



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2017-0103, 29 March 2017

Future of local and regional news providers

Backbench Business Debate Westminster Hall, 30 March 2017

A backbench business debate on the future of local and regional news providers will be held in Westminster Hall on Thursday 30 March 2017 at 3.00pm.

The text of the motion is:

That this House has considered the future of local and regional news providers

The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

Helen Goodman, Jason McCartney and Liz Saville-Roberts will lead and open the debate.

Their original representation to the Backbench Business Committee may be watched on parliamentlive.tv

The proceedings of the debate may also be watched on parliamentlive.tv

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Compiler: Sarah Pepin
Subject specialist: John Woodhouse (Press)

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1. Introduction

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) launched a [“Local News Matters”](#) campaign on 24 March 2017.¹ The campaign “aims to reclaim a vital, vigorous press that is at the heart of the community it serves and is owned and operated in the public interest”. It demands:

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

The [NUJ website](#) has further information and resources on the campaign.

An [early day motion](#), tabled by Helen Goodman in support of the campaign, has received 27 signatures so far:

That this House celebrates the importance of quality local and regional news and whether provided online, by photographers, newspapers or local broadcasters; believes that access to local and regional news is essential to the quality of life, informed citizenship, and promotion of a flourishing of democracy in all our communities; recognises the challenges posed to the sustainability of local news provision; notes that a study by Press Gazette shows that over 300 local newspaper titles have closed over the past decade, with other titles reducing the frequency of publication; further notes that thousands of editorial roles have been lost, together with widespread reduction to the staffing levels associated with front-line reporters based in the community, picture desk editors and photographers; regrets the impact of moving the production of local news out of localities they serve which effects the quality of news coverage; and supports the National Union of Journalists’ Local News Matters campaign, which urges Government devolved bodies and local authorities, to take active steps to support sustainable investment in professional local and regional news provision online, in newspapers and on radio and television.²

The Press Gazette [website](#) has news and analysis on regional press circulation and readership.

¹ [“NUJ launches local news matters week of action today”](#), NUJ news, 24 March 2017

² [EDM 1109 2016-17](#), tabled 23 March 2017

2. Media

2.1 Articles and blogs

Press Gazette

[Bureau of Investigative Journalism launches two-year Google-funded project to boost regional press data investigations](#)

Dominic Ponsford 27 March 2017

Hold The Front Page

[New data hub launched to help regional journalism](#)

David Sharman 27 March 2017

Hold The Front Page

[Weekly newspaper revived almost 35 years after closure](#)

David Sharman 27 March 2017

Hold The Front Page

[Journalists take on old paper with arts news website](#)

David Sharman 17 March 2017

Hold The Front Page

[Coverage of Premier League leaders moved off local news website](#)

David Sharman 22 March 2017

Hold The Front Page

[Regional editors to speak on local news at London Assembly](#)

David Sharman 21 March 2017

Press Gazette

[Welsh government should tackle country's news gaps rather than subsidise journalism cuts elsewhere in UK](#)

Dominic Ponsford 9 March 2017

Press Gazette

[Full details of BBC's £8m-a-year scheme to fund 150 local press 'democracy reporters' revealed](#)

Dominic Ponsford 2 February 2017

Hold The Front Page

[Best or worst of times for new journalists?](#)

Mark Wray 19 January 2017

Press Gazette

[The news-based social network which provides publishers with an alternative to the 'vampire squid' of Facebook](#)

Karl Capp 1 January 2017

Press Gazette

[Growing hyperlocal news sector forms network to bid for share of state local media support](#)

Dominic Ponsford 21 December 2016

2.2 Press releases

National Union of Journalists

[Research launch & debate in Parliament on local news matters](#)

28 March 2017

National Union of Journalists

[Welsh Assembly urged to support quality journalism as MP calls for inquiry into the future of Welsh print news](#)

28 March 2017

National Union of Journalists

[NUJ launches local news matters week of action today](#)

24 March 2017

National Union of Journalists

[Seventy eight jobs to go in Trinity Mirror restructuring](#)

19 January 2017

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

[Government seeks views on press regulation issues](#)

1 November 2016

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

[Measures to boost local media](#)

9 June 2010

3. Parliamentary Business

3.1 Early Day Motion

[Local News Matters](#)

Helen Goodman:

That this House celebrates the importance of quality local and regional news and whether provided online, by photographers, newspapers or local broadcasters; believes that access to local and regional news is essential to the quality of life, informed citizenship, and promotion of a flourishing of democracy in all our communities; recognises the challenges posed to the sustainability of local news provision; notes that a study by Press Gazette shows that over 300 local newspaper titles have closed over the past decade, with other titles reducing the frequency of publication; further notes that thousands of editorial roles have been lost, together with widespread reduction to the staffing levels associated with frontline reporters based in the community, picture desk editors and photographers; regrets the impact of moving the production of local news out of localities they serve which effects the quality of news coverage; and supports the National Union of Journalists' Local News Matters campaign, which urges Government devolved bodies and local authorities, to take active steps to support sustainable investment in professional local and regional news provision online, in newspapers and on radio and television.

23 March 2017 | Early day motion 1109 | 27 signatures

3.2 Ministerial Statement

[Supporting local newspapers](#)

Marcus Jones (Minister for Local Government):

This government remains committed to protecting the independent press from unfair competition. A healthy local democracy requires the accountability that comes from scrutiny of councils by the press and the public.

The government has sought to take action against the practice, by a small number of local authorities, of publishing local authority newspapers, which given the frequency of their publication, can push out and undermine that independent press. A small number of councils continue to breach the recommendations of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity about the frequency of publication for council newspapers.

Further to the Written Statement of 10 March 2015, Official Report, Column 8WS we have warned a small number of local authorities about

their continued failure to comply with the provisions of the publicity code.

Today I am announcing the conclusions to date of the review into the actions of three of those authorities; the London Borough of Hackney, the London Borough of Newham and the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

In each case my Rt Hon Friend, the Secretary of State is minded to exercise his powers under the Local Government Act 1986 to direct the local authorities to comply by no later than 31 January 2017 with the provision in the March 2011 Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity that: "Where local authorities do commission or publish newsletters, news sheets or similar communications, they should not issue them more frequently than quarterly". Accordingly, the Secretary of State is today issuing to each of the three authorities a written notice of the direction he proposes to issue in each case.

In deciding to take this action, the Secretary of State has carefully considered the representations each of these local authorities has made in response to a notice given to it on 10 March 2015 of a proposed direction relating to frequency of publication of council newsletters, news sheets or similar publications. He has also considered other information available to him about each of the three councils' publicity, and had regard to an Equality Statement about enforcing the 2011 Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

Each authority now has 14 days to make written representations to the Secretary of State about the proposed direction. Following this, the Secretary of State will take his final decision in each case about whether or not to issue the local authority with a direction. Each decision will be taken on its own merits.

I will be placing copies of the documents associated with these announcements in the Library of the House.

2 December 2016 | Written statements | HCWS 309

3.3 Debates

[Local Audit \(Public Access to Documents\) Bill](#) [Second reading]

HC Deb 25 November 2016 c1196-213

[Local Newspapers](#)

HC Deb 19 March 2015 c333-76WH

3.4 Parliamentary Questions

[Topical Questions](#)

Asked by: Clive Lewis

Is the Minister aware that more than 300 local newspapers have closed in the past 10 years? While Members might enjoy reading about skateboarding ducks, such newspapers are also a critical part of our democracy. Will the Minister therefore join me in supporting the National Union of Journalists in its "Local News Matters" campaign and week, and will he meet the union to discuss this critical part of our democracy?

Answered by: Matt Hancock | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

Absolutely. Local newspapers are incredibly important. As constituency MPs we all engage with them, as well as with the national media. I will be happy to meet the NUJ and take part in the week, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

HC Deb 16 March 2017 c526

[Local Government: Newspaper Press](#)

Asked by: Lord Porter of Spalding

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they will take to ensure that local authorities which have only one local newspaper in their area for the purposes of publishing statutory notices will be protected from uncompetitive practices, such as high increases in the cost of publishing those notices.

Answered by: Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth | Department: Communities and Local Government

It is for individual local authorities to negotiate advertising rates with local newspapers. My department has not made a specific assessment of the cost to councils of publishing and issuing statutory notices but findings of the pilot programmes, including about costs, are being carefully considered.

6 March 2017 | Written questions | HL 5559

[Local Press](#)

Asked by: Callum McCaig

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps she is taking to support local and regional newspapers.

Answered by: Matt Hancock | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

The local press is a crucial source of information for local communities and a vital part of a healthy democracy.

In the March 2016 budget the government announced the introduction of a £1,500 business rates discount for local newspapers for two years from 1 April 2017. The government's response and guidance regarding the business rates relief was published on 2 December 2016. More information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-case-for-a-business-rates-relief-for-local-newspapers>

Following the BBC Charter Review, the BBC is also working in partnership with the local news industry to support local journalism. On 12 May 2016 the BBC and the News Media Association announced their plans for the partnership, including the BBC's funding of 150 local journalists from 2017. More information is available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2016/bbc-nma-partnership>

19 January 2017 | Written questions | 59978

[Local Press](#)

Asked by: Jim Cunningham

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the performance of the local newspaper industry.

Answered by: Edward Vaizey | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

As the Secretary of State has stated previously, local papers are the bread and butter of journalism - they part of the communities they serve, and people rely on and respect them. In our manifesto, we committed to consulting on the introduction of a business rates relief for local newspapers in England, which was launched in summer 2015. In the March 2016 Budget, the government announced that local newspapers will be eligible for a business rates discount for two years from April 2017. We are confident that this will help local newspapers maintain a presence on the local high street.

Our recently published BBC White Paper, 'A BBC for the future: a broadcaster of distinction', sets out our expectation for the BBC to enjoy a positive partnership with the local news sector. The News Media Association (NMA) and the BBC have been working together to develop proposals and good progress has been made in agreeing the principles of a service that will see the BBC providing some funding for local journalists to provide reporting for news providers. These plans will be implemented in consultation with the industry.

4 July 2016 | Written questions | 41443

[Local Press](#)**Asked by: Gregory Campbell**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he has to maintain the diversity of the local newspaper sector in the UK.

Answered by: Edward Vaizey | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

As the Secretary of State has stated previously, Local papers are the bread and butter of journalism - they part of the communities they serve, and people rely on and respect them. In our manifesto, we committed to consulting on the introduction of a business rates relief for local newspapers in England, which we have now done, and are considering next steps.

28 January 2016 | Written questions | 24044

[Local Press](#)**Asked by: Vicky Foxcroft**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to encourage publishing groups to support local papers.

Answered by: Edward Vaizey | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

This Government believes local newspapers have a vital role to play in local communities and in local democracy. We are keen to explore how local newspapers can achieve a long term sustainable future and Government has already committed to consulting on business rates relief for local newspapers, as well as committing almost £1 million to support 24 pilot projects on the future of statutory notices.

30 June 2015 | Written questions | 3861

[Local press: Employment](#)**Asked by: Dr Alasdair McDonnell**

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of trends in the levels of employment in the local newspaper industry since 2010.

Answered by: Edward Vaizey | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

Employment levels in the local newspaper industry have been discussed at a number of summits and meetings my department has held with the local newspaper industry. These discussions have indicated there has been a steady decline in employment figures in the local newspaper industry since 2010.

26 June 2015 | Written questions | 3346

[Local Press](#)

Asked by: Jim Cunningham

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of government support for local newspapers.

Answered by: Edward Vaizey | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

Local newspapers are an important source of information for local communities and a vital part of a healthy democracy. For this reason, the government will consult in due course on whether to introduce a business rates relief for local newspapers in England to support them as they adapt to new technology and changing circumstances.

22 June 2015 | Written questions | 2957

[Local Newspapers](#)

Asked by: Nic Dakin

What information her Department holds on the number of local newspapers that have closed since May 2010; and what steps she plans to take to support such newspapers.

Answered by: Edward Vaizey | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

The Department does not hold that information, but our local press plays an incredibly valuable role in local communities, and we appreciate the challenges facing the sector. We have a number of policies to support local newspapers.

HC Deb 13 March 2014 c399

4. Organisations and further reading

[Press regulation after Leveson - unfinished business?](#) , Commons Library Briefing paper CBP-7576, 18 November 2016

[Local Audit \(Public Access to Documents\) Bill 2016-17](#) , Bill page

House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [Future for local and regional media](#) , HC 43-I 2009-10, 6 April 2010

House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [Future for local and regional media](#) , HC 43-II 2009-10, 6 April 2010

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [A BBC for the future: a broadcaster of distinction](#) , Cm 9242, May 2016

Includes discussion of a BBC partnership with the local news sector

The [News Media Association](#) website

National Union of Journalists, [Local news matters](#) campaign, Web page

National Union of Journalists, [NUJ in Parliament](#) , Web page

Press Gazette, [Regional press audience data](#) , Web page

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