

Meeting the news needs of local communities

New research by Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre
Commissioned by Media Trust



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Foreword from Media Trust: More than news

This research goes to the heart of what communities need in order to play a full part in the democratic process, in society and in their locality.

It reinforces our view that **communities want to engage with their local media, and are struggling to do so**. And it has produced some surprising results - uncovering a latent demand for the rapidly disappearing truly 'local' newspaper, for quality investigative journalism, that can represent and reflect local concerns, underpin accountability and arguably, be the key tool in bringing back a sense of community.

Media Trust works with diverse communities across the country, of all ages and backgrounds, who wish to fully participate and build a better society. We speak daily to charities and community organisers who have their own vision of a better society for themselves and their peers, locally, regionally and nationally. Yet we also sense a pressing need and vocal desire in local communities for better communication and local news. **We believe that communication is the catalyst that enables the seed of an idea to gather support and become a reality.**

With this social context, and the more specific debate around a sustainable future for local news in mind, we commissioned this research to understand what is at the heart of communities' need to play a full positive role in the democratic process and in society locally. The research validates what we hear everyday – that **many of our communities feel disempowered, unheard and irrelevant.**

The respondents and focus groups involved in this research want to see and know local journalists, want them to 'walk the beat', and engage face-to-face. **They want journalists, local news and local newspapers back at the heart of their communities.** The report talks of the role of local journalists as a 'watchdog', and whether it is court or council reporting, it reveals communities want, and need, trained, conscientious, impartial journalists asking the difficult questions and documenting, explaining and scrutinising those in authority.

In the past few years, there has been much debate around the concept of 'citizen journalism', and the research here suggests that such innovations, whether online or through community radio stations, are best applied in addition to a quality journalism infrastructure. The research suggests that online citizen journalism plays an increasing role, but does not, at least not yet, fill the deep need in our communities to engage, participate and campaign, or just simply be informed.

The research reveals that there's also some concern around community radio and even local TV being able to fill this gap, and that nothing beats the old-fashioned local paper for ease, for accessibility, for relevance, and for social impact. Even in those communities with local and hyper-local websites, it's the local paper that they want – strong, vibrant, quality local newspapers reflecting the news that concerns their neighbourhoods and communities.

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Of course, the UK needs and deserves the fastest possible broadband roll out, and the training and digital mentors to ensure communities can engage online. Martha Lane Fox's Manifesto for a Networked Nation is much needed, and we are active supporters in this campaign. The UK also deserves a range of ways to strengthen the community radio network, and even local TV. But it would be doing a disservice to conveniently side-step the conclusion from this research that citizens, communities, consumers (and voters) all see the local paper as a strong democratic and social force. Indeed, our experience is that offline media can be a powerful tool in pushing the online agenda.

In August 2008, we argued in our response to consultation on the BBC's Local Video proposal that renewed investment in local community content was needed.

- We documented the decline in local content across ITV, Cable, Independent Local Radio and local newspapers
- We identified the market gap in community news
- We called for the licence fee to be used to create new content, available to all, that reflected community news and voices
- We argued that without an investment from the licence fee in local communities, the commercial sector would have no market imperative to cover local news

We were right: the commercial sector, with the BBC now restricted in what it can do, is rapidly cutting back its local coverage.

Two years have passed and, despite being charged with the duty of protecting citizens' interests in communications, Ofcom has done little to ensure that the gap is filled and citizens' interests in local community news, so strongly confirmed by this new Goldsmiths/Fenton research, are supported.

So what's the solution?

Professor Natalie Fenton, this reports lead author, calls for local news hubs, supported with funds from local authorities and foundations. Media Trust endorses and supports this vision – and we believe such hubs could act as the catalyst, locally, for bringing together communities, professional journalists, alongside training, volunteer mentors and technical support for communities to engage in identifying, investigating and reporting local news. With appropriate financing, such hubs could act as a new and accessible source of news stories for existing local and regional media, and they could possibly act as the catalyst for a new layer of local papers – run as commercial, or not-for-profit, social enterprises. They could also drive new community online and digital initiatives, giving local communities the inspiration and drive to get online and 'digi-organise'.

We are exploring how these local news hubs could also become the new “community organisers” promised by the new government. **Galvanise communities around their media, and you create an energy and strength of voice that can move mountains.**

This solution can only be a positive for the wider media industry: the BBC’s recent Strategy Review emphasised their commitment to becoming a “catalyst and connector” within the Public Space. It also spoke of making partnerships the BBC’s “default-setting” for most new activities. We have long believed the BBC should take positive action to increase the range of services, viewpoints and engagement accessible to communities and citizens. Consequently, we believe the BBC could play a vital role in setting up and resourcing such hubs – especially in mentoring and training staff, and promoting attachments and secondments. The BBC and the dominant commercial newspaper groups will all benefit from, in turn, being fed new energised news stories, revitalising their content through strong local competition.

The importance of independence cannot be overstated. Media Trust is concerned about the emergence of Local Authority newspapers and ‘news’ websites. **This direct control of the local news agenda is not only undemocratic but an unsustainable and ineffective use of taxpayers’ funds.** This solution puts local news back where it belongs: in the hands of local people.

Along with match funding from local authorities (a small fraction of their current £450m* spend on communications), from Big Lottery and from local community foundations, the hubs would provide a new source of dynamic local news content, freely available to all media. They would drive the vision of the “Big Society”. **They would hold local powers to account – the new GP fund-holders, local authorities, parent-run schools and post offices – and encourage local participation in decision-making and democracy.** Transparency is meaningless without free and easy access to information and the means to test, challenge and debate it.

Media, communications and news are now, more than ever, at the heart of our communities and our society. Let’s seize the moment, respond to our citizens’ desires, and inject seed-funds into a new model for community action, truly local news - and yes, if our communities want them, a new layer of local papers.

The “Big Society” means communities that are strong, seen and heard and actively engaged. We believe community news hubs can be the catalyst to make this happen.

Caroline Diehl MBE

Founder and chief executive, Media Trust
July 2010

* The total local authority publicity bill is £450m (Taxpayers Alliance: Council Spending Uncovered – No1: Publicity, December 2008)

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Section 1

Executive summary

- This research identifies and then seeks to support the link between local news and democracy through a consideration of how it functions and what is required for it to thrive. It also considers in detail the demand side of news – What do people want from their local news and why does it matter to them? It then puts these into an economic, regulatory and technological context in order to better understand the changes that are taking place. The report offers a direct response to the current crisis in local news with concrete suggestions for how to deliver an independent local news service that meets the news needs of local communities. Our response is based largely on new independent research commissioned by Media Trust that looks at the local news audience to provide a critical analysis of the perceived roles and value of “community” news and information; explores and evaluates the relative importance of different media and digital media; critically assesses the possibilities for local communities to express their voices in the new mediascape; and interrogates barriers to the provision of community, local and hyperlocal content.
- This research takes place in a context in which the Government has put local media at the heart of its plans and is set to publish a full local media action plan in Autumn 2010. Having rejected the previous Labour Government’s proposals for Independently Funded News Consortia, it is committed to a concept of localisation that is centred on commercial growth in local television and online services. This includes a proposal to significantly relax local cross-media ownership rules.
- The research reveals an explicit relationship between local and community news, local democracy, community cohesion and civic engagement. But currently there is a ‘crisis’ in the provision of local news. The crisis is being managed by closing newspapers or shedding staff. These cuts are having a devastating effect on the quality of the news. Job insecurity and commercial priorities place increasing limitations on journalists’ ability to do the journalism most of them want to do – to question, analyse and scrutinize. All forms of traditional commercial local news, whether print, broadcast or online, are operating with decreasing profits and fewer journalists and/or news professionals covering local areas.
- Success in local and regional news now appears to depend increasingly on scale. This leads to more mergers and takeovers with the result that larger companies serving bigger regions are producing news that, as this research reveals, has less and less relevance for local people. But large organisational structures with significant corporate demands have now become financial burdens (Picard, 2010) and liberalisation of cross-media ownership rules in

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local and regional media is likely to exacerbate this problem and further to diminish the reason people turn to local news in the first place – to have a voice, to hear stories from their local community and see their local lives reflected. The research discussed below explicitly highlights that local news that is not local is not news. But this appears to be precisely what we are left with – a form of remote localism that has its sights set on the bottom line rather than the news service people want.

- This research identifies a genuine need for local quality news and journalism. In particular, many of the people interviewed for this research pointed to a lack of information about what is going on around them as well as a scarcity of investigative reporting from journalists who know the area and tread the beat. Local people seek reporting from those they know understand what goes on locally, or who are at least willing to learn. This means having a local presence, being seen to ferret out information, dig behind it, and make sense of it. They want analytic depth and scepticism regarding those in power, meaningful context, and robust debate. They want stories that are compelling because they are relevant to them and they want to be part of the conversation.
- The importance of local news and journalism increases with a felt decline in local democracy. This research reveals a clear relationship between the two that we ignore at our peril. In one area where the local paper no longer exists there was a poignant sense of vulnerability and powerlessness that contributed in turn to a feeling of isolation and “not being listened to” by local centres of power. A good local news service in this sense is one that gives a voice to the voiceless; that is prepared to listen to and represent the concerns of ordinary local people; and is willing to act as a fourth estate, holding power to account. The materiality of a news-room that exists in the community and that provides a beating heart of journalism that feeds, supports and sustains local life was identified as integral to the fostering of a community spirit and the enabling of local democracy. The establishment of a community space can do much to empower local people and create a stronger sense of community cohesion – this is when local news matters to people. Remove it and you disconnect it from the very thing that was keeping it going – local life and local people.
- Some population groups appear to be seriously underserved, in particular, the elderly and disadvantaged groups with no access to the internet/computer skills. The elderly face significant problems in terms of access to local news. Local print media play a particularly important role in the lives of the elderly in terms of providing them with the types of local content that they express a need for. Print media are easy to access for less mobile elderly people, as these often “come through the door” and are felt to be more able to cover an area that is geographically contained enough to be understood as local by the audience. Televised local news fulfils the first criterion of easy physical access but often fails in the second respect.

- In general, participants expressed a clear interest in and demand for much more localised (indeed hyper-local) news in their communities. But they were quite adamant that they also wanted a particular type of journalism that went with it. This should be a form of journalism that could offer long-term coverage of news items as well as everyday investigative journalism on local issues. A strong interest in “ordinary” community voices and stories in local media was also in high demand.
- Local commercial news monopolies owned by a few national conglomerates may provide economies of scale but do not fulfil the news needs of local communities and do little to enhance local democracy. While new technology is opening up new spaces for engagement of local communities and communities of interest, neither locals participating in our focus groups discussions nor our interviewees saw them as adequate replacements for a quality, genuinely local, independent news service, even by those running the local websites. In fact, they were not thought of as doing journalism at all. There are a variety of ‘alternative’ or ‘innovative’ (hyper)local media such as local websites, social networking media surgeries, and crowd-sourced investigative campaign sites that are a rich source of (hyper)local content and play a role in strengthening local democracies. But this informal, ad hoc non-journalist produced local content is only of value when people know where to find it. It is also intermittent, unpredictable and particular to the individual producing it. As such, this content cannot be a substitute for regular, sustainable, independent journalism. These websites also have less visibility than traditional media and tend to circulate in predefined networks of interest. They are mostly self-financed and rely on the work of volunteers. As a consequence they are piecemeal, driven by the interests of the few and often survive on the financial goodwill of a small number of committed individuals.
- In response to these findings it would appear imperative to increase relations with individuals and organisations in civil society in order to facilitate and maintain certain levels of news coverage in the public interest. To further the creation and distribution of genuinely local public service content, it is important that such partnerships are inclusive and involve actors that currently feel excluded from the mainstream mediated conversations and actively seek to increase media plurality rather than rely on certain individual interests. Establishing a more collaborative relationship between news organisations, individuals and civil society should be encouraged in order to enable participation, increase effective engagement, expand the public sphere, and enhance democracy. But such a service will be neither sustainable nor responsive to local needs without a core local news resource with paid-for professional local journalists who can undertake everyday investigative reporting: the daily routine of keeping an eye on elected and appointed officials, and all those who wield power in local communities.

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- How to make any proposals economically viable is clearly a central concern but it should not be the only or even the primary concern. We need to ensure that local news media operate within a value system based on the public interest. Sole reliance on fully commercial enterprises for the delivery of news and current affairs journalism that purports to be for the public good and in the public interest has proven to be problematic. Old models of local journalism are outmoded and equally problematic. Independent, not-for-profit (or not primarily for profit) newsrooms are critical to the survival of local news and the promotion of local democratic well being. This research supports the idea that the facilitation of citizen involvement in feeding and shaping stories, and an emphasis on collaboration rather than competition is best suited to the digital age. Such an arrangement, however, cannot function without established local newsrooms served by professional local journalists.

Recommendations

To these ends we see the development of local news hubs as a potential way forward. A local news hub that functions across media platforms to share information, to improve the quality of journalistic investigations, and to create cost efficiencies could be responsive to the local need for an easily identifiable and visible centre for news gathering. It could also, importantly, be a meeting place where people share concerns with a view to putting them out in the local public sphere (whether that is online, in print, on radio or television), increasing local deliberation and ultimately effecting social change that would, in turn, attract more local involvement. This would be a place where local people could meet local paid-for journalists working for the local news media which may be published or broadcast elsewhere but which have a newsroom in the hub and hold regular news surgeries with the local community.

News-rooms operating out of news hubs could enable further cross-collaboration and training. This could function through direct link ups to journalism courses at local universities but crucially they could also provide training opportunities that counter the financial and cultural barriers currently blocking equality of access to the profession. In addition they would be able to offer support for training for current media workers providing the skills they need to work in modern newsrooms. It would also mean that community media and mainstream media link up more readily and share training and facilities as well as cross-promoting content.

There is a crucial role for foundation grants and local government subsidies for genuinely local news-hub start-ups. Particular emphasis should be placed on establishing new ownership models rooted in the local community, harnessing local innovation and enthusiasm. New structures of governance would be designed to protect and preserve the quality and diversity of news content. This type of governance would need to safeguard the independence of the news organisations, but could also increase the involvement of civil society within local communities. Local government subsidies could come from local government advertising – guaranteeing that their local information campaigns reach their target audience while supporting and nurturing local media. In the long term, however, diversity of funding may be the best solution.

There should be a review of the current tax regime for media organisations to examine how it can create further incentives to invest in quality local journalism in local communities operating out of the news hubs. Furthermore if there is relaxation of cross media ownership regulation, companies wishing to take advantage of this should be required to support local news hubs through investing in them, thereby fulfilling a formal obligation to support genuinely local newsgathering and everyday and long-term investigative reporting. Their obligations would also extend to an investment in training and community link-ups.

Local news hubs respond directly to the outcomes of this research and to the Government commitment to localism and the “enormous benefits of fostering local cultural, economic and political identities” (Hunt, 2010). They would reinvent local newsrooms fit for the digital age while ensuring that local communities are given a renewed role in local democratic life.

Section 2

Introduction: News in context

The production and circulation of independent, quality news is a hallmark of democratic societies. The Digital Britain report noted that "It is important for civic society and democracy for people to have a range of sources of accurate and trustworthy news at all levels, local, regional and in the Nations as well as UK-wide and international news that is guaranteed, beyond market provision" (Digital Britain, 2009: 141). A vibrant local news media can provide the critical infrastructure for local engagement and hold power to account whilst also, importantly, offering a sense of community identity and belonging to a particular locale. At a time when disengagement from local democracy is the norm (see below), the role of local news media has never been more critical. Newspapers in particular, have also "been the archivists and chroniclers of their local and regional communities, recording the various rites of passage (births, marriages and deaths) of members of those communities, as well as the activities of judicial and political elites and institutions, manifest in court reports and coverage of the proceedings of parish councils and Parliaments" (Franklin, 2009:1). But news media are (mostly) businesses and the news is a product that is fast losing its market value to advertisers as much advertising migrates online. The demise of the existing business model of the local and regional press and of broadcast news in the regions demands a critical consideration of what we want local news for and how it can be delivered.

The Government has put local media at the heart of its plans. The Culture secretary, Jeremy Hunt has stated that "[t]he Government believes in localism and the enormous benefits of fostering local cultural, economic and political identities", adding that "[w]e are driving forward greater transparency at all levels of public life – and the challenge and scrutiny of local journalists is vital to that... I want a modern regulatory environment which will help nurture a new generation of hungry, ambitious and profitable local media companies" (Hunt, 2010). The focus on localisation is centred on commercial growth in local television and online services rejecting the previous Labour Government's proposals for Independently Funded News Consortia and redirecting the subsidy allocated to them to the roll-out of superfast broadband around the country. As part of the proposals to grow local television and online services it is also proposing to significantly relax the local cross-media ownership rules with a full local media action plan due for publication in Autumn 2010.

Any approach to revitalising local news services must do three things:

- 1) Recognise and seek to support the link between local news and democracy – how it functions and what is required for it to thrive;
- 2) Consider in detail the demand side of news – What do people want from their local news and why does it matter to them?
- 3) Understand the economic, regulatory and technological context in which the changes are taking place.

This report takes these three factors into account and offers a direct response to the current crisis in local news with concrete suggestions for how to deliver a localism that thrives on an independent local news service that meets the news needs of local communities. Our response draws extensively upon new independent research commissioned by Media Trust that looks at the local news audience to provide a critical analysis of the perceived roles and value of “community” news and information; explores and evaluates the relative importance of different media and digital media; critically assesses the possibilities for local communities to express their voices in the new mediascape; and interrogates barriers to the provision of community, local and hyperlocal content. ¹This research builds upon an extensive 2.5 year research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust that investigated the impact of new digital media on the news in the UK including local and national news, commercial and public service broadcasting, print, broadcast and online, mainstream and alternative news. This included over 170 interviews, 3 mini ethnographies and online content analysis of news (Fenton, 2010). We are also drawing upon a study funded by the Carnegie Trust UK to explore the ways that civil society associations and the media can better interact – whether that revolves around media content, media policy or media ownership (Witschge, Fenton and Freedman, 2010). Conclusions from this body of research are central to concerns regarding the nature and sustainability of news locally and in the regions and to the democratic well being of local communities and communities of interest.

Our earlier research supported the now prevalent view that news media are in crisis: Newspaper circulation and readership levels are at an all time low; there has been a tremendous growth in the number of news outlets available including the advent of, and rapid increase in free papers, the emergence of 24 hour television news and the popularization of online and mobile platforms; a decline in advertising revenue combined with increased investment in new media technologies to attract audiences online alongside cuts in personnel as profit margins have decreased resulting in a negative impact on journalism (Freedman, 2010). Put simply, in the digital age the space for news has expanded exponentially and the speed at which it has to be delivered has become virtually instantaneous with fewer professional journalists employed to do the job. The depreciation of the current business model together with increasing commercial pressures is, as a result, devaluing the pursuit of news journalism that is in the public interest and impacting in particular on expensive journalism that relies on original newsgathering and investigative reporting.

¹ This research was based on 4 in-depth, expanded case studies. The case studies were selected to cover areas that contained both different socio-demographic and different news characteristics – an urban metropolitan area with a diverse population served by thriving local and hyper local news media in the South East (Kings Cross, London); a suburban town that has recently lost its local newspaper to be replaced by an online news service in the East Midlands (Long Eaton); a rural area in the North with a successful community radio station used to engage disadvantaged and isolated communities (Cowling, Yorkshire); and an area that has emerging digital platforms that embrace the use of social media for sharing information and campaigning in the west midlands (Birmingham) (See Appendix 2 for more details on these areas). The case studies included an analysis of the community news outlets/platforms and their relationship with mainstream news media through interviews with key protagonists and also with mainstream local news providers. 3 focus groups were also held in each of the communities served for each case study (12 in total). The focus groups included up to 8 individuals in each and covered the key variables associated with the local community in question taking particular account of age, gender, ethnicity and social class (the variables that raise most issues associated with either internet usage and/or news consumption). Further interviews with news policy leaders also informed the research (See Appendix 3 for a list of all interviewees).

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In this environment there is evidence of journalists being thrust into news production more akin to creative cannibalization than the craft of journalism. As they need to fill more space and to work at greater speed while also having improved access to stories and sources online, they talk less to their sources (both the elite and the non-elite such as civil society associations), are captured in desk-bound, cut and paste, administrative journalism. Ready-made fodder from tried and tested sources takes precedence over the sheer difficulty of dealing with the enormity of user generated content or the overload of online information (Phillips, 2010).

This is not a phenomenon linked entirely to the use of new technology. Earlier research (Franklin, 1986) into the influence of local government public relations on local newspapers in the County of Northumberland noted similar concerns and concluded that 96% of press releases issued by the local authority generated stories in the local press with significant recycling of the same news between newspapers in the same regional newspaper group. Franklin (1986) also points out that press releases were often reproduced wholesale with little evidence of any original journalism. Moreover a newspaper's willingness to engage in what Davies (2008) has called "churnalism" bore a direct correlation with the size of the newspaper and the number of journalists it employed. So, the issue of local news media failing to deliver a high quality news service is far from new (Franklin, 2006; Franklin and Murphy, 1998) and is not simply a consequence of the online environment, although this may have contributed to it through the decoupling of news from advertising and the need to invest in new technology. Rather, it is linked more fundamentally to the increasing marketisation of news and the need to increase profit margins that has resulted in less staff doing more work, undermining journalism and the provision of news in the public interest:

**||...they (leaders of the big regional press companies) performed just as they were obliged by the ruthless logic of an economic system that demands ever-increasing profits. To do that they kept a close eye on the "costs", ensuring that the staffing of mechanical jobs involved in newspaper production were pared to the bone. There was little fat to cut by the time, about 5 years or so ago, that revenue began to fall away, as the rivers of gold (aka classified ads) flowed towards internet sites the papers did not own. Yet the insistent demands of the market meant that profits must be maintained. So who could be cut next? The answer sadly was journalists (...)
the net result of the cuts was a diminution of journalism. ||
(Roy Greenslade, Evening Standard, April 2009)**

In other words, reinvestment in their product and recognition and development of the product's value was superseded by market ambition and the desire to deliver extensive profits to shareholders. This is a trend that has continued. Franklin (2009) cites an ABN AMRO Bank report in July 2008 that states, "One saving grace for Trinity in recent years has been management's ability to surprise on the cost base, with a strong discipline to go out and cut out the 'fat' and (some would say) even the muscle. We expect this trend to continue,

as indicated by management yesterday, that there will be a £15–£20m restructuring charge taken in 2008 to pay for further cost cuts”, meaning of course, more redundancies.

In the worst cases local newspapers are simply being closed down altogether. The Newspaper Society notes that 101 local papers closed down between January 2008 and August 2009. And the Advertising Association have forecast that the press advertising market is likely to shrink yet further by between £700m and £1.6bn by 2019 with the regional press taking most of the impact (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2009). Television news locally and in the regions and local commercial radio news is also struggling with commercial radio revenues down by 5% in 2008 – a pattern that looks set to continue (Ofcom, 2009). Many commercial local radio stations are reduced to absolute minimal staffing on news desks, one commercial station covered in this research was functioning with only two journalists trying to serve the entire region, feed the website and edit the programmes. The Guardian Media Group’s decision to sell their regional media division to Trinity Mirror is indicative of the wider struggles in local and regional press. Operating across media platforms GMG regional media saw its profits decline year on year since 2005. The recession accelerated that decline, and in the last financial year GMG Regional Media incurred an operating loss of £0.1 million when in 2009 it made a £0.5 million profit (Guardian Media Group, 2010), it was no longer sustainable and was sold. Interestingly, Trinity Mirror did not buy the GMG’s city television station Channel M commenting “that we don’t see ‘City TV’ as a viable proposition. Our research suggests that the costs are too high and the revenues too low to support a sustainable business model” (Sly Bailey, June, 2010, <http://www.how-do.co.uk/north-west-media-news/north-west-broadcasting/city-tv-isn%92t-sustainable-says-trinity-mirror-boss-201006098288/> <<http://www.how-do.co.uk/north-west-media-news/north-west-broadcasting/city-tv-isn%92t-sustainable-says-trinity-mirror-boss-201006098288/>>).

Success in local and regional news now appears increasingly to depend on scale. This means more mergers and more takeovers with larger companies serving bigger regions with, as this research reveals, less and less relevance for local people. Since the 1990s, following successive relaxation of ownership rules in the Broadcasting Act of 1996 and the 2003 Communications Act we have seen a rapid consolidation of the newspaper industry into a handful of regionally based monopolies (see below) that dominate the market. Despite this, local news services have faced ongoing investment cuts in the commercial sector in recent decades. The top five companies’ share of the weekly and free-sheet market soared from 27% to 70% and from 38% to 75% respectively between 1989 and 2002 (Curran and Seaton 2003: 76). Cuts have often been made irrespective of market conditions. In 2006, the Times reported that the Trinity Mirror Group, one of the largest owners of local news titles in the UK, had axed 300 jobs in spite of a ‘buoyant’ market². But large organisational structures with significant corporate demands that have now become financial burdens are also part of the problem (Picard, 2010). Yet more liberalisation of cross-media ownership rules in local and regional media is likely to exacerbate this issue and increases the danger of further diminishing the reason people turn to local news in the first

² The NUJ in their 2009 submission to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee Inquiry noted that in the 12 months prior to their submission Trinity Mirror had axed 1200 jobs.

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place – to have a voice, to hear stories from their local community and see their local lives reflected. The research discussed below explicitly highlights that **local news that is not local is not news.**

It is clear that in a commercial environment, large news organisations with rising profit expectations foreground rationalization and marketization at the expense of ideal democratic objectives in a way that has led to both an homogenization of content across the board with news in the regions and locally that is less and less relevant to the people it is supposed to serve. In this environment the core value of local newspapers, journalists with fingers on the local pulse delivering news and investigative journalism that speaks directly to the readers lives, is dissipated.

A similar pattern can be seen in local and regional television news. During swingeing cutbacks in 2008/9 ITV merged regions and cut programmes, reducing output from 17 programmes across England and Wales to just nine. Under Michael Grade's leadership, ITV made it clear that it no longer wished to make regional news and would cease to do so in the near future. In 2008 Ofcom approved ITV plans to reduce its public service commitment to local and regional programming, including an overall reduction in news minutage as well as a 50% cut in non-news content. In 2009 Ofcom stated that, although one of ITV's priorities should be on nations and regions news programmes, especially in peak time, in the face of serious economic pressures and the need to protect regional newsgathering there would be changes in the pattern for regional news with sharing of some material between neighbouring regions. Under the new leadership of Archie Norman and Adam Crozier, ITV has now shifted its position saying it wishes to retain regional news but in what form and for what kind of public benefit remains to be seen.

So the same pattern emerges across commercial television news and newspapers – economies of scale result in the diminution of the very thing people are crying out for: local news that serves their local community. What we are left with is a form of remote localism that has its sights set on the bottom line rather than the news service people want.

|| Yeah for Central News it used to be regionalised, didn't it? East Midlands and West Midlands, but they moved together so there's just one Midlands news now and obviously half of it is irrelevant, well, you know, not as interesting. Whereas the news on BBC they still run an East Midlands programme. So I tend to watch the BBC rather than the Central because it's more specific to the location ||
(Long Eaton young people's focus group)

It is against this backdrop that the BBC Trust first "challenged BBC management to respond to licence fee payers wanting better local services" (Diane Coyle, quoted in BBC Trust press release, June 2008). The widening gap in local news provision was viewed as a public service problem. The BBC Trust's chairman Michael Lyons noted: "There's nobody who can be satisfied with the quality of local news in most parts of the United Kingdom". (BBC Trust Press Release

15th October, 2008). And the problem has not gone away: “there is a gap in regional/local news and it’s a public service issue but we’re not currently filling it” (interview, Stephen Mitchell, Head of BBC News Programming).

The BBC’s local news proposals in 2008 prompted commercial media firms to argue that extending BBC local services threatened to obliterate commercial competition. Even though BBC local news proposals were focussed on internet platforms and, in particular, using technology to deliver hyperlocal content, they were fiercely challenged by commercial providers. Regional and local newspapers were especially vocal in their opposition and the government backed the regional newspapers’ case “on competition grounds”. The BBC proposals were duly considered to impact negatively on the competitive health of the market, to the detriment of consumer welfare. This view was underpinned by Ofcom’s Market Impact Assessment (MIA) which found that the proposals would reduce commercial revenues by four per cent and have a serious negative effect “on future commercial innovation in online local news, sports and weather services” (Ofcom, 2008). But it is not clear from the MIA report, nor from the Trust’s associated Public Value Test (PVT), how this impact was measured against the consumer benefit that might have been derived from the additional investment in an underserved market. The overall sentiment expressed in the MIA was that the crucial competitive threat lay in the future online domain, “a central issue being whether local [commercial] online news services will be able to generate sufficient advertising revenues”. The question remains however, whether the BBC did in fact pose a competitive threat along the lines suggested. A compelling case made recently suggests otherwise, arguing that traditional players in the local sector have fundamentally misunderstood the digital threat, perceiving it as stemming chiefly from content providers with formats similar to print publications (but with less favourable or unsustainable revenue structures), rather than from ‘pureplay’ companies such as Google that are luring local advertisers with dynamic pay per click models (Heaton, 2008). Instead of adapting to this new model of revenue extraction, traditional media companies are inclined towards attempts to preserve their mode of operation and what remains of their advertising markets, arguably exemplified in their response to the BBC local proposals.

Arguments against the BBC proposals went beyond competitive issues and invoked broader public interest goals, in particular the notion of diversity and its connection to a pluralised market, claiming that the proposals would leave local news provision in the UK with “a very strong BBC and nothing else” (Carolyn McCall, Chief Executive of the Guardian Media Group quoted in testimony presented to Parliament Commons Select Committee for Culture, Media and Support, July 2008).

Even if we were to accept at face value the implied risk to the public interest associated with public service dominance, the PVT did not enable adequate reflection on recommendations that might have countered this risk. Suggestions were made by stakeholders for “editorial policies specifically designed to sustain citizenship and civil society at the local level” (PVT response from the Voice of the Listener and Viewer) or funds to commission “local public service television or...

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locally produced content chosen for relevance by the communities involved" (PVT response from the Community Media Association). Such ideas were perhaps indicative of ways in which the social and cultural benefits associated with pluralism might be achieved by means other than the market system. There could also have been more imaginative thinking around the need to preserve the commercial market for local media in the face of an enhanced BBC role. The Swedish government for instance, has long operated a system of allocating press subsidies to non-market leaders with a view to sustaining minority voices and diversity within the print sector (Curran and Seaton, 2003).

The response of the BBC management to the Trust's decision suggests that expanding public service in local news markets is now a dim prospect: "We should move on and not return to it for the foreseeable future" (Mark Thompson, November 2008). Some of the budget allocated for the local news proposals has however been re-invested in local news content, according to the Trust's recommendations:

|| We enhanced our weekend bulletin coverage (...) and we are in the process of investing some money in local political reporters for local radio stations because one of the concerns of the Trust was about the lack of local government accountability. So some of the money went to that, but not of all of it ||
(Interview, BBC news executive)

The problem as far as the public interest is concerned, is that the gap in local news provision that prompted the BBC local proposals has not been filled and BBC representatives were quick to point out that there is little sign of the market doing what it claimed it would do in the absence of BBC expansion:

|| I haven't seen the market seize the ground that everyone was complaining that we were going to march into particularly so far as the local paper markets go and I can't say I'm surprised by that ||
(Interview, BBC news executive)

The focus of development is now to look at partnerships with local independent radio and online providers in order to "point and guide people to places where a greater degree of local reporting is going on". But this is far from being an unproblematic solution with regard to limited resources leaving the BBC prone to accusations of exploitation from the community and voluntary sector:

|| (The BBC) think that just because it's got the word "community" in it it's free. But it costs us to do what we do the same as it would cost them ||
(Interview, Community Radio station manager)

|| There's a limit to how much more we can do. I just don't have the staff (...) people we find say well why x and not y and stuff like that and we have to look quite hard at those (...) and you have to work quite hard at it to make sure that people don't think you're just ripping off their stories and that you give them something back. But I, to be honest, I think if we're going to develop anywhere in a more local concept that's where it will be. It'll be about partnerships and helping people who are there rather than us, kind of, jumping in ||
(Interview, BBC news executive)

In this context, it seems clear that even though there now is a plethora of media outlets, and citizens and civil society can publish media content more easily than ever before, protecting and enhancing a genuinely local news service has become more rather than less important. Frequently, the internet is cited as the solution. Here, local people can provide hyper-local content at low cost. But there are serious reservations about whether the internet on its own can fill this gap. Although online newspapers are growing and their print versions are declining, empirical evidence shows that people use the internet mostly for entertainment purposes and online they are more likely to seek out only those fragments that are of particular interest to them rather than the pursuit of news and current affairs information more generally (Hilt and Lipschutz, 2004). And although news consumption online is steadily increasing there is very little evidence to support the view that the internet has been established as a primary source of news except for a very small minority (Castells, 2009: 231). It is also argued that the abundance of choice available online results in less exposure to news and current affairs – just as it may be easier to find it is also easier to avoid (Prior, 2007). It is worth bearing in mind that audiences are still predominantly focussed on traditional media with 43 per cent stating a preference to offline media compared to 26 per cent online and 70 per cent stating they prefer print compared to 17 per cent who prefer an online source (KPMG, 2010). And of course, issues of the digital divide are still very much with us with over a quarter of households in England still without an internet connection direct to their home and 11% of UK households still unable to get broadband at 2MB (Ofcom, 2009).

We also know that most people still get most of their news diet from the television with nearly 50 per cent stating that television is their main source for local news and information compared with just 24 per cent for newspapers and 12 per cent for radio – while the internet comes in at only 4 per cent (Barnett, 2010). While recognizing that the internet is not the democratic panacea that many believe it to be, we should also note that the average UK viewer spent 18 hours per year watching early evening regional news bulletins in 2008, an hour less than in 2003 (Ofcom, 2009).³ Other research notes that viewing for the main ITV evening news bulletin fell by a huge 38% between 1997 and 2007 with viewing of the main BBC news bulletin falling by 11% (Aalberg, Aelst and Curran, 2010). Taking all these factors into account it would seem that consumption of news overall in the UK is falling, that local news in particular is failing to deliver and the internet is not currently filling the gap.

³ Viewing of the early evening news bulletins in the South West was the highest of the English regions, at 23 hours per year, down by one hour since 2003. Whereas viewers in London watched by far the least, at just ten hours per person, three hours less than in 2003. (Ofcom, 2009: 80)

Section 3

Big Society Writ Small

Set this against other research on local democracy and the picture becomes even more worrying. It appears that a sense of belonging and personal connections to and in a locality together with satisfaction with the work of local agencies represent key factors in the quality of life of individuals and communities (Duffy and Lee Chan, 2009). While various aspects of the decline of local public life and provision of public services (including the closure of local schools, hospitals and post offices⁴) have repeatedly made the headlines, a 2008 survey by Ipsos MORI suggests that 80% of respondents are overall satisfied with their area (compared to 75% in 2006). However, at the same time satisfaction with the way local councils run public services is down from 53% in 2006 to 45% (ibid.: 5). The survey hints at a significant 'information gap' between councils and their electorate and also suggest that little progress has been made in facilitating the participation of local individuals and communities in the decision-making process with a meagre 29% of respondents feeling they had any influence over local decisions (ibid.: 31).

The involvement of the wider public in local government has been central to local government reform and revitalization of local democracy since the 1960s (Rao, 2000). It has been pursued particularly strongly since the late 1990s as part of New Labour's third way of politics. A series of policy documents and legislation emerged in the process, including the Local Government Act (2000), Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) and the White Papers *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (2006) and *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* (2008). The assessment of the performance of local councils has also changed. It is currently made against so-called local area agreement targets and a wide set of national indicators. The perceived ability to influence decisions in the local area is a key indicator of community empowerment.

It seems that councils recognize the possible role of media in achieving greater empowerment of local communities and also in fulfilling their new duty to involve representatives of local people (introduced in the 2007 Act and in force since 1 April 2009). This specifies that three means of engagement need to be undertaken: to inform, consult and involve local people in decisions about how it provides services. The publication and distribution of free council newsletters as well as the use of new technologies (particularly the internet but also social networking media) are understood as contributing to the achievement of these

⁴ Rural communities have been particularly badly hit by the closure of local post offices. A Business and Enterprise Committee Report, 'Post Offices - Securing their Future' prepared for the House of Commons argued that rural post offices played important roles for local businesses as well as for local communities, particularly in relation to social cohesion.

objectives. However, at the same time, independent scrutiny of the councils' performance has been in decline. This is partly due to the decrease in the coverage of councils by local media (see below), but possibly also due to a change in the way councils conduct their meetings and communicate with journalists. Morrison points out that the Local Government Act (2000) introduced Westminster-style cabinets/executives and relaxed their obligation to meet publicly as well as enabling directly elected mayors and executive leaders to appoint political assistants. The combination of these factors results in "the ability of council cabinets/executives to take policy decisions in secret, while minimizing the ability of the press, public, or indeed councillors shorn of 'frontbench' roles to scrutinize or challenge their actions" (2010:2). This certainly resonates with our own findings. One focus group spoke in particular how:

|| Everything seems to be secretive you know (...) sometimes you say to yourself, 'who do I write to?' (...) you need some kind of leadership, somewhere that you can contact. There seems to be nobody about ||
(Participant, Birmingham elderly group)

The importance of local news and journalism increases with a felt decline in local democracy. This research reveals a clear relationship between the two that we ignore at our peril.

Section 4

The Importance of News and Journalism

This research identifies a genuine need for local quality news and journalism. In particular, people interviewed for this research pointed to a lack of information about what is going on around them but also a scarcity of investigative reporting from journalists who know the area and tread the beat. Local people seek reporting from those they know understand what goes on locally, or who are at least willing to learn. This means having a local presence, being seen to ferret out information, dig behind it, and make sense of it. They want analytic depth and scepticism regarding those in power, context, and debate. They want stories that are compelling because they are relevant to them and they want to be part of the conversation.

Local news was clearly seen as enriching the lives of the interviewees through providing information about the local area and what is happening within it but it was also crucially felt to provide a means of identification with others in the locality and with issues that are of importance to them. However disparate a local community might be, learning about what goes on and the various issues in a different neighbourhood near to you increases local knowledge and understanding and facilitates a sense of belonging amongst newcomers. A good local news service in this sense is one that gives a voice to the voiceless; that is prepared to listen to and represent the concerns of ordinary local people; and is willing to act as a fourth estate, holding power to account. The willingness of a local news service to campaign on behalf of local issues is also central to their position in and of the community, rather than an outsider coming in and preaching on issues they are felt to know little about or bear little relevance to the actual concerns of the community.

|| The truth is ordinary people, they don't have any voice in a national paper, and broadcast, actually. And local could be and should be, you know, should be a voice of the people who don't have any voice outside ||
(Participant, Kings Cross middle-aged group)

Local news has a more immediate impact on people's lives than national news. As well as providing a space for campaigns and fourth estate journalism, local news (unlike national) also provides space for positive news. This is important to the participants not only in the context of prevalent negative news but also because it leads to feelings of pride or contentment in relation to their locality. It draws audiences into their communities. This form of community knowledge reporting enhances empathy and understanding about life in our communities.

Easily accessible local news content appears to be most important for the elderly for whom accessibility means not having to leave their homes and not having to use the Internet. Based on our research most people (and particularly the young and middle-aged) are skilled media users, who know where to turn to for the particular news/information they need. This is hardly surprising in a mediated world but what was surprising is the central importance people, especially the elderly, place on the benefits of local professional journalism with a stated preference for local *newspapers* over other sources of news. Local print media are also particularly attractive to the middle-aged groups. This is due partly to the content and also to the different experience that a print medium provides (“everything in one place”, “easy to leave and get back to”, “easy to take around” etc.). Print media was felt more able to carry issues of local relevance and more likely to run local campaigns that could result in a positive benefit to the community. Television news, on the other hand, was felt to cover too wide an area, serve too many people and not go into enough depth in their coverage of issues.

|| **But then when somebody comes along and says: “Wouldn’t it be good if we had television stations that served a population of forty thousand?” The answer is, no, they’ll be execrable, they’ll be just dreadful crap. I’d much rather go on You Tube and see something that somebody two doors down shot and stuck on You Tube than... ||**
(Participant, Birmingham middle-aged group)

People also stated that they were prepared to pay for newspapers that delivered news they felt was relevant to their local community. This was particularly noticeable in Long Eaton where the local paid-for newspaper the Long Eaton Advertiser recently closed down:⁵

P2: I’d rather pay for it.

P1: Well you pay for it, you know you’re then paying for...

P3: You’re going to read it, aren’t you?

P1: You’re going to pay for a newspaper rather than something that’s just full of adverts.

P3: And it was for us. [...] it was informing us of our community and people that we all know as well [...] And about your neighbourhood.
(Participants, Long Eaton middle-aged group)

⁵ The Long Eaton Advertiser was owned by Trinity Mirror and in 2008 returned profits of £145.2m. The NUJ (2009:4) state that the reason given for its closure was “difficult trading conditions”. Once published from within Long Eaton printing was then transferred to Tamworth and its offices were moved out of town. As a result the paper began to lose its connection to the area it was supposed to serve leading to a reduction in meaningful content for the local readership and a cycle of decline set in.

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Regardless of age or location, the participants were also highly critical of media and use them in sophisticated and complex ways. In the course of our research, they referred regularly to the “commercialization of news”, “dumbing down”, “Americanization of media”, “celebrity culture”, “biases”, and “a lack of long-term investigations”. At the same time, when referring to news media that they understand as fulfilling their roles well, they used terms such as “be of benefit”, “educational”, “factual”, “relevant”, and “useful”. They also addressed issues relating to access to news online and fragmentation of audiences and news contents:

|| We tend to select our news now, because if we go on the net we read what we want to read, but we don't read anything...so consequently, we are sort of narrow casting our information ||
(Participant, Kings Cross middle-aged group)

|| Sort of peer to peer news things like Twitter, where you just end up (...) browsing stuff because other people who are probably kind of like you because you're following them, then start feeding through, is that sense of kind of self-selection ||
(Participant, Kings Cross middle-aged group)

National print media are subject to particular criticism. Participants saw them as politically or ideologically biased or of very low quality:

|| Like, with the Sun paper, and stuff, I just think I never really believe what I read anyway in those kinds of papers so it's, like, you'll read one thing and it'll say another thing on the news ||
(Participant, Cowling young people's group)

Whereas the local newspaper is seen as something quite different:

|| The local paper they have to earn everybody's trust with everything that they print. National newspapers they're not too worried really, in terms of what they actually put in there (...) they're like something in the distance (...) you're not involved. The local newspaper has to be about the local area. And it's not just about Cowling obviously, it's about the whole area. But it is locally produced and it has to be factual ||
(Participant, Cowling elderly group)

|| Whereas from a local level I suppose, it's local people writing the news and generating the news then you're not going to have that bias maybe ||
(Participant, Long Eaton middle-aged group)

There was however, fierce criticism of what was characterised as a long-term decline in the quality of local news journalism which was chiefly associated with content convergence and the increasing primacy of commercial values in local news provision. Interviewees professed a strong sense for the loss of local journalism as watchdog and an equally strong desire for its return. Participants often referred to a form of everyday 'watchdogging' that goes with journalists' actual presence in the community and at events. When they are around, even if equipped only with notepads and pencils, "politicians have to speak respectfully about the political process, watch what they say about other subjects, and refrain from scandalous acts. Corrupt politicians take their hands out of the till, and the military is careful not to shoot at civilians if the news media are watching" (Houston, 2010). The call was for active, visible reporting that speaks to people, recognises and listens to the various voices in community – particularly those without authority or power, reinforces standards and thereby holds power to account:

- P1:** You think, where's the quality journalism here where people are going out and getting under people's skin and getting their info?
- P2:** It's lack of interviews as well, it seems, like, interviews, it's more now, can you give me a quote, rather than actually getting a background of actually who somebody is.
- P3:** Let's get the reporters back out into the communities, actually reporting about what is going on.
- P4:** Yeah, they should have foot patrols.
- P5:** You know, send them around the schools, send them to community centres, send them into old people's homes, get people's opinions, people's stories.
- P6:** It's as if the reporters aren't out actually looking for stories, it's as if...a lot of time it feels like...and I know for a fact that they do, but they just trawl the internet looking for stories that they can publish, that they can reword and then publish. (Participants, Cowling middle-aged group)

This research shows that people feel a genuine loss of independent reporting that provides information, investigation, analysis and community knowledge in the coverage of local affairs. Reporting the local news means telling citizens a little of what they know and a lot of what they would not otherwise know about an area that they know very well. Independent reporting should reveal not only what local government and private interests are doing but also the motivation behind their actions. It should dig deeper and provide people with insight that takes time and resources to reach. This is the watchdog function of the news and

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it is a function that is still at the heart of what people want from their local news service – reporting that holds truth to power and keeps local authorities, business and professional leaders accountable to the legal and moral framework of society. As Downie and Schudson (2009:5) point out “reporting the news also undergirds democracy by explaining complicated events, issues and processes in clear language.”

Representation was also a key factor noted particularly by the young people’s group in Kings Cross. Although it was generally felt that local outlets better represented them than national news, they still expressed a sense of exclusion from traditional media such as the local paper. To some extent this may be offset by engagement with voluntary and community media projects as expressed by one respondent. The key limitation expressed here though was that it did not seem to matter much to the outside world. This echoes other groups in reflecting a ‘twin’ local news need – a platform that enables communities to represent themselves to each other and one that enables them to represent themselves to society at large. A recurring distinction in the concept of local ‘voice’ seems to be between one that is internal to the community and one that is external to the wider society and centres of power.

The local council free-sheet on the other hand, was not considered to fill the gap and was felt by most to be peddling a particular political agenda:

.....

|| It’s more a propaganda for council. If you look at it, there’s nothing about community as such like an input and it looks so very, it doesn’t look like a newspaper to me, it looks like some sort of election leaflet which they’ve pushed through the door ||
(Participant, Kings Cross elderly group)

|| I think there are better ways of contacting or having a relationship with people in Birmingham than publishing a magazine for Birmingham City Council ||
(Participant, Birmingham middle-aged group)

.....

Local councils use their publications and communication strategies as a means of fulfilling their statutory obligation to inform, consult and engage and (as noted above) as a means of achieving national indicator 4: “the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality” that relates to the building of stronger communities and to the objective of building more cohesive, empowered and active communities.⁶ It would appear from this research that this is misplaced and the importance of a news service that exists independently from the local council is far more likely to meet the objectives as stated.

Section 5

If Local News is not Local it's not News

Ofcom (2007) note that only 3% of people want to see less coverage of current events in their region; 97% want the same or more coverage of current events in their region; and 91% think that ITV's geographical footprint is already too wide or about right. The meaning of local for our participants was a very tightly defined geographical area, that they directly identified with and the more specific that news could be to that locale, the better it was deemed to be. Genuinely local news of the type outlined above was meaningful to them because it spoke to things that directly affected their lives and documented people they knew:

|| If it's not within a 10 mile radius, it's not local news as far as I'm concerned. (...) It might as well be national ||
(Participant, Birmingham elderly group)

|| ... it's within the local community you want it, you don't want news about what's happening down in Gloucester or Hereford you want your own local news ||
(Participant, Birmingham elderly group)

The NUJ (2009) note that the Birmingham Post and Mail plus their associated titles had 16 offices ten years ago and they are now down to four. Five years ago they had approximately 230 journalists, now that has shrunk to around 160. They have also lost all specialist journalists in transport, home affairs, the industrial correspondent, the community affairs editor along with three chief reporters. The courts/crime specialists have more than halved and business specialists have gone from nine to six. This is mirrored in many other places as news-desks, sub-editors and journalists are moved to centralised locations that serve regions rather than locales often many miles from the communities they are supposed to be speaking to and reporting on. With the increased pressures in the newsroom noted above, journalists now have a limited knowledge of the areas they cover and rarely get out to do local journalism. As a director of Times Newspapers Ltd. Observed:

|| I love the way local newspapers say 'we invest in journalism'. (...) They do invest in journalism, I'm quite sure they do. But it has to be a disproportionate investment if they are going to get back the kind of thing that's makes you want to go and get the local newspaper because it's campaigning on behalf of .. what ever it is ||

Local news that operates out of premises removed from the local vicinity, with journalists who are out of touch with the communities they serve, ceases to be relevant to local people. And something very tangible is lost in the process. The social benefits of local news were recounted time and time again by our participants. And when they had lost their local newspaper, as in Long Eaton, they felt they had lost far more than news about the area, they had lost a

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sense of community and belonging that went with it: "it was informing us of our community and people that we all know"(Long Eaton, elderly group). While there is a sense of accountability when the paper/journalist is physically present locally, with distance this disappears. This was true for virtually all the participants in the focus groups in Long Eaton but was particularly marked for the elderly:

|| Because it (local news) makes the community, doesn't it? It makes it all feel like you belong some where, I mean you're part of something ||
(Participant, Long Eaton elderly group)

Where it was felt that a newspaper served a local community well as in the Camden New Journal (see below) in Kings Cross, the elderly participants were unanimously supportive of it as both a community anchor and as a means of bringing about social change and impacting local policy.

Camden New Journal

The paper was one of the first independent local London titles. It was established as a result of a management buy out of the Camden Journal in 1981 which followed a two year dispute between the management and owners over the planned closure of the paper. It was launched in 1982 with the aid of £50,000 bank loan (government guaranteed) and support from the Co-operative Development Agency (CDA). Today the paper employs a staff of 30 and has a turnover of £2 million. It has also established the neighbouring publication Islington Tribune and a central London events magazine West End Extra.

The influence of the CDA enshrined the paper's political orientation from the outset. According to Eric Gordon (managing editor):

|| The paper's core philosophy is a belief in the common ownership of land, commerce and industry. That is still part of its constitution ||

The paper lost its initial funding but then secured a £100,000 loan from the Greater London Council and by the mid 1980s the company had reached profitability and repaid most of its debt. Gordon cites the development of physical assets (such as buying their own premises), an egalitarian pay structure (minimising labour costs and maximising staff morale), intimate knowledge of the local market, and an expansion into other titles as the key factors in ensuring the paper's endurance. But most of all, it has survived by being independent:

|| Today, we are managing, but it is because we can survive on a small net profit. A big company would not tolerate our performance. They would close us down ||

The paper has a strong reputation for providing voice and support to local campaigns and resident concerns. In February this year it helped to organise a major protest in north London aimed at saving the Accident and Emergency wing of the Whittington hospital. The paper claimed the protest attracted over 5,000 people and covered the event extensively both in print and video online.

Serving a precise local area is not enough in and of itself, however. People placed great importance on having the physical presence of a news organisation and of professional journalists in the actual locality so that they can build a relationship with them and feel that they are part of what they are covering. The materiality of a news-room that existed in the community, providing a beating heart of journalism that fed, supported and sustained part of local life was identified as integral to the fostering of a community spirit and the enabling of local democracy. This was stated in recognition of the lack of face to face contact brought about by technology and contemporary lifestyles. The establishment of a community space can do much to empower local people and create a stronger sense of community cohesion – this is when local news matters to people. Remove it and you disconnect it from the very thing that was keeping it going – local life and local people.

|| You'll have a (news) organisation that's based in one particular area and has been covering that area for the last fifty years and they'll move to another area close by. So their connection with that area just disappears and, in fact, quite often, the response of the people in the area that they were covering is to stop buying the newspaper, (...) because people know that that disconnection has happened ||
(Participant, Birmingham middle-aged group)

Of course, the age of the internet has given rise to the interactive and participative characteristics of the Web that opens up the potential for everyone with the right tools to play the role of a journalist through the sharing of news and information. This impact comes in three main forms. Firstly, civic journalism is increasing; secondly, citizen access to public information and government services is expanding; and thirdly, citizens are more and more able to get direct contact with news sources themselves (Pavlik, 2001; Fenton and Witschge, 2010). Our case studies revealed several examples of where citizens had stepped into the fold and set up their own online news service – these are detailed in the next section.

So, even if news organisations were to disappear tomorrow, information, investigation, analysis and community knowledge would not cease to exist. But we would lose something else. Where people had experienced this loss in a relatively small way in this study, through the loss of a local newspaper, they were quite clear that they were worse off as a result. Worse off politically in terms of their public knowledge, and worse off socially in terms of their community understanding. This reminds us that there is not just a need for news but for newsrooms that allow consistent and stable reporting, analysis and investigation by recognized, trusted and experienced journalists with an infrastructure that ensures they are both respected and legally protected to scrutinise power effectively.

Section 6

Community Costs and Opportunities

The Carnegie UK's inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland (2010) identified a number of pressing findings that are relevant to this report. In particular it noted the growing isolation of the poorest and a need for civil society associations to support and empower the most marginalized and ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon. This was echoed in this research where many, not just the poorest, felt disenfranchised and powerless to effect change. This is still true despite the potential of digital media to enable access and aid equality through low operating costs and ease of use. Similarly, the Carnegie report points to social cohesion being under pressure and the fear that society will further fragment along socio-economic grounds, adding to a growing concern that the online world will bring yet more fragmentation as audiences are channelled to and seek out specific interests and issues. They also indicate that there are diminishing arenas for public deliberation along with the marginalization of dissent especially in relation to those that lack power or confidence to voice their concerns or those who have non-mainstream views – this narrowing of the public sphere appears to be happening despite the expansion of mediated space and multiplicity of media platforms and claims regarding interactivity, speed and reach of online communications.

The research undertaken for this report puts the demise of local news media at the centre of these concerns with many participants stating a relationship between a decline in places for community contact such as local shops or the post office and the importance of local news media in preserving community identity, particularly with reference to the decline in community gathering spots:

|| Well I think probably because we're all busy these days, and you don't actually congregate in the shops on here. When the Post Office was here, I used to see everybody and you'd stand and have a natter. Whereas that doesn't happen anymore, and you'd find out things. Whereas now I think we're more reliant on the newsletter than we used to be, you know for that reason ||

(Participant, Cowling elderly group)

As noted above, the elderly faced significant problems in terms of access to local news. Local print media play a particularly important role in the lives of the elderly in terms of providing them with the types of local content that they expressed a need for. Why local print media? First of all, print media are easy to access for less mobile elderly people, as these often "come through the door". Secondly, print media are felt to be more able to cover an area that is geographically contained enough to be understood as local by the audience. Televised local news fulfil the first criterion of easy physical access but they

fail in the second respect. Discussion participants were highly critical of the geographically wide coverage of local televised news in all the locations that we visited. Thirdly, it became clear in the course of the discussions in all the locations that the individuals who felt best served in terms of local news were the ones who had access to and were able to use a variety of news sources, many of them online. The elderly, however, are much less likely to use the Internet at all.

The discussions with elderly people in areas that had a popular widely circulated local print medium (e.g. Camden or Cowling) and in the areas where such a medium was missing highlighted the role of local print media in fostering a sense of belonging in the community. Knowing about local births, deaths and marriages and reading about the achievements of one's grandchildren was as important as getting information about local public services and understanding public issues. The sense of disconnect from the local community and helplessness in achieving change in areas that are of particular concern to the elderly (such as healthcare provision and public safety) linked to the lack of news and information that we detected in our discussions was striking and particularly ironic in an age that is supposedly characterized by high levels of connectivity and information overload:

P1: It's funny, I can't remember who I was speaking to, but there was the – you know when the troops did the march through a few weeks ago. There were very, very few signs around telling people that it was happening [...] Well again, if we'd have had a paper.

P2: What actual times and what the actual route was and different things. ... We used to have all that in Advertiser, it used to tell you everything [...] and I think as well things like that, I think people bothered more about doing community things. When they constantly got it in their face there's going to be a carnival in six weeks, there's going to be the carnival in five weeks and things like that. It makes you want to be more involved in the community. (Long Eaton middle-aged group)

The middle-aged interviewees from Long Eaton also felt badly hit with the closure of the Long Eaton Advertiser that had once chronicled their lives and acted as a material archive of their personal histories – a contemporary indicator that their lives counted and the lives of their families counted and were recorded in the paper:

|| I mean, I don't know, my wedding was in there, and my children were born we put notices in you know, and it just - your whole life's basically from Long Eaton evolved around the Advertiser. Your parents put notices in, you put notices in ||
(Participant, Long Eaton middle-aged group)

Meeting the news needs of local communities

The lack of a local paper reflected a poignant sense of vulnerability and powerlessness that contributed in turn to a feeling of isolation and “not being listened to” by local centres of power:

|| Nobody wants you. Nobody’s interested in you ||
(Participant, Long Eaton elderly)

This could be countered not just by any local newspaper but one that provided a voice to the voiceless and actually sought and took a lead in bringing about social change (possibly through campaigns, naming and shaming etc.).

P1: See I was reading, I can’t remember what it was in, it was on a leaflet [...] and they said that Long Eaton council are going to make emptying dustbins once a month [...] Now if we had a newspaper that would be part of the headlines and then [...] you could all do something about that.

P2: I think the paper gave us a voice didn’t it, and now it doesn’t.
(Participants, Long Eaton Elderly group)

In the case of the Long Eaton Advertiser, the community’s decline and the closure of the paper are closely linked; and so is the possibility to bring about change and bring people together to effect change:

|| Maybe if you had a newspaper and you could get a lot of people’s views, maybe the community would come back and people would start using Long Eaton again because they’re fighting for it, I mean at the moment it’s just, it’s like slowly, slowly dying, isn’t it? ||
(Participant, Long Eaton elderly group)

|| Local journalist – ‘a spokesman to the people’ ||
(Participant, Long Eaton elderly group)

Where a local paper does exist, such as the New Camden Journal, the prospect of enabling change is conspicuous. And it is this conspicuous visibility that is important. The appreciable perceptibility of local issues that a newspaper brings through literally circulating around communities and being available to everyone brings with it a sense of efficacy and community engagement:

|| On certain issues the journal is extremely good because when the council sold the house over my daughter’s head, who is deaf, the Camden (New) Journal took it up and they were absolutely wonderful. I will say that and they supported us as a family more than the council and consequently she got a very nice flat, because they were afraid of more embarrassment ||
(Participant, Kings Cross elderly group)

And where local community radio had been introduced it also helped to build a sense of co-operation and collaboration (see page 34). A sense that something was being done for the good of the area; that the community was pulling together:

|| (Drystone Radio) has only been open for a very short period of time, but gradually it's becoming quite a hum for community activities. For toddlers, for musicians and all kinds of local produce (...) it's a community, it's embryonic of something in the community ||
(Participant, Cowling elderly group)

Community radio stations have a variety of shapes and forms (FM, digital, live, pre-recorded, daily, occasionally etc.) and they provide a variety of (hyper) local news and content. However, where they are successful their role also appears to be that of acting as a centre of community identity and for community activity (especially when they are physically located in a community centre), providing a space for socializing and working together and reaching out to the locale often bringing in vulnerable young people and providing them with the opportunity to work in the radio and broadcasting programmes on local social issues.

|| One purpose is to get out stories that wouldn't find any airtime as it were, to get things told from the perspective of where they're happening ... and the other is to give airspace to people who don't get access to it, ... creating spaces where people can listen to one another ||
(Interview, community radio station manager 1)

These services do however struggle through lack of professional technical assistance. The representatives of community radios argue for more support for the Community Media Association as their main source of technical support and advice. More importantly local people are often unaware of their existence. Where Community Radio has tried to partner with BBC radio it would seem that the rules governing the relationship are overly complicated and restrictive and rarely work in practice:

|| The memorandum and articles of understanding with the BBC, it's not worth the paper it's written on, it really isn't. ... It doesn't work in practice, if they're if they're going to do something like that between community radio and the BBC, 1), stop patronising us and, 2), deal with us, you know, we can help you, you can help us ||
(Interview, community radio station manager 2)

South Birmingham Community Radio

The station was established in August 2008 and today it is run by a mix of volunteers and professionals operating on Restricted Service Licences on FM radio. As well as offering a daily schedule of news and wide ranging special interest content, the project is centred on a local community space in a council owned shop that is used for journalism and broadcasting training, IT education, as well as an informal venue for social events and counselling work. The importance of space is central to the project's raison d'être. According to the station manager:

|| We've got no restaurants around here, there's no bingo, you have to go miles out of your way in order to be able to find any kind of, you know, social space really. So, for us, this is a social space, you can come in and get a cup of tea and sit down, it's just tables and chairs but, at the end of the day, that's all you need, just tables and chairs ||

It was originally funded by the Community Network South West Scheme which was set up to support communities affected by the closure of MG Rover in 2005. But the central case for the project rests on the need to preserve and foster community identity in an area that has been subsumed by the greater Birmingham administrative jurisdiction but excluded from its centrally-oriented local media:

|| We're semi rural, we're not a priority, but we still have the same issues and the same problems as an inner city estate would have, it's just that we've got trees (...). The radio station is the heart because it gives the community a voice, it gives us the chance, not only to be able to socialise and to work together as a team, right, but it also enables us to be able to challenge and to be able to speak to those people that are all the way over in the big city, hello! (Interview, station manager) ||

A typical day's schedule includes various national, regional and local news content sourced by a small network of local journalists, as well as special interest programmes aimed at various groups within the community including women, the elderly and underground/alternative music. The project as a whole is organised around 8 teams all with a particular focus (cafe, production, sports, health, IT etc). Although the project continues to attract funding, it aspires to be less dependent on this source of revenue and replace it as far as possible with revenue from public notice advertisements. They have not yet acquired a community radio license despite winning an award from the Birmingham City Council but hope to win a full license in the next round of frequency allocation for the area.

Sources:

Interview with station manager, 15.5.10 www.southbirminghamradio.co.uk
<http://www.createdinbirmingham.com/2008/08/13/south-birmingham-community-radio/>

Surveying the mediascapes in the selected localities, we identified many non-journalists producing hyperlocal content, often in innovative ways. These individuals (or groups of individuals) characterize themselves neither as news makers nor as journalists and are insistent that they could not and should not be seen as replacing journalists. Rather, their role is important in two respects: 1. they fill in a gap in the provision of (hyper) local media content; and 2. they strengthen local democracy.

There is a wide range of content from local organisations (including voluntary organisations, charities, churches) and local people available especially on the internet. Websites of various organisations, blogs, email lists, newsletters, Facebook pages, MySpace, Twitter as well as printed leaflets, handouts, information on notice boards etc. all provide information and sometimes news that are of local importance. The sources and contents of such information are however fragmented and often difficult to find for local people. As the Kings Cross middle-aged group pointed out:

P1: It's not that you can't get your voice out there, because you can.
I mean never before has it been so easy to get your voice out there.
You can get your voice out in a sort of constant babble.

P2: You can, you can blog yourself to death

P1: Yeah you can, it's just that there's no, it's just a voice

P3: There's no impact

P2: Very little impact

P4: Nobody's listening.

This informal, ad hoc non-journalist produced local content is of value when people know where to find it but it is also intermittent, unpredictable and particular to the individual producing it. This is brought home (literally) by the case of Tony Fountain who set up a self-financed local news website in response to the closure of the Long Eaton Advertiser (see page 36). By his own admission "one man in his bedroom" cannot provide a comprehensive and consistent news service. As such he is driven by his own particular interests, who he happens to meet that day or what he happens to come across in the street. He also recognises the severe limitations of an online only service that is drowned out by the abundance of online content more generally. He compensates for this by the production of a printed news-sheet but cannot afford to distribute this very widely or consistently.

Long Eaton Website

<http://woile.blogspot.com>

Following the closure of Long Eaton Advertiser, the town was left without a local newspaper. At the time Tony Fountain, a local football enthusiast, was running a website on pubs and gigs in town. After putting a story on his website, he noticed a huge increase in hits and decided to concentrate on news and information about Long Eaton. The website is self-financed. It is literally "one man in his bedroom" who is exploring the possibility of generating income from local business advertising.

The main news and information sources for the website include the council, police, local voluntary organisations but most importantly Tony Fountain himself. The site incorporates the home pages of local voluntary organisations. In the month of May 2010 the website received 4,000 hits.

In order to achieve greater visibility for the website among locals, Tony Fountain publishes a printed biweekly digest of the most important news which can be picked up free of charge from the local newsagent.

Tony Fountain's website has filled a significant gap in the provision of local and hyperlocal news and content in Long Eaton. The printed version is particularly important as it allows the elderly who are the least likely users of the Internet to have access to local news.

The website is not intended to replace the Long Eaton Advertiser and Tony Fountain does not consider himself a journalist or news maker. He rejects the idea of charging for access to the website either by readers or by voluntary and charity organisations.

There is no doubt about the popularity of the website and the printed digest among locals, however, this type of (hyper)local 'news production' is particularly vulnerable to disruption as it depends on a single self-financing volunteer. Also, understandably, it is driven by the interests and judgements of a single individual and hence – as Mr Fountain himself stresses – cannot fulfil the roles that the Long Eaton Advertiser used to play in the life of the local community.

Similarly, William Perrin, the founder of Kingscrossenvironment.com, runs the website "simply to make it [Kings Cross] a better place" (Interview, William Perrin). The website receives between 90-120 unique visitors per day. A newsletter goes out to a few hundred subscribers and the site's community videos are also available on YouTube. The website aims to increase the effectiveness of local activism (it is compared to a community newsletter that comes through the door), relies on contributions from volunteers and has an archive of about 800

articles on the area. Like many similar websites, it is self-financed and a model based on advertising income is not desirable or even feasible. "I'm not trying to sell advertising, it doesn't matter that hundreds or thousands of people are looking on my website. What matters to me is that the people who need to know locally are looking at my website" (Interview, local website owner). These types of initiatives are clearly not emerging business models and do not replace local news but can be a compliment to it.

Communities of interest whose reach is not delineated by geography have also had success in developing and distributing news to particular interest groups. Muslim News provides news and information for a diverse faith community for free. The news production is embedded in the community and privately funded by the owner/editor. The aim is not only to enable communication inside the community but also to improve the representation of Muslims in mainstream media. According to the owner and founder, self financing is the only economic option available to him as he is either ineligible for government programmes on grounds of exclusivity to a particular faith group or the source of funding is linked to inappropriate targeting of anti-terrorism and the paper can not survive on advertising alone.

The Birmingham blogging scene and social media networking surgeries run by Podnosh (see page 38) show how digital media can be used "to strengthen democracy or support democracy or advance democracy by networking people and creating spaces in which they meet and have civic conversations and get things done without mediators" (interview with Nick Booth, founder of Podnosh). They are used successfully in disclosing wrongdoing by those in power and in empowering civil society. The surgeries are often visited by representatives of local voluntary and charitable organisations. Nick Booth is also a co-founder of an online site for (hyper) local investigative journalism which crowd-sources investigative stories. In other words, it uses ordinary people (non-journalists) and their knowledge to uncover and investigate issues that affect them. Essentially the site's aim is to collect evidence and create a common resource of knowledge for a community who is interested in it. It is not intended as a replacement for investigative journalists, rather, "it's so that journalists who have a lead that they don't have the time to explore or they don't think is strong enough to justify spending time on, they could put that on the site, and others who might be passionate about it, or who might owe that journalist something from other investigations, they might do a bit of digging and help them out." (Paul Bradshaw, 2010). The funding model is not yet in place, at the time of this research the project had initial funding from Screen West Midlands and 4iP. Individual "investigators" are not paid.

Podnosh Social Networking Media Surgeries

<http://podnosh.com>

Nick Booth from Podnosh , runs free social networking media surgeries in central Birmingham. He and a group of volunteers provide one-to-one advice and help with using these media for enhancing local democracy. As he explains:

|| You can have a local, neighbourhood level civic conversation if you do two things. If you give the people in government at neighbourhood level the authority and the skill to use these online tools and if you do the same with those citizens who feel that they've got something to say. ||

This conversation then ideally leads to holding people in power to account and accomplishing changes that improve the lives of (hyper) local communities without mediators. The creation of networks and facilitation of the conversation is particularly successful among active citizens or online civic activists. The Podnosh 'model' has also spread to other parts of the country.

The surgeries form an important support mechanism that enables local citizens and voluntary/charitable organisations to use new media for democratic purposes more effectively. In essence the volunteers teach and provide advice for locals with varied computer skills and knowledge of social networking media.

A number of factors contribute to the success of this approach: the surgeries are free, regular, conveniently located, held at a convenient time (early evenings), informal and with a hands-on approach. Advance registration is recommended but it is not a requirement, very little administration is involved. The surgeries are self-financed, the cost is kept to a minimum by involving volunteers and locations that can be used for free. The sustainability of this 'model' depends on the same factors as any other type of volunteering. However, making it more bureaucratized and institutionalized would jeopardize its accessibility and question its underlying principles.

All of these media are innovative but do not represent alternative business models. They are mostly self-financed and rely on the work of volunteers. As such they are piecemeal, driven by the interests of the few and in the case of community radio, often struggling to survive. Volunteers, as research by Paul Bradshaw on helpmeininvestigate.com⁷ suggests, tend to work on issues that are of personal interest to them resulting in an inevitable fragmentation of the public sphere and they often have difficulty finding the time to do the work required, barriers that were echoed in our own research:

|| It depends what it's for. If it was for something I'm not interested in then I wouldn't bother, I don't want to waste my time to be honest ||
(Participant, Kings Cross young people's group)

In terms of funding, our interviews with representatives of various innovative and alternative media suggest that they aim to be self-reliant but small grants or public funding would help them ensure more consistent and smoother running. They reject the idea of significant subsidies that may ossify and bureaucratize these emerging models.

Section 7

Ownership and Control

The issues outlined above raise particular questions for the enhancement and development of local news services. These are questions that cannot be adequately addressed without understanding the current patterns of ownership of local media and the consequences of this for local news provision.

The top 20 regional press publishers now account for 87% of all regional and local newspaper titles in the UK, and 97% of the total weekly audited circulation. As of the 1 January 2010 there are now 87 regional press publishers producing a total of 1,212 titles, a drop of 59 titles since January 2009. This group contains 38 publishers producing just one title. The five largest groups: Trinity Mirror [134 titles – 9,581,662 copies], Associated Newspapers [1 title – 3,672,810 copies], Johnston Press [285 titles – 7,949,205 copies], Newsquest [191 titles – 7,148,470 copies] and Northcliffe [129 titles – 6,609,588 copies] own 740 (61%) of all local newspapers titles with an aggregate circulation of 34.96m. The key consequence of this process of merger and takeover has been to reduce radically the number of Groups publishing local newspapers from 200 in 1992, to 137 by 1998 and 87 in 2010 (Newspaper Society Intelligence unit 1 January 2010, ABC/VFD/ Independently audited figures).

Such a high level of concentration of ownership amongst the local press has come about largely in the last decade and works to subdue rather than foster competition. Reeves (2002, cited in Franklin, 2009) notes that local newspapers operate in geographically discreet markets through tacit agreements between corporations to stick to their own patch. In commercial radio four companies control almost 80% of the market (NUJ, 2009). Such consolidation is justified on grounds of economies of scale and cost efficient operation through centralisation of production. This in turn has led to massive job cuts outlined above, a restriction of the news coverage and removal of news from the communities they serve.

Meeting the news needs of local communities

The decline in quality local journalism was strongly associated with convergence and ownership concentration:

- P1:** Yeah, and you get all three papers into one because it used to be, you bought one and you got, like, totally different information between one and the other, not now, it's all filled with almost the same thing bar three or four stories.
- P2:** They're all the one company.
- P3:** A few years ago, they tried it over at Pendle, where after ten o'clock it was linked up with Sunderland, or somewhere, all the northern locals, it wasn't local any more, they had, like, Geordie accents on TVR.
- P4:** Leeds did that for a while after a certain time at night, I think it was cut backs, they linked up with Sheffield and somewhere else.
(Participants, Cowling middle-aged group)

As noted in the previous section, citizen media is indeed growing but it is still overshadowed by the major news organisations. These large traditional news organisations with a strong market position and extensive and established news production infrastructure have responded to the current climate by investing heavily in online platforms. UK citizens predominantly use online news sites that are run by existing news providers further asserting the already significant dominance of the major players (Ofcom, 2007). Furthermore the organisation of web search tends to send more users to the most popular sites in a "winners take all pattern" (Hindman, 2009: 132). Added to this, Ofcom have found that, of the top ten news websites by unique user, four were run by internet-based organisations. These were Google News (a news aggregator site that produces none of its own content), Yahoo! News, AOL News, and MSN News (all sites that rely almost entirely on news agency reports) (House of Lords, 2008a). Ofcom (2006: 2) have stated that plurality of ownership is vital for democracy since it "helps to ensure that citizens have access to a variety of sources of news, information and opinion". But amateur ad-hoc journalism is unlikely to bring the plurality required. It seems ever likely that the voices on the web will be dominated by the larger more established news providers, rather than any form of citizen media, in a manner that limits possibilities for increased pluralism.

Where local newspapers do exist, their audience reach has traditionally been high although it has dropped in recent years (see Appendix 1) and as noted above where they are genuinely local they tend to garner the trust of their readerships more readily than national newspapers. In an environment of cost-cutting and profit maximisation that leads to economies of scale and

the consolidation of newspaper groups that results in reduced resources for newsgathering and a subsequent narrowing of the range and diversity of voices and coverage, the damage to the public sphere is potentially vast. The evidence on the ground shows that larger companies formed with the express purpose of increasing shareholder returns are highly unlikely to invest in more journalism.

The Competition Commission in its evidence to the House of Lords Committee on Communication's and the Ownership of News stated that "Media mergers in particular may raise plurality concerns because they might concentrate newspaper and other media ownership in too few hands, to the detriment of the quality of journalism and broadcasting", concluding that "We do not accept that the increase of news sources invalidates the case for special treatment of the media through ownership regulation. We believe that there is still a danger that if media ownership becomes too concentrated the diversity of voices could be diminished."

Representatives of the local media sector (including commercial print and broadcast, community media and council papers) express concern about the financial problems that they face and the emphasis on 'efficiency gains' over and above a high quality news service. This is also linked to a further concern about a decrease in public service obligations (for example, a reduction in the frequency of news bulletins on commercial radio) and in the quality of local journalism (and the lack of embeddedness of news gatherers in the local community):

|| There's a line to be drawn between giving the owners of radio stations what they want, because at the end of the day, they are commercial businesses who want to make money, and having a quality product. And I think the more you relax the rules on local broadcasting, there's the bigger risk that you damage the product and listeners will move way from you and get their information from alternative sources ||
(Interview: local commercial radio journalist)

This research vividly reveals a need for increased diversity of local journalism, guaranteed independence and editorial vigour. The critical relationships between local news and democracy and between journalism and citizenship only work under certain conditions. Currently, on the whole, those conditions do not function for the public interest. In 2009, George Monbiot wrote a feature article about local papers:

|| .. this is the universal view ... local papers, half of which, on current trends, are in danger of going down in the next five years, are all that stand between us and creeping dictatorship. Like my colleagues, I mourn their death; unlike them I believe it happened decades ago. For many years the local press has been one of Britain's most potent threats to democracy, championing the over-dog, misrepresenting democratic choices, defending business, the police and local elites from those who seek to challenge them. Media commentators lament the death of what might have been. It bears no relationship to what is ||
(Guardian, 9 Nov 2009)

The relationship between journalism and democracy is not a given. Monbiot says that local newspapers entrench the power of local elites and do nothing to hold power to account:

|| It's true that the vacuity and cowardice of the local papers has been exacerbated by consolidation, profit-seeking, the collapse of advertising revenues and a decline in readership. But even if they weren't subject to these pressures, they would still do more harm than good. The local papers fail to challenge the powerful because the powerful own and fund them. ... Yes, we need a press that speaks truth to power, that gives voice to the powerless and fights for local democracy. But this ain't it. ||

Journalism, we should remember, can also be de-democratising and this is precisely the sort of journalism that our respondents objected to. They wanted independent local newspapers with a physical presence in the locale and journalists who could and would challenge the powerful, investigate wrongdoings and campaign for social change. The local journalists we spoke to also saw this as their role but were structurally constrained by the contemporary configurations of local news production with less and less journalists employed to fill more and more space, often removed from the area they were supposed to cover. The clear conclusion is that the democratic potential of news media and the structural practice of local news production and journalism are at odds. Can local television make up for the loss of reporting by newspapers? It is highly unlikely that they can. Currently, impartiality rules limit the potential of local broadcasting news to function as a community voice in the same way that print media can. Furthermore, most commercial television news has far fewer news reporters than local newspapers.

|| There's no real profit justification for doing television news, for a commercial broadcaster like ITV. ... And all the time, as more stations are launched, as the monopoly is eroded, the first thing that goes is the investment in news. And news only stays with those commercial broadcasters because it's written into their licence to do it ||
(Interview, former television news executive)

The material conditions of contemporary journalism (particularly unprotected, unregulated commercial practice) do not offer optimum space and resources to practice independent journalism in the public interest. On the contrary, job insecurity and commercial priorities place increasing limitations on journalists' ability to do the journalism most of them want to do – to question, analyse and scrutinize.

Our findings suggest that there is a demand for locally embedded (in a physical sense as well as in terms of knowing and connecting to the local community), independent journalism. The challenge for Government is to deliver a genuinely local news service built on truly local journalism that can function in the public interest and for the public good.

It appears that there is an increasing understanding by major media players (interview, BBC and ITN news executive) that in the future multiplatform presence and the use of online facilities and co-operation with different news providers (including community media) will be necessary. In terms of local content, there appears to be a move towards more space and collaboration with non-journalists who create online content.

|| The IFNC (Independently Funded News Consortia) strategy for ITN ... actually ... opened our eyes to a lot of things that were going on, that obviously we knew about, but I didn't realise the depth of them, and I think this is relevant to you, one of our strands of work during that work during that process was to look at local media. We did work with newspaper groups ... and looked at combining resources, giving and helping newspapers develop more online material. ... Now that was a, a win-win. It means a bit of investment to start with, but I think that's an interesting idea. The other thing that, that is very relevant I think is, and a real eye opener for me, was the amount of local content that is already being gathered ||
(Interview, ITN News executive)

Meeting the news needs of local communities appears critical to their long term democratic health and social well being. Protecting the public interest requires both a detailed understanding of the consequences for local democracy of increased media concentration and a more imaginative approach to securing media diversity that is based not simply on economic benefits but on the advantages of community cohesion, civic engagement, local empowerment and the securing of widespread political representation that offers evidence that communities and the people who inhabit them matter.

Section 8

Conclusion

This research clearly establishes that the relationship between news and democracy only works under certain conditions. Local and regional news media are in crisis. The crisis is being managed by closing papers or shedding staff. These cuts are having a devastating effect on the quality of the news. Job insecurity and commercial priorities place increasing limitations on journalists' ability to do the journalism most of them want to do – to question, analyse and scrutinize. What we are left with is a contradiction between the democratic potential of news media and the pressures of a recession-affected market.

The discussions with members of local communities in the four locations suggest that, in terms of local news, there is a prevalent sense of being underserved and, in some cases, not served at all (Long Eaton in particular). It appears that individuals and communities that have a "well-functioning" local print medium that covers an area that is understood as genuinely local, feel better served than others (for example, the case of Camden and the Camden New Journal). However, even in these communities it appears crucial that the local newspaper/s not only cover public issues relevant to the community but also exert some local influence and can facilitate social change.

Furthermore, those people who have access to a variety of media along with the skills that are required to make good use of them, feel more engaged and less disempowered. This mostly involves online sites and knowledge of sources or networks that lead to reliable online information or news. But if you do not have the time, access, resources or knowledge to find the information you want, then newspapers represent not only a comfortable way of acquiring news/information but also a kind of 'one-stop-shop' that fulfils a number of news/ information needs without having to piece them together from a variety of (often online) fragmentary sources.

Two issues in particular should be highlighted. Firstly, the elderly expressed a strong need for “well-functioning” local newspapers. They felt not only disconnected from the communities and localities in which they lived but also keenly vulnerable. Their case highlights the inadequacy of overall reliance on online sources for local news/information. Secondly, truly local media with everyday investigative journalism, that has its finger on the local pulse, is required for local democracy dynamics to function well with local media exercising scrutiny over those in power and bringing about change in relation to (hyper) local issues.

In general, participants expressed a clear interest in and demand for much more localised (indeed hyper-local) news in their communities. But they were quite adamant that they also wanted a particular type of journalism that went with it. This should be a form of journalism that could offer long-term coverage of news items as well as everyday investigative journalism on local issues. A strong interest in ‘ordinary’ community voices and stories in local media was also in high demand.

Local commercial news monopolies owned by a few national conglomerates may provide economies of scale but they do not fulfil the news needs of local communities and do little to enhance local democracy. While new technology is opening up new spaces for the engagement of local communities and communities of interest, neither locals participating in our focus groups discussions nor our interviewees saw them as adequate replacements for a quality, genuinely local, independent news service. In fact, they were not thought of as doing journalism at all. Why not? Because they were driven, and usually funded, by the passion of particular individuals with particular interests and would by definition be narrow in remit, inconsistent and potentially unsustainable. These websites also have less visibility than traditional media and tend to circulate in predefined networks of interest. They may thicken communication in these networks but do little to spread their message to those who may not be in their Facebook group or following their tweets. Hyper-local then becomes ‘hyper-local and interest-specific’ that speaks only to those already ‘in the know’.

This report has raised serious concerns over the state of local media and the consequences this has for local democracy. It has highlighted the expressed needs of a quality, independent news service to facilitate community cohesion, civic engagement and social well-being. Building on these conclusions we now turn to offer some practical recommendations.

Section 9

Recommendations

In drafting these recommendations we have considered the proposals of many organisations and individuals who have put forward ideas for the reinvigoration of local media. We have also paid particular attention to the key findings of this research:

1. Local and community news is vital to local democracy, community cohesion and civic engagement.
2. All forms of traditional commercial local news, whether in print, broadcast or online form, are operating with decreasing profits and fewer journalists/news professionals.
3. In particular, the role of local newspapers and everyday investigative journalism are considered by all respondents, but especially the elderly and middle-aged groups, to be critical for local accountability, the scrutiny of power and a sense of local identity and voice. Local television is considered to be largely irrelevant and disconnected from local people.
4. Hyperlocal online news initiatives run by local volunteers are emerging in many areas. These can provide a valuable addition to the media landscape and stimulate local engagement and action but are not a substitute for regular, reliable, professional, independent, investigative journalism and news.
5. Where there are examples of the facilitation of web-based skills and investigative training these do enable local communities to express their voices in the new mediascape but these are piecemeal and unsustainable.

In response to these findings it would appear imperative to increase relations with individuals and organisations in civil society in order to facilitate and maintain certain levels of news coverage in the public interest. To further the creation and distribution of genuinely local public service content, it is important that such partnerships are inclusive and involve actors that feel excluded from mainstream mediated conversations and actively seek to increase media plurality rather than rely on certain individual interests. Establishing a more collaborative relationship between news organisations, individuals and civil society should be encouraged in order to enable participation, increase effective engagement, expand the public sphere, and enhance democracy. But such a service will be neither sustainable nor responsive to local needs without a core local news resource with paid for professional journalists who can undertake everyday investigative reporting: the daily routine of keeping an eye on elected and appointed officials and all those who wield power in local communities.

Even though the internet can provide opportunities for small-scale local independent journalism and commentary to enter the mediascape, it is not the free, easy and universally accessible option many claim it to be. If we want to have sustainable structures for local media pluralism that can encourage continuity and build expertise as well as engaged audiences, we must also consider ways in which to support them.

How to make any proposals economically viable is clearly a central concern but it should not be the only or even the primary concern. We need to ensure that local news media operate within a value system based on the public interest. Sole reliance on fully commercial enterprises for the delivery of news and current affairs journalism that purports to be for the public good and in the public interest has proven to be problematic. Old models of local journalism are outmoded and equally problematic. Independent, not-for-profit (or not primarily for profit) newsrooms are critical to the survival of local news and the fostering of local democratic well being. These are already becoming prevalent in the US and spreading to the rest of Europe and Latin America (Houston, 2010). Since 2007, investigative reporters who were forced to leave mainstream news in the US began creating local and regional reporting centres in several states around the country. These centres and networks began as a way of trading story ideas, facilitating cross-training, and collating training tips and guides to improve the quality of investigative journalism. Although the UK exists in a very different news environment to the US, this research supports the idea that the facilitation of citizen involvement in feeding and shaping stories, and an emphasis on collaboration rather than competition is best suited to the digital age. Such an arrangement, however, cannot function without established local newsrooms served by professional local journalists.

To these ends we see the development of local news hubs as a potential way forward. A local news hub that functions across media platforms to share information, to improve the quality of journalistic investigations, and to create cost efficiencies could be responsive to the local need for an easily identifiable and visible centre for news gathering. It could also, importantly, be a meeting place where people share concerns with a view to putting them out in the local public sphere (whether that is online, in print, on radio or television) increasing local deliberation and ultimately effecting social change that would in turn attract more local involvement. As one senior ITN/C4 news executive said, “you need to offer something that provides a good service to people and then link journalism to it”. This would be a place where local people could collaborate with local paid-for journalists who work for local news media that may be published or broadcast elsewhere but that have a newsroom in the hub and hold regular news surgeries with the local community.

Meeting the news needs of local communities

News-rooms operating out of news hubs could enable further cross-collaboration and training. This could function through direct link ups to journalism courses at local universities but crucially they could also provide training opportunities that counter the financial and cultural barriers currently blocking equality of access to the profession. They would also be able to offer support for training for current media workers providing the skills they need to work in modern newsrooms. It would also mean that community media and mainstream media link up more readily and share training and facilities as well as cross-promoting content and contribute to community renewal.

There is a crucial role for foundation grants and local government subsidies for genuinely local news hub start-ups. Particular emphasis should be placed on establishing new ownership models rooted in the local community, harnessing local innovation and enthusiasm. New structures of governance would be designed to protect and preserve the quality and diversity of news content. This type of governance would need to safeguard the independence of the news organisations, but could also increase the involvement of civil society within local communities. Local government subsidies could come from local government advertising – guaranteeing that their local information campaigns reach their target audience while supporting and nurturing local media. In the long term, however, diversity of funding may be the best solution. If all funders of the news media contribute, preferably indirectly, to the cost of investigative reporting, it is more difficult to ask individual ones to halt threatening investigations (Gans, 2010). The local news hub could both attract and share the benefits of local business advertising and classified advertising directed at the local community that would be placed on whichever platform is most suited to the target audience.

There should be a review of the current tax regime for media organisations to examine how it can create further incentives to invest in quality local journalism in local communities operating out of the news hubs. Furthermore if there is relaxation of cross media ownership regulation, companies wishing to take advantage of this should be required to support local news hubs through investing resources in them (both financial and professional), thereby fulfilling a formal obligation to invest in genuinely local newsgathering and everyday and long-term investigative reporting. Their obligations would also extend to an investment in training and community link-ups. In other words, such regulation would need to “ensure that shareholder dividends and corporate profits will not once again take precedence over the civic and democratic potential of first-class local journalism” (Barnett, 2010: 18).

Local news hubs respond directly to the outcomes of this research and to the Government commitment to localism and the “enormous benefits of fostering local cultural, economic and political identities” (Hunt, 2010). They would reinvent local newsrooms fit for the digital age while ensuring that local communities are given a renewed role in local democratic life.

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Appendix 2: Case Study Profiles

COWLING (Yorkshire)

Indicators (Census 2001):

2096 residents live in the village, of these 2078 in households, 18 in communal establishments. The age structure of the village's population is 46.1 % aged 30-59, 17% aged over 60. 98.9% of the inhabitants are white, 97% born in the UK and 76.9% are Christian.

In terms of employment, 84.2% of men are economically active and so are 70% of women. 40.6% of economically active inhabitants work in professional occupations, 12% in administrative and secretarial, 16.5% in skilled trades. Men work mainly in manufacturing, wholesale and retail and construction, women in health and social work, wholesale and retail and manufacturing.

Average household size is 2.52, average household has 5.57 rooms, 83.4% own their house (with or without mortgage) while 96.6% of properties are houses.

Mediascape:

Local TV news: ITV and BBC

Local radio: Radio Lancashire, Radio Leeds

Local print media: Craven Herald, Keighley News, Yorkshire Post

Free papers: West Yorkshire-based (Northallerton) and Bradford-based

Hyperlocal content provided by Cowling News (monthly newsletter funded by the Council Parish, independently edited, printed out and distributed in the village by volunteers), Drystone Radio (smallest community radio station in England, broadcasts live 7 hours a day, established 18 months ago), cowlingweb (website run by a local couple), church newsletter.

LONG EATON

Indicators (Census 2001):

6022 residents live in Central Long Eaton, of these 5998 in households and 24 in communal establishments. In terms of the age structure 53 % are aged 25-64, 15.9% are over 65. 90.9% of inhabitants are white and 71.7% Christian.

In terms of employment, 78.9 % of men are economically active, so are 66.7% of women. The major occupational groups are 32.8% professional occupations, 12% administrative and secretarial and 13.5% skilled trades. Residents work mainly in manufacturing, distribution and catering and public administration, education and health.

Average household size is 2.31, 81.6% own their house (with or without mortgage); 10.3% of local residents live in council or housing association accommodation and 8% in rented accommodation.

Mediascape:

Local TV news: ITV and BBC

Local radio: Radio Trent, Radio Nottingham, Heart, Erewash Sound (community radio)

Local print media: Nottingham Post, Derby Telegraph

Free papers: Recorder, Topper, Breeze

Hyperlocal content: Long Eaton website and its biweekly printed version

The Erewash Council paper Be Seen Today will be available from July 2010.

KINGS CROSS

Indicators (Census 2001):

Approximately 1800 residents live in the neighbourhood around Kings Cross station.

(231,900 in Camden Local Authority area based on 2007 estimates).

22% aged 18-30, 42% aged 30-64 and 14% aged 65 and over.

In the broader Camden area 71% of the population are self classified as white, 11.9% Asian, 6.9% black, 6.2% Chinese or other and 4% mixed. In the local Kings Cross area, 50.4% of residents are self-classified Christian, 27.7% Muslim, 11.4% no religion, and 10.6% not stated or other.

Unemployment rate for 2007 in the Camden local authority area was 6.6%. Percentage of people of working age claiming any kind of benefit was 23% for the immediate local area and 13% for the Camden local authority area. In the immediate local area, 23.4% of employment was in elementary occupations or process, plant and machine operatives. 18.2% was in professional occupations or managers/senior officials. This compares with 8.9% and 42.4% respectively for Camden as a whole, 20.2% and 26.5% for England.

Mediascape:

Local TV news: ITV and BBC London

Local radio: XFM, LBC, Radio London.

Free papers: Camden New Journal, Evening Standard, Metro

Hyperlocal content: Kings Cross TV, Camden Community Radio

LONGBRIDGE, Birmingham Indicators (Census 2001):

Approximately 1500 residents live in the neighbourhood around Longbridge station.

(1.01 million in Birmingham Local Authority area based on 2007 estimates).

17% are aged 18-30, 45% aged 30-64 and 17% aged 65 and over.

In the broader Birmingham area 66.7% of the population are self classified as white, 21% Asian, 6.7% black, 2.4% Chinese or other and 3% mixed. In the local Longbridge area, 76.9% of residents are self-classified Christian, 15.1% no religion, and 8.1% not stated or other (0.4% Muslim compared to 14.3% for Birmingham as a whole).

Unemployment rate for 2007 in the Birmingham local authority area was 9.2%. Percentage of people of working age claiming any kind of benefit was 14% for the immediate local area and 21% for the Birmingham local authority area. In the immediate local area, 23.3% of employment was in elementary occupations or process, plant and machine operative, 19% in professional occupations or managers/senior officials. This compares with 24.4% and 23.4% respectively for Birmingham as a whole. The Longbridge area was acutely impacted by the closure of the MG Rover plant in 2005, with the loss of over 6000 jobs.

Mediascape:

Local TV news: ITV Central and BBC West Midlands

Local radio: Galaxy, Unity FM (Muslim station), BBC WM, BRMB

Local print media: Birmingham Post, Birmingham Mail, Sunday Mercury, Sports Argus

Free papers: Metro, Mail Extra SW (covering south and west), Mail Extra NE (covering north and east), Birmingham News, Birmingham Independent, Forward (Council monthly magazine).

Appendix 3: Interviewees and focus groups

Focus group discussions by location:

London Kings Cross

Middle-aged group, 8 May 2010
Young people's group, 21 May 2010
Elderly people's groups, 21 May 2010

Birmingham

Middle-aged group, 11 May 2010
Young people's group, 12 May 2010
Elderly people's group, 12 May 2010

Long Eaton

Middle-aged group, 18 May 2010
Young people's group, 18 May 2010
Elderly people's group, 18 May 2010

Cowling

Elderly group on 8 June 2010
Young people's group, 10 June 2010
Elderly people's group, 10 June 2010

Appendix 4: Financial returns and circulation

Johnston Press (Yorkshire Post)

Key financial figures:

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|-------------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Turnover | 300.6m | 428.4m | 491.8m | 518.8m | 520.2m | 602.2m | 607.5m | 531.9m | 428m |
| Operating profit | 89.5m* | 129.5m* | 160.6m* | 177.2m* | 180.2m* | 186.8m* | 178.1m* | 128.4m* | 72m* |
| Operating profit margin | 30.2%* | 31.7%* | 33.1%* | 34.3%* | 34.6%* | 31%* | 29.3%* | 24.1%* | 17%* |
| Advertising revenues | 229.4m | 234.3m | 371.2m | 394.5m | 387.5m | 409.9m | 401.5m | 346.6m | 257.6m |

Source: <http://www.johnstonpress.co.uk/jpplc/mediacentre/pressreleases>

* before non-recurring items

Northcliffe Media Ltd. (publishes Derby Telegraph and Nottingham Post owned by Daily Mail and General Trust)

Key financial figures (only available for 2006-2009)

| | 2006 | 2 007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|-------------------------|------|-------|------|--------|
| Revenue | 455m | 447m | 420m | 328m |
| Operating profit | 89m* | 97m* | 68m* | 24m* |
| Operating profit margin | 20%* | 21%* | 16%* | 7%* |
| Advertising revenue | 298m | 301m | 277m | 193.9m |

Source:

<http://www.dmgreports.com/2009/businessreview/anmedianorthcliffmedia>

<http://www.dmgreports.com/2008/businessreview/anmedianorthcliffmedia>

<http://www.dmgreports.com/2007/businessreview/northcliffmedia/>

Trinity Mirror (publishes Birmingham Mail and Birmingham Post)

* before non-recurring items

Trinity Mirror (publishes Birmingham Mail and Birmingham Post)

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Revenue | 1,131m | 1,087m | 1,095m | 1,142m | 1,083m | 1,032m | 971.3m | 871.7m | 763.3m |
| Operating profit | 204.4m* | 190.6m* | 212.5m* | 253.1m* | 250.2m* | 207m* | 208.9m* | 145.2m* | 105.4m* |
| Operating profit margin | 16.8%* | 17.5%* | 19.4%* | 22.2%* | 22.5%* | 24.8%* | 20%* | 16.7* | 13.85%* |
| Advertising revenues | 634.1m | 618.2m | 620.6m | 644.4m | 597.7m | 555.5m | 520.7m | 426.5m | 331.8m |

Newsquest Media Group (Craven Herald and Pioneer and Keighley News), subsidiary of US based Gannet Co.

Circulation data

| Title | 2006 | 2 007 | 2008 |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------------|-------------|
| Derby Telegraph (LE) | 35,784 | 39,152 | -8.6 |
| Nottingham Post (LE) | 46,326 | 51,526 | -10.09 |
| Craven Herald and Pioneer (Cowling) | 15,082 | 15,878 | -5 |
| Keighley News (Cowling) | 12,803 | 13,830 | -12.63 |
| Yorkshire Post (Cowling) | 43,095 | 45,718 | -5.73 |
| Birmingham Mail | 52,752 | 61,526 | -14.26 |
| Birmingham Post | 14,685 | 12,791 | +12.9 |
| Camden New Journal | 53,788 | unavailable | unavailable |

Source:

Newspaper Society Database <http://www.nsdatabase.co.uk/>

The Joint Industry Committee for Regional Media Research <http://jjab.jicreg.co.uk/JIAB.cfm?NoHeader=1>

Readership data Adult AIR The number of adults reading an average issue of the newspaper

| Title | 04/2010 | 04/2009 | 04/2008 | 04/2007 | 04/2006 | 05/2005 | 05/2001 | Readership growth between 05/2001 & 04/2010 |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---|
| Craven Herald and Pioneer (Cowling) | 41,086 | 41,941 | 44,567 | 48,219 | 48,368 | 49,576 | 34,310 | +16.5%* |
| Derby Telegraph (LE) | 104,462 | 113,746 | 124,510 | 133,479 | 121,616 | 128,012 | 143,789 | -27.4% |
| Keighley News (Cowling) | 36,274 | 38,118 | 40,368 | 41,978 | 42,648 | 43,982 | 44,368 | -18.4% |
| Nottingham Post (LE) | 131,186 | 145,912 | 163,382 | 175,784 | 186,606 | 197,281 | 234,750 | -44.1% |
| Yorkshire Post (Cowling) | 162,946 | 143,591 | 191,987 | 197,977 | 188,903 | 181,193 | N/A | -14.5%** |
| Birmingham Mail | 135,300 | 157,804 | 172,174 | 217,652 | 241,452 | 330,066 | 449,230 | -69.88% |
| Birmingham Post | 43,614 | 34,122 | Not available | Not available | Not available | Not available | Not available | +21.76%*** |
| Camden New Journal | 78,894 | Not available | Not available | 78,930 | 78,785 | 55,942 | 65,018 | +17.59 |

Source: The Joint Industry Committee for Regional Media Research <http://jiab.jicreg.co.uk/JIAB.cfm?NoHeader=1>

*Yorkshire Post (the first time it appears in the statistics is May 2004 with a readership of 190,575) hence decline between 05/2004 and 04/2010 is 14.5%

**Yorkshire Post (the first time it appears in the statistics is May 2004 with a readership of 190,575) hence decline between 05/2004 and 04/2010 is 14.5%

*** Only between 04/2009 and 04/2010.

Notes

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Media Trust

Media Trust is a national charity that believes everyone should have a voice and the opportunity to be heard. We work with media organisations and charities to enhance their communications and enable communities to find their voice and make it heard through:

- Multi-media channels, including Community Channel and Community Newswire
- Media volunteers and mentors
- Film and content production
- Communications resources and training
- Funding for media projects

Community Newswire

Community Newswire, Media Trust's unique partnership with the Press Association, engages with more than 10,000 civil society organisations every year, of which 60% deal with hard to reach, disadvantaged and isolated groups from every region of England. The most newsworthy community stories are turned into news articles by professional Press Association journalists and distributed via the Press Association's newsfeed into the newsrooms of regional and national newspapers and radio and television journalists, throughout the day.



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