Future of news is local, says Culture Secretary, as she launches the first action plan to back local news in a generation

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First local media strategy in a generation guarantees up to £12m funding for local media's digital innovation, for community radio and to fill 'news deserts'.

- Campaigns to promote 'Newspapers for Schools' and encourage young people into journalism careers
- West of England to pilot improving reporting on local decision-making and public services

Communities across the UK will benefit as the government backs high quality and trustworthy local journalism with a new local media action plan.

Speaking at the Society of Editors Future of News Conference today (Tuesday 17 March), the Culture Secretary will back the essential role of local media in communities all over the UK. The Local Media Strategy is part of the steps the government is taking to improve social cohesion and protect what matters.

The Strategy also includes new funding to help local news publishers innovate digitally, support community radio stations and tackle the risks of 'news deserts' by helping to revive a local news presence in communities that currently don't have one.

Speaking at the conference, the Culture Secretary will say:

> This strategy will provide unprecedented funding for local media outlets to invest in innovation and infrastructure, almost tripling the size of funding for community radio, harnessing the power of local and national government and giving more young people access to high quality journalism and the opportunity to pursue careers in it.
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> Because local media was and always has been a ladder of opportunity to help new voices break into journalism. This is not a nice to have. It is essential to a cohesive country. Our debate is too narrow and too small. We will change that. The strategy we publish today is the start – not the end point – and we recognise there is more to do. But it is the start of a new approach to local media, which nurtures it and places it directly at the heart of our government's support for our country. Because the future of news is local.

A new Regional Media Forum in the West of England will explore ways to improve the relationship between journalists and local public services. The forum, alongside a wider review of the publication of statutory notices in local newspapers, will aim to stimulate generation of public interest news and scrutiny of local decision-making.

Other measures in the Strategy include a campaign in schools in North West England to inspire young people from all backgrounds to pursue local media careers, and a commitment to guarantee digital access to a wide range of local and national news in all state schools in England.

The Strategy commits central government to ensuring it makes best use of local and hyperlocal media in its advertising and public information campaigns, while helping them to become more competitive and championing their use in commercial advertising.

Chief Executive of the Society of Editors, Dawn Alford said:

> The Society of Editors welcomes the government's recognition of the importance of local media and the steps set out in this strategy to support innovation and encourage the next generation of journalists.
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> Publishers and editors have been adapting to a rapidly changing media landscape for years, successfully reaching significantly larger audiences through digital platforms while continuing to inform the public, reflect local voices and hold decision-makers to account. In fact, some publishers are now reaching 80% of the local population their titles serve - more than ever before.
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> A strong local media sector is essential to democratic society, and we look forward to working with government and industry partners to ensure it continues to thrive and serve communities across the UK.

News Media Association Chief Executive, Owen Meredith said:

> The government's focus on the sustainability of local journalism and its importance to communities through the package of measures announced in the Local Media Strategy today are very welcome. As reader habits change and the way we all access local news evolves with technology, ensuring publishers are properly rewarded for their investment in local journalism is vital, rather than the lion's share of the value being siphoned off by Big Tech.
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> We are particularly pleased to see a clear commitment to make better use of trusted local news environments – which reach 77% of UK adults - for central government advertising, as well as a new £12 million fund to boost local news provision. We are also delighted to be supporting a new campaign aimed at inspiring young people to take up a career in local news media.
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> The Strategy also rightly identifies a need to improve transparency in local public bodies - maintaining a strong link between public notices and local news media will be critical to the success of that important work.

Local media outlets in print, online, radio or TV will be able to bid for grants to support their financial sustainability and transition to online-focussed business models under a new multi-year Local News Fund worth up to £12m over the next two years.

Digital tools, resources and infrastructure can help the industry in its move towards a sustainable future, stemming the closure of titles and journalist redundancies. For example, new tools and

software - such as adtech, apps or better website architecture - could help local media tap into new or younger audiences and revenue streams, or simplify and centralise journalists' access to public records.

Evidence shows that up to 37 local authority districts now have no print, online, TV or radio outlet dedicated specifically to that area - leaving as many as 4.4 million citizens in local 'news deserts', which disproportionately occur in the most deprived urban areas.

A portion of the Local News Fund will be used to revive local news in these areas where a presence has retreated. This could see existing local news publishers or neighbouring news titles expand into the area or revive a dormant title, or the establishment of brand new, independent, community-owned titles.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

FURTHER INFORMATION - LOCAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Local News Fund

Funding will be distributed to local media outlets in print, online, radio or TV according to the outcomes of a centrally-managed competitive bidding process, with some funding reserved for a parallel competitive process open to third parties which are developing the tools and initiatives from which the whole industry could benefit. Further detail on the Fund will be announced in the coming weeks.

Community Radio Funding

Funding for community radio stations will be doubled to £1 million per year (compared with 2024/25) over the next three years, helping to support the long-term sustainability of nearly 400 community radio stations and to encourage the sector's development in underserved areas.

North West Schools Campaign and 'Newspapers for Schools' initiative

A new Inspiring the Future campaign will launch to connect local media employers and journalists with schools to inspire young people about media careers, while building their media literacy skills. Initially based in the North West, which benefits from a relatively healthy local media presence, the campaign will see a range of showcase events and visits aimed to help schoolchildren understand media career pathways and the unique importance of journalism in society.

The Strategy will aim to ensure all pupils and teachers at state funded primary and secondary schools in England continue to have access to high quality and trustworthy local and national news titles. This will be achieved by promoting and improving the 'Newspapers for Schools' News Library, an existing platform funded by the Department of Education offering digital access to 150 local and national news titles.

West of England Regional Media Forum

With a recent industry survey finding that 55% of local news editors think it is harder to report on local public bodies than it was five years ago, the Strategy aims to improve the relationship between local journalists and local public services, recognising that local journalism fosters civic

engagement, accountability, and more cohesive communities - a role that cannot be fulfilled by social media.

A Regional Media Forum will be launched in the West of England in the coming months in partnership with the Combined Authority. The Forum will act as a channel for ongoing dialogue and cooperation between local media outlets and local councils, the emergency services, health services and the courts. It will establish a best practice framework for how local journalists and local public services should engage and DCMS will roll out the lessons learned nationwide, encouraging adoption of the framework in other areas.

Helen Godwin, Mayor of the West of England, said:

> Local journalism is one of the cornerstones of democracy, and new funding announced by the government today is an important step in supporting the sector.
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> Journalists across the West Country do irreplaceable work, whether they're writing in the papers I grew up reading or updating people in our region and beyond on what's going on via social media.
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> Through our new Regional Media Forum, working in partnership with the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, we are looking forward to bringing together journalists and public sector bodies to deliver best practice in how we work together.

Review of Statutory Notices

DCMS will undertake a review of statutory notices - the statutory requirements on local councils to publish decisions on such matters as planning, road management and alcohol licensing - in local print newspapers. These notices are intended to keep communities informed of decisions made by their council or other institutions which may affect their quality of life, local services, or their property. However concerns have been raised in recent years over whether print newspapers are still an effective means of raising public awareness of this information.

Recognising calls for greater digitalisation of statutory notice requirements, a public consultation will be launched to understand how statutory notices can best work for communities and effective journalistic scrutiny.

Use of Local Media in Government Advertising

Through the Local Media Strategy, the government will endeavour to make best use of local media outlets in government advertising campaigns, while championing their value as an advertising channel.

This will include piloting and assessing the value of hyperlocal news titles in government advertising campaigns, while promoting and supporting local media as a whole to better compete in the wider advertising market. Where local channels are identified as a good fit for a campaign, the government will always use local media as a trustworthy communications channel with a loyal and engaged audience.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/future-of-news-is-local-says-culture-secretary-as-she-launches-the-first-action-plan-to-back-local-news-in-a-generation