

BBC Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London
W1A 1AA

5 January 2023

Dear Dr Sahota,

Thank you for your letter, sent by email, to the Director-General dated 12 December 2022. Your letter has been passed to me for reply.

Thank you for raising your concerns and those of the London Assembly regarding the proposed [changes to BBC Local services](#) which we announced on 31 October 2022.

I've noted all of the points raised and I've outlined some answers to the key questions from your feedback and elsewhere below.

I completely agree that the BBC provides a vital local service to audiences in London and across the country, we do not wish to compromise that, in fact the very purpose of these plans is to reach more - not less - people with the local stories that matter to them.

We are investing in local journalism, these proposals will improve daily online news services in 43 local areas - delivering a trusted week-round service to communities across the country. We also plan to deliver a wider range of local audio programming through BBC Sounds.

Investment in local current affairs would increase by about 40 percent when we establish 11 investigative reporting teams across England. This will see the creation of 71 new journalism roles and the teams will deliver original stories across TV, Radio and online services.

I would also like to reassure you that under these proposals we would still have 39 local radio stations across England. We are committed to keeping BBC Radio London and protecting our key output.

There would still be dedicated local programming from here - and all of our bases - between 6am and 2pm on weekdays when audiences are larger. In the current proposals, BBC Radio London is not due to share any programmes on weekday afternoons. In addition, news bulletins and live sport would remain entirely local as they are today. It is really important to note that over 70% of our listeners tune in for our weekday breakfast, mid-morning and Saturday sport programmes, all of which remain 100% local.

Our plans to strengthen local online services reflect the changing habits of audiences as the use of digital news services increase. Our goal is to deliver trusted local online news for all local communities while keeping our local broadcast services strong.

According to Ofcom, 66% of adults now use online services for news consumption in the UK. This growing trend can be seen across age groups - with those aged 65-74 now citing online as a more common source of news consumption than radio (51% using online services compared to 47% for radio).

Despite this, we spend about 90% of the BBC's local investment in England on regional TV news and Local Radio. To deliver a greater impact locally across all of our platforms, we propose to reduce the amount we spend on these broadcast services by around 10% which will see us reprioritise around £19m towards local online services and stronger journalism. This means there will be a loss of 48 job roles – which is a 2% reduction in staffing. To put that into context, we currently have 2,200 posts across BBC Local. Overall, we're protecting the BBC's spend on local services despite the Licence Fee freeze and the impact of inflation.

I know there will be some who believe that unless every hour of the day comes from each of our existing local radio bases, we will be losing something special. But, if the enduring success of our Local TV news programmes and our successful pan-regional local radio programming tells us anything, it's that stories can travel further and identity isn't always rigidly dictated by county boundaries. With the right talent and the right production, we can produce output that really connects with communities.

Looking at the full picture, these proposals will improve daily online news services in 43 local areas – delivering a trusted week-round service to communities across the country. We also plan to deliver a wider range of local audio programming through BBC Sounds. We will be launching new online news content for Bradford, Peterborough, Sunderland and Wolverhampton as part of these proposals.

BBC Local Radio remains an essential service for millions of listeners – I believe it is the very best local radio network in the world. But, standing still is not an option at a time of such audience change. To do so would see the BBC's public impact slowly erode.

I hope that my response addresses your concerns, but if you have any further questions, don't hesitate to get in touch.



Rhodri Talfan Davies
BBC Director of Nations