

Wednesday 11 May 2016

Dear Secretary of State,

BBC and local news partnership agreement

The News Media Association and the BBC have been working together on a set of plans to support local journalism in the UK, increase coverage of public services and institutions and enhance the relevance of news services to local communities. We are now agreed on a partnership and we look forward to putting it into practice at the beginning of the new Charter.

The regional press and the local newsrooms of the BBC compete for stories. We offer very different services, in print, on air and online and we operate at very different levels of localness, which we agree should be reflected in our partnership agreement. Our products and programmes provide a range of contrasting views and differing voices. This competition is not only healthy in a democracy, it is essential in holding public officials and those in power to account.

We have, though, identified a number of initiatives where we can work together. We believe these will sustain plurality in the local news media, drive up the quality of services and use the expertise of both the BBC and the local commercial news sector for the benefit of all audiences. The framework for co-operation is:

- The establishment of a shared data journalism unit, drawing on the model of Trinity Mirror's operation in Manchester.
- A video news bank enabling BBC local video and audio news content to be accessed by news media websites, enhancing their online offers and making BBC news output more accessible to audiences online.
- A jointly commissioned independent audit to establish the usage of local press content by the BBC on its media platforms and vice versa. The outcome of the independent audit will inform a review of the BBC's efforts to improve the linking and attribution of stories and sources.
- The establishment of a local public sector reporting service to cover local authorities and public services. The BBC will fund 150 journalists from 2017, who will be employed by local newspapers and other qualifying providers of local news (e.g. IPSO-accredited organisations). While the journalists will be under the editorial direction and control of their employers, processes will be jointly agreed to ensure the quality of coverage is in line with the BBC's public service obligations. The number will rise to 200 journalists, depending on the outcome of a joint review of usage in 2019. If the usage of the journalism on BBC outlets warrants increasing the numbers from 150 to 200 in 2019, the further 50 journalists could be funded from a number of different sources including net revenues raised by the participating news media groups from advertising against BBC news bank video content (which may need specific approval from the future regulatory body of the BBC), external funding, or reallocation of BBC resources spent on the data journalism unit.

The proposals above, costing overall around £8 million p.a., herald a new and unique partnership that will support both the BBC's on-going public mission to serve local audiences, and the growth

and evolution of the commercial news sector. The delivery of the proposals, and the broader relationship between the BBC and its local news partners, will be subject to a joint annual review by the BBC and the NMA and considered by the new BBC Board to ensure that the terms of the agreement are being met and that it continues to deliver its intended purpose. The results of this review will be published alongside the BBC's Annual Report and Accounts.

Our joint intention is to deliver the separate elements of the agreement as soon as possible in the new Charter. More work is needed to finalise the operational details and ensure appropriate regulatory compliance, but we are committed to working together over the coming months to resolve these as rapidly as possible; indeed, substantial and productive discussions are already underway in all these areas.

This package of proposals has the potential to make a real difference to the work of local journalists across the UK. The BBC will benefit from access to a broader and deeper range of journalism on its services, and the local news sector from an appropriate framework for use of this content by the BBC. We hope that you welcome this partnership and would like to thank you for your engagement and encouragement so far in this vital area.

Yours sincerely,

Ashley Highfield
Chairman
News Media Association

James Harding
Director
BBC News and Current Affairs