily newspaper. 57.9% of the UK population live in areas not served by a local daily. Rural areas are particularly poorly served, with almost all local daily papers covering major urban areas.

In total, 273 of 406 LADs in the UK (67.2 %) are not served by a dedicated local daily newspaper. 80 LADs are directly served, and 53 are covered by local dailies based in adjacent or nearby LADs.

Areas that are particularly underserved by local daily newspapers are: the south-east of England, Devon & Somerset, middle England (Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire), Central and Southern Wales.

Local daily papers are overwhelmingly located in major urban areas. Rural or semi-rural areas with daily local news coverage tend – with some exceptions – to be covered by metropolitan titles (e.g. Aberdeenshire and Moray covered by the Aberdeen-based Press and Journal).

London has the *Evening Standard*, but since this serves a population of over 8.5 million people it is **more equivalent to a national paper than a local paper covering news at a community level.** Many of the London boroughs receive relatively little dedicated coverage in the *Evening Standard*.

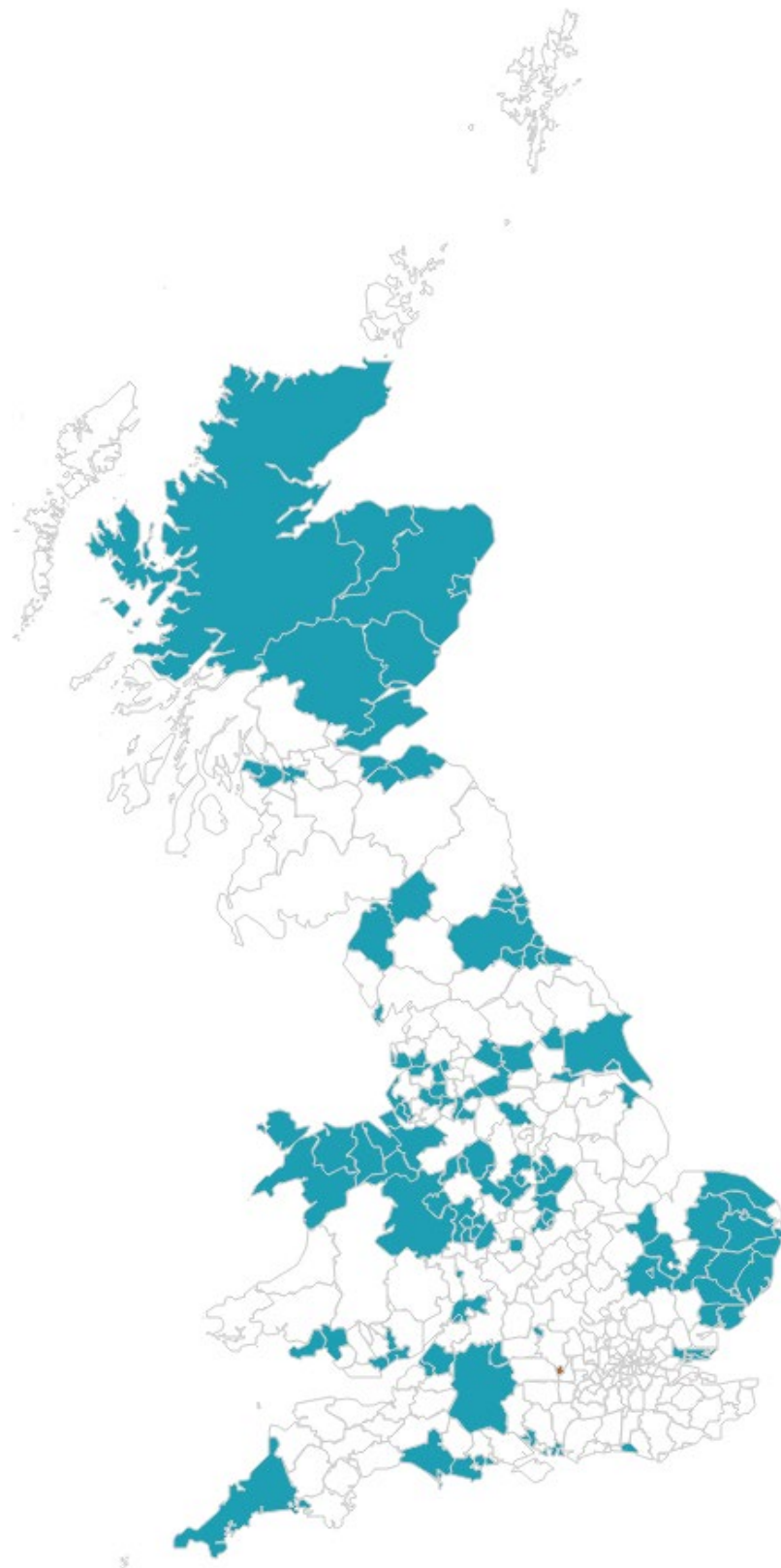


Figure 1: UK Local Authority Districts served by a daily local newspaper (shaded)¹

¹ Data obtained from <http://localnewsmapping.uk/>

Figure 2 shows the areas of the UK served by one or more local publishers.

- ▶ Six (1.6 %) of 380 LADs in Scotland, England and Wales have four publishers or more of local papers. Four of these – Aberdeenshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Argyll and Bute, and Highland – are in Scotland.
- ▶ 47 (12.4 %) of LADs are served by three publishers.
- ▶ 156 (41.1 %) of LADs are served by two publishers.
- ▶ 171 (45.0 %) of LADs are served by a single publisher.

Legend

- 0 publishers
- 1 publisher
- 2 publishers
- 3 publishers
- 4 publishers

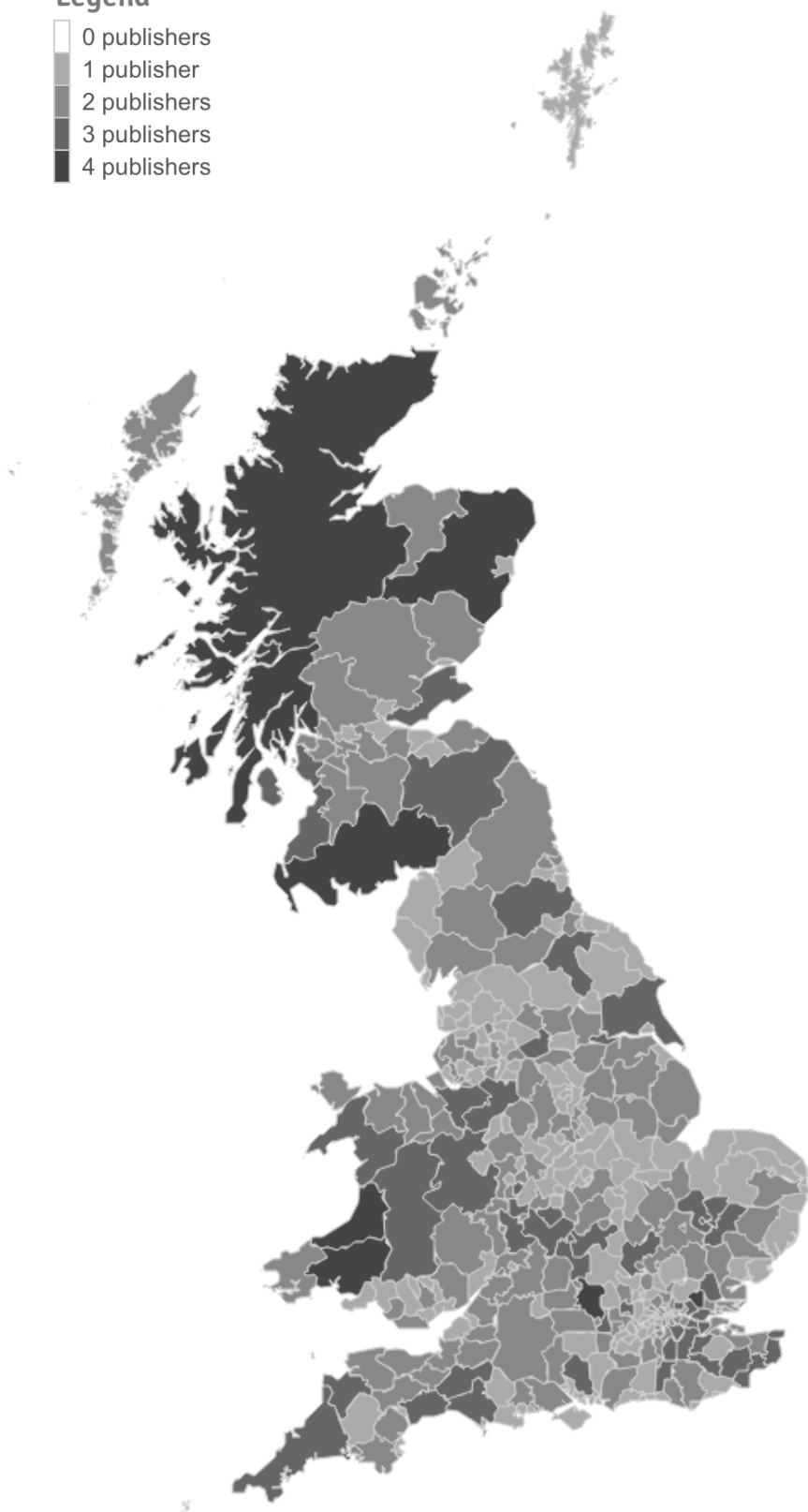


Figure 2: Local Authority Districts served by one or more local newspaper publishers

Table 1 shows the list of local newspapers that have been reported as closing between November 2015 and March 2017 (not including a small number of titles that launched and closed in this period). The largest number of closures were made by Trinity Mirror – 11 in total, including six titles acquired in the purchase of Local World in October 2017 (discussed below). Johnston Press closed a further seven titles.

In contrast with newspaper closures, 13 local newspapers were launched during this period and continue publication as of March 2017. **Table 2 shows that smaller publishers account for the majority of these titles**, and a small number of independent publishers entered the market.

Overall, therefore, the net change in UK regional newspaper provision was a loss of nine titles, with three new publishers entering the market. This relatively modest change has a negligible effect on the dominance of the local newspaper market by a very small number of dominant publishers. **As Table 3 shows, the five largest publishers still account for almost four-fifths of titles** – the reduction of share of titles by these groups is approximately two percentage points.

Title	Local Authority District	Publisher	Freq.	Paid/Free
Norwich Advertiser	Norwich	Archant	Weekly	Free
South Yorkshire Times	Doncaster	Johnston Press	Weekly	Paid
East Lothian News	East Lothian	Johnston Press	Weekly	Paid
Musselburgh News	East Lothian	Johnston Press	Weekly	Paid
Beverley Guardian	East Riding of Yorkshire	Johnston Press	Weekly	Free
Driffield Times and Post	East Riding of Yorkshire	Johnston Press	Weekly	Free
Malton and Pickering Mercury	Ryedale	Johnston Press	Weekly	Paid
St Helens Reporter	St Helens	Johnston Press	Weekly	Free
Mid Devon Star	Mid Devon	Newsquest	Weekly	Free
Midweek Mercury (Stevenage)	North Hertfordshire	Newsquest	Weekly	Free
Lochaber News(merged)	Highland	SPP	Weekly	Paid
Wilmslow Express	Cheshire East	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Free
Coventry Times	Coventry	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Free
Crawley News	Crawley	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Free
Luton on Sunday	Luton	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Free
MK Web	Milton Keynes	Trinity Mirror	Online/Daily	Free
oneMK/MK News	Milton Keynes	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Free
Nuneaton News	Nuneaton and Bedworth	Trinity Mirror	Daily	Paid
Nuneaton Weekly Tribune	Nuneaton and Bedworth	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Free
Crosby Herald	Sefton	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Paid
Formby Times	Sefton	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Free
Grantham Target	South Kesteven	Trinity Mirror	Weekly	Paid

Table 1: Newspaper closures, November '15 to March '17 (data from Press Gazette, Hold the Front Page, and NUJ)¹

Title	Local Authority District	Publisher	Freq.	Paid/Free
Norwich Extra	Norwich	Archant	Weekly	Free
Wanstead & Woodford Recorder	Redbridge	Archant	Weekly	Paid
Cambridge Independent	Cambridge	Iliffe	Weekly	Paid
The Carmarthenshire Herald	Carmarthenshire	Megagroup	Weekly	Paid
The Llanelli Herald	Carmarthenshire	Megagroup	Weekly	Paid
The Ceredigion Herald	Ceredigion	Megagroup	Weekly	Paid
Oxfordshire Star	Oxford	Newsquest	Weekly	Free
The Times of Tonbridge	Tonbridge and Malling	One Media	Weekly	Free
The Times of Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells	One Media	Weekly	Free
City Matters	City of London	Roy Court	Weekly	Free
The Wokingham Paper	Wokingham	Xn Media	Weekly	Paid
The Oxford Paper	Oxford	(Independent)	Weekly	Paid
The Hawick Paper	Scottish Borders	(Independent)	Weekly	Paid

Table 2: Newspapers launched, November '15 to March '17 (data from Press Gazette, Hold the Front Page, and NUJ)

Publisher	Number of Titles (March 2017)	Change from November 2015	Share of Titles (March 2017)	Change
Trinity Mirror	226	-11	20.50%	-0.8%
Johnston Press	213	-20	19.30%	-1.6%
Newsquest	211	-1	19.10%	0%
Tindle Newspapers	126	0	11.40%	+0.1%
Archant	75	1	6.70%	0%
5 largest combined	851	-31	77.10%	-2.2%
Remaining 61 publishers	252	22	22.90%	+2.2%
Total	1,103	-9		

Table 3: Local newspaper titles, by publisher (March 2017 vs November 2015)

¹ In addition to closures, the Newsquest weekly *South Coast Leader*, covering Lewes, was rebranded as the *Lewes and South Coast Argus*.

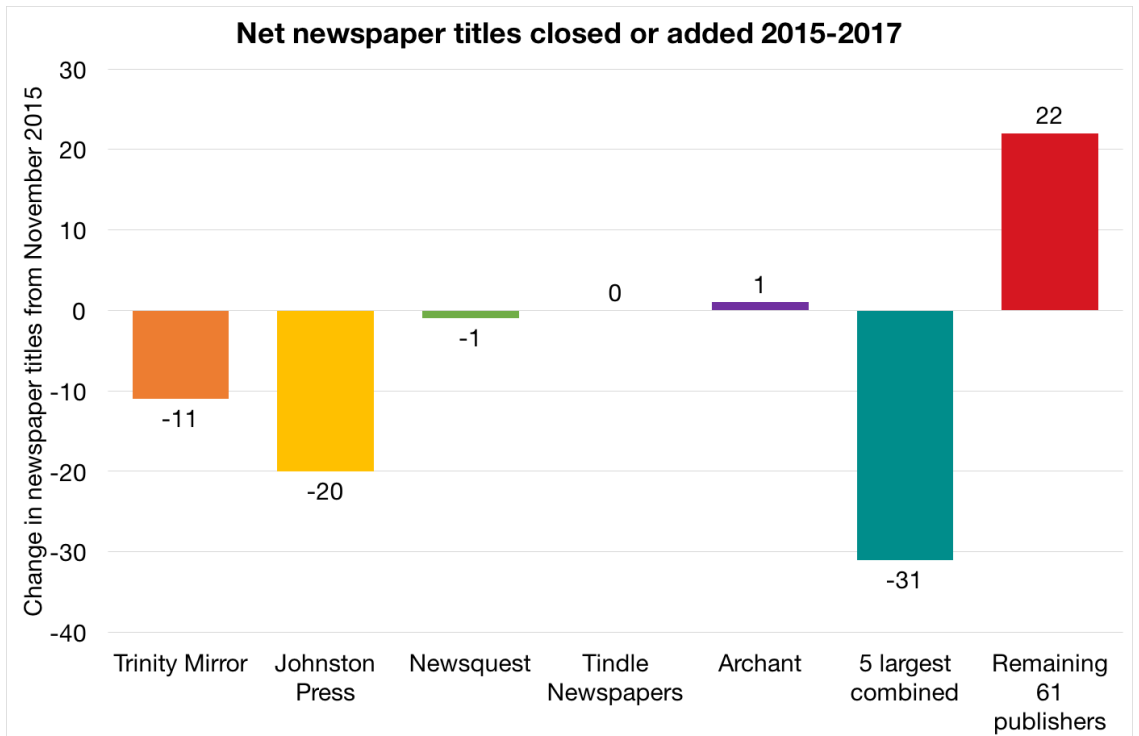


Figure 3: Net newspaper titles closed or added between November 2015 and March 2017

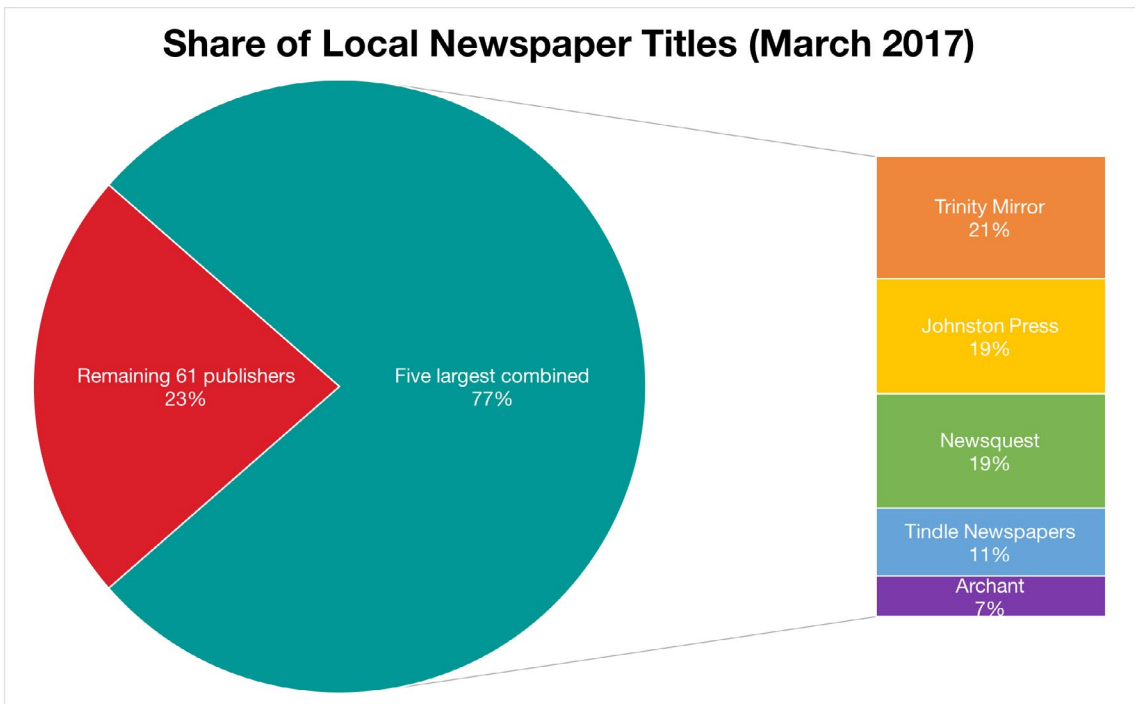


Figure 4: Percentage share of local newspaper titles (March 2017), comparing the largest five publishers with the remaining 61

Other evidence of local press decline: job losses, office closures and reorganisation

In addition to newspaper closures and launches, there are a number of other indicators that demonstrate wider trends in the capacity of the local press to serve their communities. These include: instances of job cuts; internal reorganisations that affect staff numbers; forced relocations of staff; and the closure of newspaper offices and relocation of titles outside the area they cover.

The full information gathered here, with links, is included in the Appendix to this report. Reporting by Press Gazette, the NUJ and Hold the Front Page was again invaluable in collating this information, though it is possible that further, unreported cuts and reorganisations have taken place.

Job losses

There were 30 reported instances of jobs being lost at specific news outlets or across publishers as a whole in the 17-month period – approximately one every two-and-a-half weeks. Two of these announcements contained no specified numbers of proposed redundancies (CN Group's announcement of a £600,000 staff budget cut,³ and an unspecified number of photographer job losses across Trinity Mirror's Local World acquisitions⁴).

The remaining proposed cuts removed local journalism 418 jobs in total. Table 4 shows how these break down by publisher. Twelve announcement of job cuts at Newsquest were made, with a loss of 139 jobs. Trinity Mirror made ten announcements of job losses, of which nine led to a specific prediction about lost job numbers – 102 jobs in total. Johnston Press made one announcement which was projected to lead to 100 lost jobs, while Archant announced 68 job cuts.

It is possible that further job cuts were recorded at smaller publishers, although data on this is not immediately available.

Reorganisations, relocations and office closures

As well as job losses, a series of other restructures had implications for the provision of local journalism in the UK. There were **seven reorganisations announced between November 2015 and March 2017**, all made by Trinity Mirror and Newsquest. These consisted of the following:

³ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/editors-production-journalists-and-photographers-at-risk-as-cn-group-seeks-to-cut-editorial-budget-by-600k/>

⁴ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/editors-production-journalists-and-photographers-at-risk-as-cn-group-seeks-to-cut-editorial-budget-by-600k/>

Announced Local Press Staff Cuts November 2015 – March 2017

Announcements of job cuts: 30

Total number of specified job losses: 418

Worst affected area(s):

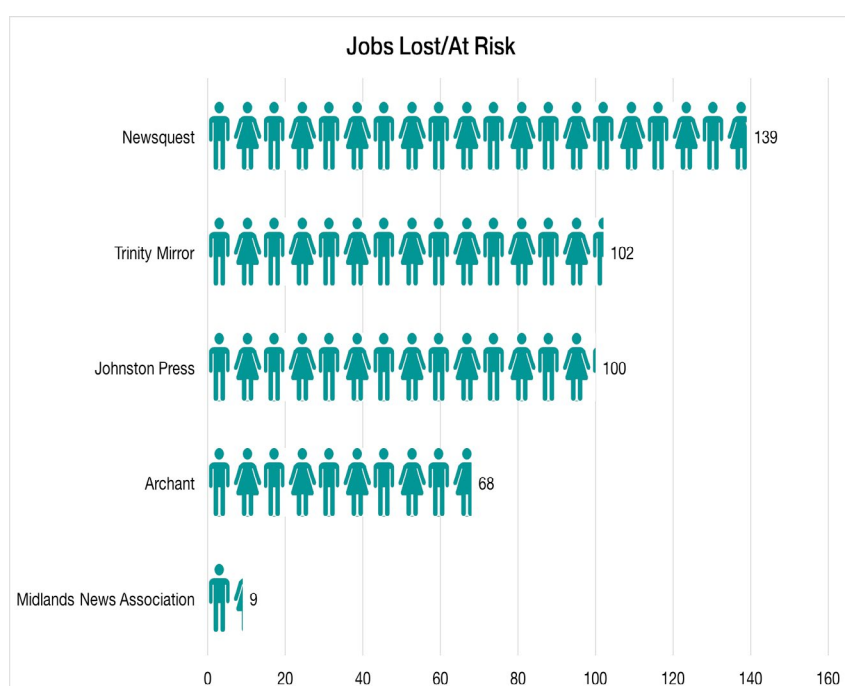
- South East: 6 announcements
- London: 5 announcements

Local Press Staff Cuts November 2015 – March 2017 by Publication

- Newsquest: 12 announcements, 136 jobs
- Trinity Mirror: 10 announcements, 102 jobs
- Johnston Press: 1 announcement, 100 jobs
- Archant: 4 announcements, 68 jobs
- Midlands News Association: 2 announcements, 9 jobs
- CN Group: 1 announcement, £600k staff budget cut

Publisher	Job Cut Announcements	Jobs Lost/At Risk
Newsquest	12	139
Trinity Mirror	10	102
Johnston Press	1	100
Archant	4	68
Midlands News Association	2	9
CN Group	1 (unspecified)	£600k staff budget reduction

Table 4: Announced job cuts across local news publishers (Press Gazette, HTFP, NUJ data - full description in Appendix)



- ▶ Newsquest moving production jobs from South London to Wales and South-West England (November 2015: 8 jobs affected)
- ▶ Trinity Mirror reorganisation within the Manchester Evening News (June 2016: 7 jobs affected)
- ▶ Trinity Mirror reorganisations at South-West England and Newcastle titles (June 2016: 4 jobs affected)
- ▶ Newsquest hiring freeze at South London titles (August 2016: 8 jobs affected)
- ▶ Trinity Mirror plan to merge Scottish Daily Record and Sunday Mail into seven-day operation (October 2016: 22 jobs affected)
- ▶ Trinity Mirror closure of printing press in Cardiff (November 2016: 33 jobs affected)
- ▶ Newsquest decision not to fill vacant Brighton Argus editor's post (December 2016: 1 job affected)

In total, 83 jobs were affected by these reorganisations. Though in some cases replacement jobs were specified, it is not clear that the changes have resulted, or will result, in stability of staff numbers.

Finally, **six newspaper offices were closed in this period**, five by Trinity Mirror and one by Newsquest. The closures were in Hertfordshire, Leicester, Newcastle, Cheshire, North Wales, and South London. In some cases, it was also clear that staff were moved a substantial distance away from the previous office location: Herts & Essex Observer journalists were moved 13 miles by Trinity Mirror;⁵ a Newsquest office closure in Cheshire moved staff 15 miles.⁶ A Trinity Mirror closure in Llandudno, North Wales, resulted a staff move of five miles, and was only discovered by reporters via a press release from Lidl, who were due to take over the office.⁷

The effect of the local world deal

The most significant event affecting the local newspaper market in the past 18 months was the purchase of Local World – then one of the largest local publishers – by Trinity Mirror. This increased the number of titles owned by Trinity Mirror by 83 (including 16 dailies). Trinity Mirror later retained ten Local World titles that were initially to be taken over by Iliffe News and Media.

⁵ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/trinity-mirror-closes-155-year-old-office-of-bishops-stortfords-weekly-newspaper/>

⁶ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/northwich-guardian-calls-on-newsquest-to-keep-base-in-town-after-office-closure/>

⁷ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/wales-daily-post-staff-find-out-from-press-release-that-their-office-is-becoming-lidl-supermarket/>

Evidence suggests that **Trinity Mirror has, in the 18 months since the deal was initially completed, engaged in a number of staff reductions, reorganisations and closures within its Local World portfolio:**

- ▶ Six newspapers have been closed, including one daily (the Nuneaton News). In addition, the online news coverage of Milton Keynes – MK Web – was also closed
- ▶ Nuneaton News (closed May 2016)
- ▶ Grantham Target (closed June 2016)
- ▶ Luton on Sunday (closed October 2016)
- ▶ Crawley News (closed October 2016)
- ▶ OneMK (closed October 2016)
- ▶ MK Web (www.onemk.co.uk – closed October 2016)
- ▶ Eight instances of announced job cuts at Local World titles represent a loss of at least 62 jobs. One announcement, regarding cuts to photographers working across Local World titles, does not specify numbers, but were predicted to affect “dozens” of jobs.⁸
- ▶ Proposed reorganisations at Cornish titles (West Briton, Cornishman and Cornish Guardian) and the Newcastle Chronicle, announced in June 2016, place at least four jobs at risk.⁹
- ▶ Two Local World newspaper offices have been closed: Those of the Herts & Essex Observer, and the Leicester Mercury.

The purchase of Local World by Trinity Mirror has not, then, just represented a substantial reduction of plurality across the national press (exacerbated by the growing problem of local monopolies); it has also led to a strategy of newspaper closures, staff cuts, reorganisations and office closures with serious implications for the provision of local journalism in many areas across the UK.

Evidence of further problems within the UK's local newspaper industry

In January 2016, Johnston Press identified 59 ‘sub-core’ titles across its portfolio, including the daily Wigan Evening Post, which were deemed to be insufficiently profitable to merit keeping.¹⁰ In March 2016, the company announced plans

⁸ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/trinity-mirror-axes-photographers-across-local-world-titles-instead-relying-social-media-pictures/>

⁹ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/fresh-redundancies-in-cornwall-and-newcastle-as-trinity-mirror-newsroom-restructure-continues/>

¹⁰ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/johnston-press-identifies-59-sub-core-titles-including-wigan-evening-post-and-scotland-sunday/>

to sell, close or cut costs across all 59 titles.¹¹ Between these two announcements, Johnston Press announced a £22m deal to expand into the national newspaper market by purchasing the i from Independent News and Media.¹² Eventually, in December 2016, Iliffe News and Media agreed a deal to purchase 13 of Johnston's 'sub-core' regional titles.¹³ The fate of the remaining 46 publications is not clear at present.

In March 2016 the director of Court News UK questioned the role of local newspapers due to the reduction in court cases covered by regional titles describing the following situation:

Court reporting does take a long time, and a local newspaper can't really sit around day-in, day-out and do it any more... That's why agency reporters are so valuable. But what we've ended up with is a situation where so many court cases just don't get covered in local papers at all. We recently had a very interesting case where a guy carried out five serious sexual assaults in Poplar, east London. Those sexual assaults were never covered in the local newspaper – his arrest was never covered, nor was the opening of his trial, his conviction or his sentence. You have to really ask yourself: what is the function of these local newspapers if they can't keep people properly informed?¹⁴

In July 2016 an award-winning local reporter took voluntary redundancy from the Croydon Advertiser, a Trinity Mirror title, stating that **the paper “consists entirely of stories scraped from [the] website by subs and put in [the] paper”, and “Reporters no longer have any input or involvement in the paper product, including no chance to proofread.”**¹⁵ The regional editorial director of Trinity Mirror criticised the comments, claiming: “The days when reporters could choose, arrogantly, to write about what interests them, rather than what interests the audience, are over.”¹⁶

In November 2016 the Cumbria-based CN

Group offered one loss-making title for sale at a 'nominal amount'.¹⁷ A Community Interest Company was formed for the purpose of taking over the title, and agreement was reached in December 2016.¹⁸

In December 2016 the Press Gazette reported on an issue of the Bullivant Media title the Coventry Observer which **consisted entirely of listicles, many of which had no local relevance, including:**

- ▶ A list of the greatest inventors
- ▶ The ten safest countries in the world
- ▶ The ten most dangerous countries in the world
- ▶ New words of 2016
- ▶ Top baby names
- ▶ The top ten active volcanoes
- ▶ The most haunted places in England
- ▶ The highest grossing films
- ▶ Top ten things discovered on Google Earth.¹⁹

¹¹ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/johnston-press-says-59-local-newspaper-titles-will-be-sold-closed-or-run-less-costs/>

¹² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-35559192>

¹³ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/iliffe-media-set-to-buy-13-johnston-press-newspaper-titles-in-17m-deal/>

¹⁴ https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/court-news-uk-courtroom-reporting?utm_source=vicetwitteruk

¹⁵ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/heartbroken-reporter-gareth-davies-says-croydon-advertiser-print-edition-now-thrown-together-collection-of-clickbait/>

¹⁶ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/trinity-mirror-boss-hits-back-at-claims-croydon-advertiser-printing-clickbait-says-days-when-reporters-wrote-about-interests-were-over/>

¹⁷ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/cn-group-offers-loss-making-weekly-newspaper-for-sale-at-nominal-amount-to-community-benefactor/>

¹⁸ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/scottish-weekly-finds-potential-buyer-in-community-company-being-created-for-purpose-of-running-it/>

¹⁹ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/post-news-coventry-observer-fills-entire-edition-with-listicles/>



"Wendy News" newsstand in Broad Street, Oxford, England. Photo by: Kamya Adl, CC-BY.



Tavern Street newsstand, Ipswich. Photo by: Olivier Bacquet, CC-BY.

Local journalism and the transition to digital

The transition from print to online and mobile as the primary means of reaching audiences is one of the most important factors shaping local journalism. As with national print journalism, however, gaining a clear picture of the nature of change is difficult as the necessary information is diffuse and publishers tend to announce only the positive developments – especially large numbers relating to audience growth and unique daily/weekly visitor figures. Information regarding issues relating to the changing capacity of local papers to provide journalism within their communities, such as the changing balance of journalism and content-curation roles or the actual changing content of local news amid concerns of clickbait-oriented strategies and a rise in non-local content, are less easy to obtain or have not yet been subject to significant research.

There is no doubt that print circulation of local news content has decreased dramatically in recent years. **Between 2016 and 2017 there has been an approximate average 11.2% decline in local weekly print circulation**, among those titles audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC).²⁰ The decline has been slightly higher in local dailies, at 12.5% on average.²¹ **Digital circulation, however, has risen substantially**, with the Press Gazette reporting that almost all regional daily papers saw increased digital circulation across 2016.²²

What is not clear is how even this growth is across the country. Newsquest, for example, reported a 15.1% year-on-year increase in average unique daily visitors to 1,480,000 between 2016 and 2017.²³ Across the 160 Newsquest local news websites, this daily average is around 9,250. Breaking down the aggregation of multiple print titles into grouped websites, this represents an average of around 7,014 daily visitors for each of the 211 discrete titles Newsquest publishes.

However, as Table 5 shows²⁴, the top ten performing Newsquest publications in terms of digital audiences are all daily newspapers centred on a large urban area – with the exception of the Lancashire Telegraph and the Northern Echo

²⁰ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/abcs-uk-local-weekly-newspapers-lose-print-sales-by-average-of-11-2-per-cent/>

²¹ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/uk-regional-dailies-lose-print-sales-by-average-of-12-5-per-cent-wigan-post-and-the-national-are-biggest-fallers/>

²² <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/abcs-regional-press-website-growth-offsets-print-decline-as-manchester-evening-news-beats-standard/>

²³ <http://www.newsquest.co.uk/news/2017/02/23/newsquest-grows-its-online-audience-by-a-further-15/>

²⁴ Data obtained from Press Gazette: <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/abcs-regional-press-website-growth-offsets-print-decline-as-manchester-evening-news-beats-standard/>

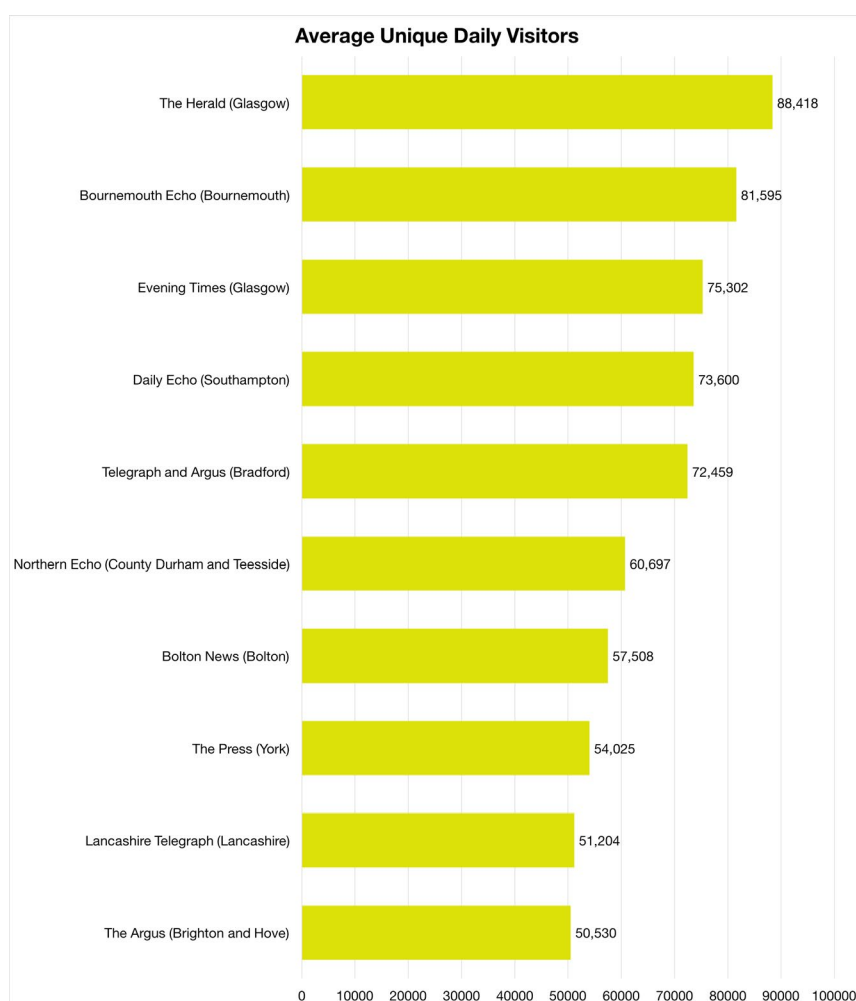


Figure 5: Average unique daily visitors to top ten Newsquest dailies

which covers an area across County Durham and Teesside.

Between them, these ten titles account for an average daily audience of 665,338 – around 45% of Newsquest's total. The remaining 150 websites have an average daily audience of around 5,431. **The growth of digital audiences does appear to be growing substantially, but this evidence suggests that the growth is not evenly distributed, and that websites developed from daily newspapers are responsible for a very large proportion of that growth.** Figures from other large local publishers would enhance the extent to which this is representative of the industry as a whole. Some evidence from Trinity Mirror's Local World titles suggests that the websites of urban daily papers in that group are also performing particularly strongly on digital audience engagement.²⁵

The growth of digital audiences is, however, failing to shore up the losses of print revenue

²⁵ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/how-digital-growth-is-outpacing-print-decline-at-the-big-former-local-world-dailies-bought-by-trinity-mirror/>

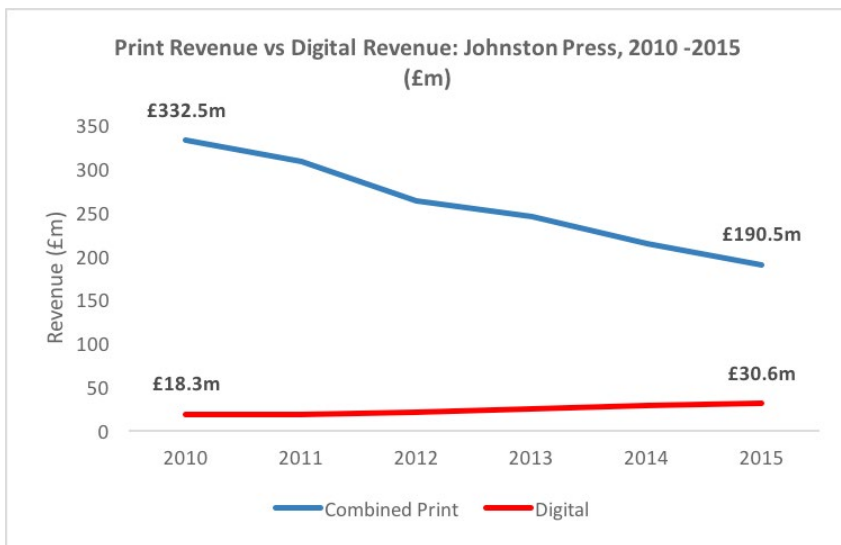


Figure 6: Johnston Press Print and Digital Revenue, 2010-2015

experienced across all major publishers. As Figure 3 shows²⁶, the trends in Johnston Press revenue streams from print (combined sales and advertising) and digital (advertising) demonstrate that **dramatic increases in digital engagement and unique daily visitors does not translate into income from advertisers or begin to offset the huge losses in print advertising.**

Nor is there comprehensive evidence that the increased frequency of publication of online journalism represents an increase in journalistic capacity. In practice, it appears that daily online news provision is produced by the same or similar staffing levels of the weekly newspapers that they grew out of – in other words, the traditional news-gathering capacity of online local news sites is not greater than the previous print-only titles, except in their ability to curate information available online or provided by outside sources. This may in some cases increase the capacity of publications to gather and process information, but there is little evidence of a replacement of traditional face-to-face or in-depth local journalism.

The larger publishers have tended not to publicise workforce changes between November 2015 and March 2017, though some of the information available from reorganisations (see Appendix) outline which roles will be created or lost. The Trinity Mirror restructuring at the Manchester Evening News and the Huddersfield Examiner outlined the loss of a number of staff photographer roles and a Head of News position (to be absorbed into an Executive Editor (Digital)). The newly-created roles consisted of 3 digital sports writers, an online trend writer advising staff about audience engagement, a city beat reporter, and an evening breaking news

blogger.²⁷ A further Trinity Mirror restructuring in Cornish titles and the Newcastle Chronicle saw redundancies replaced with a head of content, head of audience engagement, fan writers for football clubs, and a city writer for Sunderland.²⁸

The extent to which these new roles will consist of traditional newsgathering roles is not clear, but a significant amount of the replacement jobs in these cases consist of content curation or repackaging. The recent aborted imposition of individual online audience growth targets for journalists by Trinity Mirror does not mitigate the fact that such targets still remain in place for teams.²⁹

Finally, **the growing anecdotal evidence of clickbait-heavy local journalism, reductions in public-interest journalism such as court and local council reporting, and increasing amounts of non-local reporting** (for example the North-East England-based Newsquest title The Northern Echo published 527 articles about, or mentioning, Real Madrid between 1st January 2016 and 8th March 2017,³⁰ and in the same time period published 992 articles mentioning Kim Kardashian³¹ - that is 2.3 articles per day) means that there are serious grounds for concern about the extent to which digital local news is performing the traditional – essential – role in their local communities. Further research is urgently needed to establish the possible effect of these trends.

²⁷ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/trinity-mirror-cuts-photographers-out-and-digital-trend-writer-plus-breaking-news-blogger-in-at-men/>

²⁸ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/fresh-redundancies-in-cornwall-and-newcastle-as-trinity-mirror-newsroom-restructure-continues/>

²⁹ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/trinity-mirror-shelves-plan-give-journalists-individual-online-traffic-growth-targets/>

³⁰ http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/search/?search_submitted=true&from_date_day=1&from_date_month=1&to_date_day=31&to_date_month=12&searchwords=%22real+madrid%22&from_date_year=2016&to_date_year=2017

³¹ http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/search/?search_submitted=true&from_date_day=1&from_date_month=1&to_date_day=31&to_date_month=12&searchwords=%22kim+kardashian%22&from_date_year=&to_date_year=

²⁶ Figures obtained from Johnston Press annual reports: <http://www.johnstonpress.co.uk/investors/reports-results-presentations>

Local news and broadcasting

The agreement for the BBC to provide 150 local news reporters

The agreement between sections of the local newspaper industry and the BBC for the Corporation to use a portion of the licence fee to fund 150 local news reporters, announced in February 2017, was the culmination of discussions that had been ongoing between representatives of the local press and the BBC since late 2015. The BBC initially offered to provide 100 new local reporters as part of its 'Open BBC' initiative in early September 2015.³² This was instantly rejected by Ashley Highfield, Chief executive of Johnston Press and then vice-Chairman of the News Media Association – the group representing the interests of the national and regional press – as “BBC expansion into local news provision... through the back door.”³³

In March 2016 – seven days after Johnston Press announced that it wished to sell, close or cut 59 'sub-core' local titles – the News Media Association (NMA) announced that they were seeking £14m a year from the BBC to pay for 364 local newspaper reporters to cover court and council reporting.³⁴ A month later, Ashley Highfield – now Chair of the NMA – announced that a deal had been agreed in principle with the BBC on funding local journalism.³⁵ An official announcement of the deal was made in early February 2017.

As this research has shown, **during this period of negotiation to procure public funding of 150 local reporters, significantly more than 400 jobs have been lost or replaced across the local newspaper industry, including 100 at Johnston Press.**

The amount of money provided via the licence fee (£8m annually) is also a fraction of the profit margins of the largest publishers combined. Johnston Press profit margins have averaged between 15% and 20% in recent years,³⁶ while profit before tax in 2015 was £31.5m.³⁷ The operating profit of the Trinity

Mirror parent company in 2016 was £137.5m. The Trinity Mirror annual statement also forecast savings from the Local World integration to be £15m – almost double the BBC's investment in local journalism.³⁸

The deal itself involves journalists being distributed across the UK, with the stories they produce being made available to commercial local news organisations as well as the BBC. It is not fully clear as of yet how the BBC will advertise and award these journalists in 'bundles'. The number of reporters is intended to increase to 200 in 2019.

While the increase of funding for journalists doing journalism at the local level can only be seen as a positive, it is not clear to what extent this programme will offset the continuing and substantial loss of editorial jobs in local journalism across the major publishers. It is also not clear the extent to which licence fee money will be used to subsidise the core functions of local newspaper groups who have shown little appetite for investing in journalism even while maintaining healthy profit margins.³⁹

Developments in Local TV

The local television public policy intervention in 2011 set up a licencing regime for a series of local TV stations to provide local news and programming. Of 21 local TV stations currently licensed by Ofcom,⁴⁰ almost all are located in urban areas, and 90% are in areas already served by a local daily newspaper – thereby failing to address the increasing rural/urban deficit in local newspaper coverage.⁴¹ This is best illustrated by the franchise Mustard TV, serving the Norwich area. Mustard TV is owned by Archant, the local newspaper group which is the dominant publisher across Norwich and the surrounding area.

Since September 2015, as Table 5 shows, 15 licence-holders have successfully applied to Ofcom for a reduction in their local news provision – ranging from reductions in the number of hours of local news content they are obliged to publish each week, to a relaxation of the format or timing of news provision.

³² <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/sep/07/bbc-will-offer-staff-and-content-to-help-local-newspapers>

³³ <http://awards.pressgazette.co.uk/2015/09/07/regional-press-snubs-bbc-100-public-service-reporters-offer-as-back-door-expansion/>

³⁴ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/local-newspaper-publishers-want-14m-from-bbc-to-help-plug-gap-in-council-and-court-reporting/>

³⁵ <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/ashley-highfield-bbc-has-agreed-principle-fund-local-newspaper-council-reporting/>

³⁶ *Monopolising Local News*, p32: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/CMCP/local-news.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/f674b36c-f01a-11e5-9f20-c3a047354386>

³⁸ <http://www.trinitymirror.com/2016fyannouncementfinal.pdf>

³⁹ *Monopolising Local News*, pp25-37: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/CMCP/local-news.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/manage-your-licence/tv-broadcast-licences/current-licensees/local-tv>

⁴¹ See *Monopolising Local News*, p56 <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/CMCP/local-news.pdf>

Licence Area	Relaxation of News Provision Sought?	Granted Date
Belfast	Yes	September 2015
Birmingham	Yes	April 2016
Brighton & Hove	No	N/A
Bristol	Yes	October 2015
Cambridge	Yes	March 2017
Cardiff	Yes	October 2016
Edinburgh	Yes	May 2016
Glasgow	Yes	May 2016
Grimsby	No	N/A
Leeds	Yes	October 2015
Liverpool	No	N/A
London	Yes	December 2016
Manchester	Yes	October 2016
Newcastle	Yes	October 2015
Norwich	Yes	September 2015
Nottingham	No	N/A
Oxford	Yes	April 2016
Preston	Yes	October 2016
Sheffield	No	N/A
Southampton	Yes	October 2015
Swansea	No	N/A

Table 6: Local TV licences and dates of successful applications for relaxation/reduction of local news provision

Conclusion

As the title of this report implies, local news is the lifeblood of local community and local democracy. Local journalists play a vital role in **informing** local communities about things that matter to them; **connecting** people to each other in their geographical community; **scrutinizing** those in power; **representing** communities to themselves and the larger publish sphere; and advocating for communities on issues of public concern. Therefore the crisis afflicting local news today is one we need to address with some urgency.

Whilst ours is not the first report of its kind to draw attention to the local news landscape, the facts that we document are no less arresting:

- ▶ The majority of the UK (57.9%) is not served by a local daily newspaper.
- ▶ 45% of local authority districts are served by a single publisher.
- ▶ Local daily papers are overwhelmingly located in major urban areas.
- ▶ 77.1% of local newspaper titles are owned by the big five local newspaper publishers.
- ▶ Another 418 local journalism jobs have been lost in the last 17 months.

Of course, this report comes at a time when the transition from print to digital is well established and still ongoing. As such, we can document considerable rises in digital local news consumption. But as news organisations are experiencing writ large, digital ad revenues are not close to compensating for newspaper ad revenue losses. This transition to digital – while seemingly inevitable at this point – has precipitated a crisis in the economics of news; one that local news organisations seem the least well placed to respond to. As our report shows, this phenomenon comes with a real human resource cost in the newsroom.

As other recent reports have demonstrated¹, there is a steady growth of hyperlocal news outlets that have often stepped in to serve communities where the local newspaper may have closed down. These hyperlocals are performing some of the same democratic and community functions of legacy news media. However, the sector is built on very fragile foundations, with self-funding and

voluntarism the predominant economic model. At present, then, hyperlocals are not in a position to compensate for the role played by strong, confident, independent and critical local journalism that many communities have lost.

The levels of concentration together with the closures and job cuts identified in this report demonstrate that we need remedial action to protect local news. Here, it is important that we consider local journalism – and by extension, news – as a public good and therefore treat it accordingly when it comes to public policy. This means recognising that the market cannot provide what society needs in sufficient quality or quantity. What is required, we argue, is a set of local news policy interventions that can stimulate independent, pluralistic, local news.

To be clear, such interventions should not only be aimed at the printed newspaper industry, but should recognise the period of huge digital transformation we are witnessing. As a 2014 Media Standards Trust report argued “during this period the opportunities for innovation and experimentation are considerable. There is significant grassroots innovation, but much of it is nascent and needs to be incentivized if it is to grow and become sustainable.”² The good news here is that “the tools available for innovating – with regards publishing, distributing and promoting news and information – are widely available at low cost”³ and therefore relatively small investments can have a considerable impact.

Here, we would support calls for a contestable fund for local news, information and civic technology, paid for by a levy on the largest digital intermediaries, that allows news organisations to experiment with new business models and new models of news delivery that work for local communities and that counter the prevailing winds of economic decline and democratic deficit.

In the immediate future, as the NUJ Local News Matters campaign proposes, we need to lobby for a range of interventions including a parliamentary inquiry, in order to secure the future of local news and journalism in the UK.

¹ <https://hyperlocalsurvey.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/hyperlocal-community-news-in-the-uk-2014.pdf>

² <http://mediastandardstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Positive-Plurality-policy-paper-9-10-14.pdf>

³ *Ibid.*

Appendix

Regional paper job cuts, staff relocation, reorganisation and office closure announcements 1st November 2015 – 3rd March 2017

The information presented in the table below is a compilation of reports published by *Press Gazette*, Hold the Front Page, and the National Union of Journalists between November 2015 (when the previous research ended) and the beginning of March 2017.

It contains a comprehensive list of all announcements reported by those three sources on instances of job losses, forced staff relocations, reorganisations (in which staff numbers were affected) and the closure of offices and selling-off of property by regional publishers.

These three sources provide an invaluable service in monitoring these changes in the UK regional newspaper industry, but the general opaqueness of the precise details of publisher reorganisations of this kind means that some details of cuts may have been missed.

Date	Event	Job Losses / Jobs Affected	Publisher	Description	Location
09/11/15	Job cuts	12	Newsquest	Newsquest plans to cut 12 more jobs in North West including web editor and social media editor	North West England
10/11/15	Forced staff relocation	8	Newsquest	Newsquest moving production jobs to Wales & SW England	South London
11/11/15	Job cuts	5	Midlands News Association	Photographers at risk of redundancy	Wolverhampton
11/11/15	Job cuts	5	Newsquest	Newsquest restructuring & job losses	Western Scotland
18/11/15	Job cuts	11	Newsquest	Editorial job cuts (inc photographers) in Essex (Newsquest)	Essex
19/11/15	Job cuts	6	Newsquest	Newsquest job cuts in Lancashire	Lancashire
07/01/16	Job cuts	25	Newsquest	Cuts across Newsquest Glasgow papers	Glasgow
11/01/16	Job cuts	100	Johnston Press	Series of cuts announced across Johnston	Scotland, NI, NE, NW England and East Midlands
04/02/16	Job cuts	4	Midlands News Association	Sub-editors' voluntary redundancy at MNA	Wolverhampton
08/02/16	Job cuts	"dozens"	Trinity Mirror	Local World/Trinity Mirror cut photographers across Essex and Midlands	Essex, Midlands
09/02/16	Job cuts	Unspecified	CN Group	Staff budget reduction at CN Group - editorial and photographer positions to be cut	Cumbria
18/04/16	Job cuts	8	Trinity Mirror	Merging news teams (Devon)	Devon
25/04/16	Job cuts	14	Trinity Mirror	TM closing Local World websites	SW England
09/05/16	Job cuts	4	Trinity Mirror	Closure of Nuneaton News daily, inc. job losses	Warwickshire
27/05/16	Job cuts	13	Trinity Mirror	TM cuts across South East	Essex, Kent, Surrey
03/06/16	Job cuts	5	Archant	London website closure	London
07/06/16	Job cuts	30	Archant	Photographer job cuts across Archant	London, East Anglia
07/06/16	Reorganisation	7	Trinity Mirror	MEN reorganisation; 7 jobs lost; some replacements in new roles	Greater Manchester
16/06/16	Reorganisation	4	Trinity Mirror	Reorganisation at Cornish and Newcastle TM titles; some jobs replaced	Cornwall, Newcastle
23/06/16	Job cuts	12	Trinity Mirror	Trinity Mirror restructure - job losses	Cambridge, Hertfordshire, Essex
26/07/16	Job cuts	5	Trinity Mirror	TM restructure of LW jobs in Hertfordshire & Essex	Hertfordshire, Essex
04/08/16	Reorganisation	8	Newsquest	Hiring freeze at Newsquest South London titles	London
09/08/16	Office closure	N/A	Trinity Mirror	Herts & Essex Observer office closed - staff moved 13 miles	Hertfordshire, Essex
11/08/16	Job cuts	1	Newsquest	Eastbourne Independent closed - 1 FT job lost	Eastbourne
15/08/16	Job cuts	6	Newsquest	Photographer jobs under threat at Newsquest in Essex	Essex
18/08/16	Job cuts	19	Newsquest	Production staff facing redundancy at NQ's South Wales subbing hubs	South Wales
08/09/16	Job cuts	11	Newsquest	11 editorial staff at NQ South London offices to be cut	South London
04/10/16	Job cuts	3	Archant	Staff photographers cut at Archant London titles	London
05/10/16	Office closure	N/A	Trinity Mirror	Leicester Mercury office closure	Leicester
13/10/16	Reorganisation	22	Trinity Mirror	TM merging Record and Sunday Mail	Scotland
18/10/16	Office closure	N/A	Trinity Mirror	TM/Press Association training centre to close in Newcastle	Newcastle
19/10/16	Job cuts	6	Trinity Mirror	TM closure of LW papers, with job losses	Milton Keynes/ Northampton
26/10/16	Job cuts	3	Newsquest	NQ South London sports reporters cut	South London
24/11/16	Reorganisation	33	Trinity Mirror	TM Cardiff printing press closure - 33 jobs affected	South Wales
01/12/16	Job cuts	26	Newsquest	Newsquest cutting 26 jobs at Newport subbing hub	South Wales
13/12/16	Reorganisation	1	Newsquest	Departing Brighton Arguseditor's post not to be refilled	Brighton
16/01/17	Office closure	N/A	NQ	NQ office closure in Cheshire - staff moved 15 miles away	Cheshire
19/01/17	Job cuts	34	Trinity Mirror	Moving of TM subbing hub - net loss of 34 jobs out of total of 78	Nationwide
24/01/17	Job cuts	6	Trinity Mirror	Editors at Local World titles to be cut by TM	Nationwide
22/02/17	Job cuts	30	Archant	Archant outsourcing design work to India	Norwich and Weston-Super-Mare
28/02/17	Office closure	N/A	Trinity Mirror	TM closure of Daily Post office, staff moving five miles away	North Wales
02/03/17	Office closure	N/A	Trinity Mirror	TM closure of office housing multiple titles in South London	South London
06/03/17	Job Cuts	14	Newsquest	Newsquest closure of Newport subbing hub	South Wales

¹ Includes sale of 13 titles to Iliffe News and Media in December 2016

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418 **local journalism jobs have been**
lost in the last 17 months alone

Local News Matters campaign demands:

1. A short, sharp, national, parliamentary inquiry into the state of local news
2. Local papers should be treated as community assets
3. New rules to prevent local media outlets from closing overnight – they should be offered to potential new owners, including local co-operatives, with the time available to submit in a bid for alternative media ownership in advance of any closure
4. Action by government and employers to stem the relentless job cuts
5. Increasing investment, from a range of sources, for quality local journalism.

