

LONDON ASSEMBLY

The fate of local news – read all about it



Economy Committee
August 2017

Holding the Mayor to
account and
investigating issues
that matter to
Londoners

LONDONASSEMBLY

Economy Committee Members*



*During the 2016/17 Assembly year when the investigation was carried out, the membership of the Committee was: Fiona Twycross AM (Chair), Kemi Badenoch AM (Deputy Chairman), Shaun Bailey AM, Andrew Dismore AM, Joanne McCartney AM, and Caroline Russell AM

The Economy Committee scrutinises the work of the Mayor and investigates issues of interest to the public relating to economic and social development, wealth creation, the arts, sports and tourism in London.

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Fiona Twycross AM

Economy Committee



A strong local news industry is essential to our local democracy in London. Not only do local media providers ensure Londoners are provided with the latest news in their local areas, it also provides the opportunity for local decisions to be scrutinised and for residents to be kept informed of upcoming changes to their neighbourhoods.

Local media provision has undergone a rapid change over the past decade. As the internet and social media have grown, the number of hardcopy newspapers has declined. Fewer Londoners receive a weekly local newspaper through their door as provision is reduced. During this time, we have seen a growth of hyperlocal blogs that specialise in neighbourhoods, community issues and local democracy, demonstrating that Londoners wish to be kept informed about what is happening in their local areas.

The age of the internet means that we have a vast amount of information at our fingertips but it also poses a number of challenges for London's local media provision. While free access to news is welcome, it has created problems for an industry whose business models have not always kept up with the need to change to take into account the rise of digital news sources. These changes to the industry have led to cuts to the industry's workforce and a downward pressure on wages. Furthermore, journalism is no longer a viable career option for many because they simply cannot afford to be journalists. The low pay and poor working conditions that they face means that many can struggle to make ends meet in a city where living costs are high. Fewer journalists has resulted in a decreased capacity for proactive reporting and detailed investigations into local issues.

“London needs a strong and credible local press. Without addressing the challenges that the industry is facing and finding solutions, we are at risk of losing one of our most important democratic functions.”

The scrutiny of local democracy is an important function of the local media and one that is at threat with a declining workforce. We have seen that some local authorities produce their own newsletters. While it is important that councils keep local residents informed about their work and services available to residents, they can never provide the scrutiny that is possible with a news source outside of the local authority.

In our investigation we heard how residents have a higher level of trust in local media services than in other media. In an age of ‘fake news’ with incorrect information being shared rapidly through social media, new ways of establishing credible news sources online are vital. This is particularly important in relation to young people – who are less likely to read traditional forms of media. Digital innovations in reliable local news reporting would make news more accessible to those unlikely to buy newspapers. However, this should not be a way to exclude those who are not digitally enabled.

Action needs to be taken now to change the path for local newspapers. The decline of the industry and its impact on the workforce is leading to a less credible news source. Hyperlocal news sources are a great addition to the industry, but questions remain about their ability to survive as they are often reliant on volunteers and can struggle to get reliable sources of funding.

London needs a strong and credible local press. Without addressing the challenges that the industry is facing and finding solutions, we are at risk of losing one of our most important democratic functions.

In preparing this report, the committee heard from a wide range of local media providers, journalists and organisation representatives. We are grateful for the insight they have provided in this changing area.

Summary

Local news provision in London

The local news industry has gone through seismic change in recent years. Newspaper titles across the country have shut as the growth of the internet has seen local news increasingly being consumed online and free of charge. The challenge for the industry has been made more difficult by Google and Facebook soaking up the advertising revenues that were for so long the lifeblood of the local news industry. Both local and national newspapers were unprepared for this change and, despite growing digital audiences, are still struggling to generate revenues and profits. The knock-on effect has been negative for the news industry as publishers have cut costs to maintain titles, which has led to job losses and downward pressure on wages.

Despite this, the market for local newspapers in London has been fairly resilient. More titles have opened than shut in recent years. And the rise of hyperlocal newspapers and blogging news sites show there is still strong demand for local news. However, the recent announcement by the news publisher Tindle that it would be closing three titles in north London suggests the resilience of London's local newspapers is waning.

Yet a number of challenges remain for newspaper publishers. By consolidating ownership, publishers hope to bring economies of scale to boost investment, but this has led to job cuts and evidence of less "on-the-ground" news reporting. The cumulative effect is the potential for a democratic deficit as local newspapers scale back their campaigns, coverage of courts, and scrutiny of council activity. This matters because if the local press is not carrying out its democratic functions there is a risk people will be less engaged and less informed about their local community.

Local newspapers have, in some cases, been negatively affected by local authorities regularly publishing their own newsletters. While these newsletters have their place, they should not be a substitute for local news. The Government's intervention to clamp down on how frequently these publications are produced will help local newspapers. Local authorities should not be afraid of their critics and should instead choose to support local newspapers by advertising and making announcements through them.

Digital innovation has the potential to reimagine local news provision while also supporting new journalistic talent. However, this cannot be achieved

without investment. The Mayor's digital talent programme could support the creation of a new digital journalism apprenticeship.

At the same time, we recognise that focusing on digital innovation exclusively risks leaving some groups behind. Projects to demonstrate the value of local news in schools have tremendous potential to engage a new readership, and a pilot to carry local newspapers for free on bus routes could boost advertising revenues and open up local newspapers to a wider and more socially diverse readership.

Recommendations

Supporting London's journalists

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should secure a commitment from all news publishers operating in London to work towards paying all their staff at least the London Living Wage.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should explore opportunities to work with corporate partners to fund bursaries for journalists to tackle the lack of diversity in the local news industry.

Improving access to local news

Recommendation 3

To protect those groups digitally and news-excluded, TfL should consider trialling a pilot carrying copies of local newspapers on specific bus routes.

Supporting digital innovation in local news

Recommendation 4

In partnership with the National Union of Journalists, the Mayor should investigate the potential to establish a digital journalism apprenticeship.

1. The state of play for local newspapers

Key findings

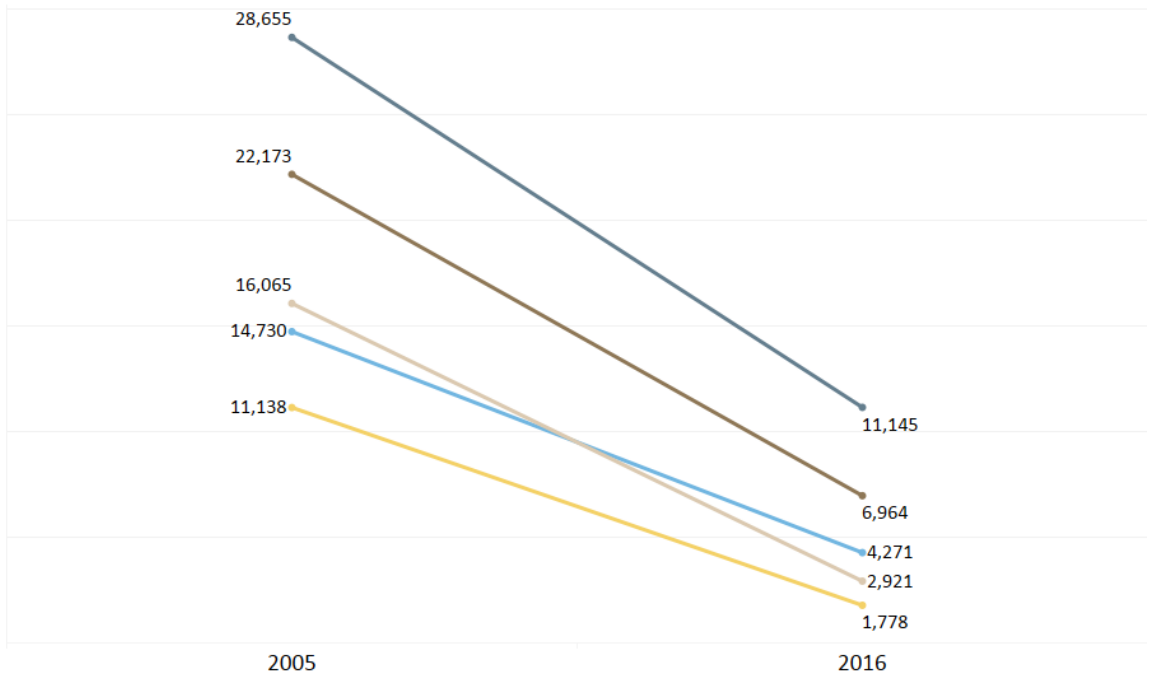
- The majority of local newspapers have seen their circulation fall in recent years.
- While many of these newspapers are increasing their online readership, it is not compensating for the sharp drop in revenues for publishers from print.
- Faced with falling sales and lower revenues, newspaper owners have consolidated and restructured their operations to reduce overheads.
- But cost cutting and consolidation has led to significant job cuts and pressure on wages.

The state of play for local newspapers

- 1.1 The number of local newspapers in the UK has been falling in recent years. Over the past decade, almost 200 titles have closed (over half of them free).¹ Technology has been the major cause of this fall. The growth of the internet has led to local news increasingly being consumed online and not always through traditional news sources. Ceri Gould, Editor-in-Chief, Trinity Mirror, said readers were increasingly “brand-blind.”
- 1.2 But the fall in the number of local newspapers has not been as severe as some commentators predicted. In 2009, the media analyst Claire Enders projected half the UK’s local newspapers would close within five years.² In fact, the local press has been more buoyant than predicted, and the drop in the number of titles from 2009 to 2015 has been less than 15 per cent.³
- 1.3 The market for local newspapers in London has been fairly resilient compared to the rest of the country. The capital has actually seen more local newspapers launch than close in recent years.⁴ Yet this increase does not reflect changes to titles to preserve them; for example, switching from daily editions to weekly. Most of the new titles launched in the capital in recent years were owned by the news publisher Tindle, but it recently announced it would be closing three weekly newspapers in north London: the Barnet Press, Enfield Advertiser and Haringey Advertiser.⁵ However, the launch of City Matters, which has a strict Square Mile focus, points to the growing emergence of hyperlocal newspapers in the capital. After six months of publishing it is close to breaking even.
- 1.4 While the number of titles in London has increased, the number of print readers has declined. The majority of local newspapers have seen their circulation fall in recent years. Comparing the average circulation figures of five of London’s paid-for newspapers in 2005 with 2016 shows circulation fell by more than half. Last year, only two paid-for local newspapers in London saw an increase in year-on-year circulation figures. It was a similar story for free newspapers in London, with only the Islington Gazette seeing a rise in circulation. While many of these newspapers are increasing their online readership, it is not compensating for the sharp drop in revenues for publishers from print. From 2005 to 2010, the revenue of the four leading newspaper owners in the UK dropped by between 23 and 53 per cent according to analysis by Enders.⁶

In the last decade, a number of paid-for newspapers in London have seen their circulation fall by more than half

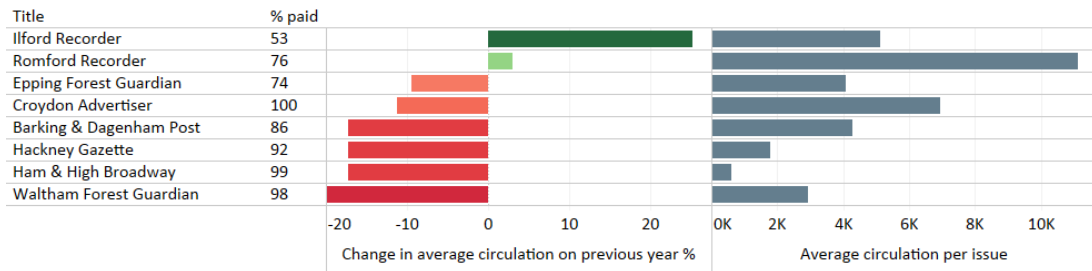
Average circulation per issue



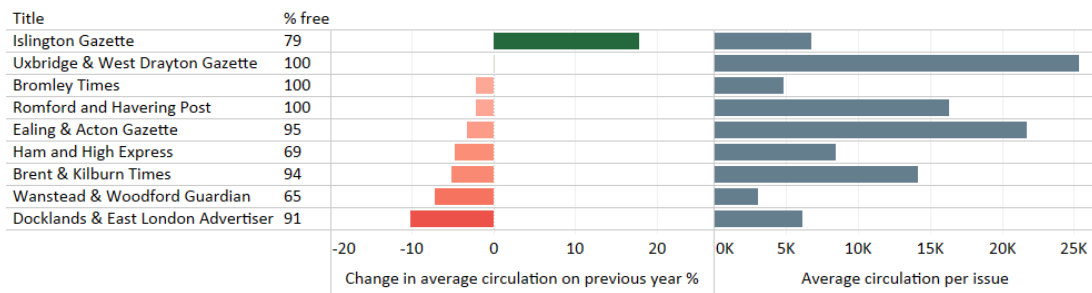
Source: ABC

- Romford Recorder
- Croydon Advertiser
- Waltham Forest Guardian
- Barking & Dagenham Post
- Hackney Gazette

Last year, only two-paid for weekly newspapers in London saw average circulation increase on the previous year...



It was a similar story for many of London's free newspapers



Source: Holdthefrontpage

- 1.5 The fall in advertising income has hit the revenues of local newspapers the hardest. Before the growth of the internet, local newspapers relied on classified advertising for a large proportion of their income. Rupert Murdoch once described classified advertising revenue as “rivers of gold.” But as advertising has migrated online – mainly through Google or Facebook, but also through specialist property, car and job sites – the income it generates for print media has fallen. Spending on regional newspaper advertising fell by 17 per cent between 2014 and 2016.⁷ As Ceri Gould said, “the traditional pillars that local newspapers used to cleave to for their revenue: property has gone to Rightmove, motors has gone to Auto Trader and 95 per cent of our jobs revenue has gone to a local jobs board.”
- 1.6 Local newspapers were not prepared for the loss of advertising. A reliance on classified advertising while print sales were falling left newspapers overleveraged. According to Professor Angela Phillips of Goldsmiths University, the result has been the erosion of the funding base for local newspapers. She said the news industry had “totally failed” to find a new revenue stream. She added: “This is not a failure of journalism – which it is often described as being – it is a business failure.”
- 1.7 Local news publishers cannot compete with Google and Facebook for local advertising revenues. Both companies have created services tailored for local advertisers by using tracking technology to target their advertising at particular groups. Google and Facebook account for around half the £4bn

currently spent in display advertising online in the UK. A report by OC&C Strategy Consultants forecasts Facebook and Google will take a 71 per cent share of the total ad market by 2020.⁸ The report states: “The scale and speed is really a call to action for media companies. By the time [Facebook and Google] get to 70 per cent of the online ad market, that doesn’t leave a lot of space left elsewhere.”

- 1.8 But a recent scandal involving extremist content on YouTube might weaken Google and Facebook’s duopoly on local advertising. Several big companies have pulled their advertisements from Google-owned YouTube after it emerged some advertisements had been placed next to extremist or inappropriate content. The incident highlights the risks associated with programmatic advertising. As Professor Phillips explained to the committee, many companies “did not understand how programmatic advertising works and now they are running scared.” She said this might result in some of these companies advertising with publishers again. It may also force Google and Facebook to raise the cost of advertising, which could level the playing field. One of the main reasons local news publishers have lost out to Google on local advertising was cost, but according to Professor Phillips, Google “is not going to be able to clean up its act just by flicking a few switches.”
- 1.9 Faced with falling sales and lower revenues, newspaper owners have consolidated. In 2015, Trinity Mirror acquired Local World, a regional chain of 83 print titles in a £220m deal. The move was described as a “game changer for the industry”, by Alex DeGroot, a media analyst at Peel HuntFour publishers, as economies of scale would enable greater investment.⁹ Trinity Mirror, Johnston Press, Newsquest and Tindle now account for around three quarters of local newspaper titles across the UK. According to analysis by Kings College London, the four main publishers have monopoly control of newspaper titles in 13 London boroughs. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) argue the lack of plurality in the local news industry is creating a “democratic deficit.”
- 1.10 Newspaper owners have also restructured their operations to reduce overheads. Following Trinity Mirror’s takeover of Local World, it closed a number of Local World titles. And all former Local World titles have been subject to cutbacks as they have moved to a web-first publishing model. Other newspaper owners have followed suit as local newsrooms have been shut and sub-editors have been moved to central production centres to cut costs.
- 1.11 Local newspaper owners are investing in online services and products to offset lost print revenues. Trinity Mirror, Newsquest and Johnston Press have increased their web traffic significantly over the past seven years — from 20.7m monthly users in the first half of 2009 to 86.4m for the same period in 2016.¹⁰ Ceri Gould said Trinity Mirror’s strategy was to grow its audience online so that it “reaches a point where the digital revenue outweighs the print decline.”

- 1.12 But despite growing digital audiences, local newspapers are still struggling to generate revenues and profits. Trinity Mirror reported that digital revenue was up 13 per cent in 2016 on the previous year, but print revenue was down 11 per cent and overall revenue down eight per cent. Trinity Mirror, like other newspaper owners, still relies heavily on print, which provided £581m of revenue in 2016 compared with £79m from digital.
- 1.13 Cost cutting and consolidation has led to significant job cuts and pressure on wages. The headcount of local reporters is estimated to have at least halved since 2005.¹¹ As well as employing fewer reporters, most papers have scaled back on sub-editors, designers and photographers. However, there is a lack of reliable data on the number of professional journalists. According to ONS figures, the number of journalists in the UK has remained at around 60,000 since 2000.¹² But according to the NUJ, there has been a significant fall in the number of experienced journalists in London because of the poor pay and conditions in which they are expected to work. This void has resulted in fewer specialist positions and anecdotal evidence that some roles are being carried out by interns.
- 1.14 Jobs cuts have led to industrial action. South London journalists recently went on strike after South London Newsquest cut 11 jobs at the Sutton office, which produces 11 South London and Surrey titles, and put on notice of redundancy 27 of its 29 staff. The NUJ, which brought the action, said the publisher was “driving down standards, terms and conditions at work for journalists.” Newsquest said it was regrettable jobs had to be put at risk but it was necessary to ensure the business had “a credible future.”¹³
- 1.15 London journalists deserve to earn the London Living Wage. Current pay rates for local journalists in London are not sustainable with the high costs of living in the capital. The committee would welcome a commitment from all news publishers operating in London to work towards paying all their staff at least the London Living Wage.

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should secure a commitment from all news publishers operating in London to work towards paying all their staff at least the London Living Wage.

- 1.16 By reducing their cost base, newspaper publishers have remained profitable. Analysis by King’s College London shows Johnston Press reduced its editorial and photographic staff by around 40 per cent between 2010 and 2014 while its profit margin remained stable at around 20 per cent. Similarly, Local World, before its takeover by Trinity Mirror, increased its operating profits from eight per cent in 2013 to ten per cent in 2014 while cutting production jobs from 1,117 to 1,015.¹⁴ As Professor Phillips told the committee “the way forward,

unfortunately, for the big chains has been to cut, cut, cut, so that we end up with chains across south London with practically no journalists.”

2. The changing landscape of local newspapers

Key findings

- As the digital presence of local newspapers increases, there is evidence of less “on-the-ground” news reporting or investigative journalism.
- A democratic deficit could emerge if local newspapers continue to scale back coverage of courts and councils.
- There is a risk the switch from print to digital will marginalise some groups, both young and old.

The changing landscape of local newspapers

- 2.1 The role of the local news reporter is changing as newsrooms scale back operations. With fewer designers and photographers employed by local newspapers, reporters are encouraged to be “multimedia” journalists by uploading photos and videos from their smartphones to the internet.
- 2.2 Local news reporters are increasingly expected to put content out through social media and other digital mediums. This expectation has presented both opportunities and challenges for journalists. As a recent survey by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) found, some journalists see this as an opportunity to improve the breadth and quality of a newspaper’s content while others have claimed it is creating “content on the cheap.”¹⁵
- 2.3 Data analysis could also help generate news stories. With greater access to data sources, journalists could be using it to produce data-driven stories about their local area. The increasing importance of data analysis is emphasised by the emergence of journalism courses which combine IT and computer science, and specific data journalism courses.
- 2.4 But as the digital presence of local newspapers increases, there is evidence of less “on-the-ground” news reporting or investigative journalism. As Hannah Walker, Editor-in-Chief, London Weekly News, explained, local newspapers increasingly have to “pick and choose.” She said “we have to make more informed choices ... I cannot afford to lose a reporter for three days not being productive. I need some copy because we have deadlines and we need to get papers out.” And, as Eric Gordon, Editor of the Camden New Journal Group, identified, the higher opportunity costs of deploying journalists to cover certain stories means less investigative journalism is being carried out. He said: “The fact is that over the years there are fewer journalists and therefore, of course, what you call investigative reporting is now much less often done than it used to be years ago. There is little doubt about that.”
- 2.5 A democratic deficit could emerge if local newspapers continue to scale back coverage of courts and councils. Linda Quinn, Editor-in-Chief, Brixton Bugle, told the committee there was “the real potential for a democratic deficit as a result of a lack of local community reporting.” She said if people “do not know what is happening in their name, it is very difficult to form a judgment to hold the council to account.” While the scale of the problem is unclear, there is evidence the increase in the digital readership of local newspapers is not being matched by an increase in the number of on-the-ground reporters. Local newspapers are at their best when they are part of the fabric of their local community. And while many still are, a continuing focus away from community reporting because of cuts to staff and consolidation risks leaving people less engaged and less informed about their local community.

- 2.6 Local authorities are increasingly producing their own local news content. The committee heard how many local authorities were expanding press and communications teams, and producing publications which were in direct competition with local newspapers for advertising revenues. Martin Hoscik, a journalist and founder of Mayorwatch, said these projects were often “pet projects by the executive” and “damaging to democratic accountability because what people are getting is a very sugared, polished council propaganda rag.” The Government has intervened to prevent the spread of local authority newsletters. It has introduced guidance to prevent newsletters being published more often than quarterly.¹⁶ While recognising the role local authority newsletters can play in keeping people informed, it is important they are not seen as a direct substitute for local newspapers. The committee would also like to see local authorities supporting the local news industry by adopting the more open transparency standards of the GLA and Transport for London, and, as Professor Phillips argues, helping “put a bit of life back into the local press” by advertising and making announcements through them.
- 2.7 A lack of diversity among local journalists is unlikely to improve with fewer job opportunities. A survey of 700 journalists by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found 94 per cent of all UK journalists were white.¹⁷ Linda Quinn, Editor-in-Chief, Brixton Bugle, said the diversity of the journalists she was training from three colleges in South London was “narrowing.” She said this was largely because of poor pay.
- 2.8 London’s diversity should be reflected in its press. The Mayor could work with corporate partners to fund bursaries for journalists to tackle the lack of diversity in the local news industry. The Evening Standard and The Independent have recently created an apprenticeship programme for journalists targeted at candidates from a diverse range of ethnic and social backgrounds.¹⁸ In a similar vein, bursaries could be targeted at Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic journalists and those on low starting salaries seeking further career development. The committee heard how the high cost of living in London is making it harder for journalists to remain in the industry. While the issue of low pay speaks to a wider point about the sustainability of local news, bursaries would help to improve the diversity of the supply chain of talent newspapers could draw on.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should explore opportunities to work with corporate partners to fund bursaries for journalists to tackle the lack of diversity in the local news industry.

- 2.9 There is a risk the switch from print to digital will marginalise some groups. In London, around half a million people have never been online. According to the ONS, a quarter of disabled adults in the UK have never used the internet.¹⁹

Unsurprisingly, older people are the group least likely to have accessed the internet.²⁰ Yet older people are the demographic group most likely to read a local newspaper. According to research by Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre, commissioned by Media Trust, older people express a strong need for well-functioning local newspapers.²¹ But there is also evidence some young people are digitally excluded. Martin Hoscik said many younger people from lower income families were unable to access the internet. He said the Mayor’s trial tablet-lending scheme in local libraries was welcome, but more could be done to help “all young people have the opportunity to go online.”

- 2.10 There is evidence young people are less likely to access news. According to Professor Phillips, because of the choice available of things to do online, young people are less likely to access news. She said many young people were “news-excluded”, and their only contact with news might be from picking up a copy of the Evening Standard on the Tube or bus. She said school projects to bring news into schools were important in making more young people aware of the news sources available to them.
- 2.11 Teaching the value of local news could be part of the London Curriculum.²² The GLA’s London Curriculum offers free teaching resources. Its aim is to create exciting learning experiences and one aspect could be exploring the importance of local news to communities. As Hannah Walker told the committee, the reception she gets from visiting schools is excellent. She said children in citizenship classes “are taught to play a part in their communities and so they are going to need a voice and their voice is the local newspaper.” Hannah Walker also emphasised the importance of local newspapers offering “fair and balanced coverage” and letting their readers “make up their own minds.” Given the rise in ‘fake news’, these classes could explore the importance of objectivity and checking sources in engaging with local news.
- 2.12 TfL should consider carrying copies of local newspapers on bus networks. To protect those groups digitally and news-excluded, TfL could trial a pilot carrying copies of local newspapers on specific bus routes. By offering free distribution of the newspapers, it would have the benefits of helping advertising revenues, expanding the readership of the newspapers, and offering a different set of views. And given older people and young people are more likely to use the bus, it would be socially inclusive.

Recommendation 3

To protect those groups digitally and news-excluded, TfL should consider trialling a pilot carrying copies of local newspapers on specific bus routes.

3. What the future holds for local news

Key findings

- While local newspapers face an uncertain future, there are signs the industry is responding to the challenge.
- Hyperlocal newspapers and blogs are playing an increasingly important role in covering community issues.
- Digital innovation has the potential to reimagine local news provision while also supporting new journalistic talent. However, this cannot be achieved without investment.

What the future holds for local news

- 3.1 While local newspapers face an uncertain future, there are signs the industry is responding to the challenge. From May 2017, the BBC, following an agreement with the News Media Association (NMA), will spend £8m a year funding 150 local reporters.²³ The reporters will be employed by local newspapers and will be based around the UK, with 12 in London and the South East. They will be selected through a bidding process. According to Michael MacFarlane, Head of BBC London and BBC South East, there will be very specific rules around how they will operate, with a particular focus on covering councils and other public institutions. The material they supply will be available to the individual newspaper groups, the BBC, and any other relevant and approved users. While the committee welcomes the scheme in principle, it is important these reporters will not be used plug gaps left by staffing vacancies. The BBC and NMA should work with the NUJ to ensure there are appropriate safeguards to prevent this from happening.



Proposed number of Local Democracy Reporters across the UK

- 3.2 Facebook wants to establish “stronger ties” with the news industry. The social media and networking service recently announced plans to launch a Facebook Journalism Project. The aim of the project is to collaborate with news organisations on new products to “equip people with the knowledge they need to be informed readers in the digital age.”²⁴ As part of the project, Facebook has also proposed “exploring what we can build together with our

partners to support local news and promote independent media...to shape what local news on Facebook could look like.” Google has also recently announced funding for 124 digital news projects.²⁵

- 3.3 But Facebook and Google do not want to report on local news. While both companies compete with local newspapers for advertising, they do not provide their own local news content. Instead, they provide a platform for others to publish information which may or may not be described as “local news”. For some, this has created a grey area where Facebook and Google can publish ‘fake news’ stories with impunity from privacy, libel or copyright law.
- 3.4 Hyperlocal newspapers and blogs are playing an increasingly important role in covering community issues. According to research by Carnegie UK Trust, there are around 240 hyperlocal news sites in the UK.²⁶ The sites tend to converge in metropolitan areas, and vary in scale. London is well served by hyperlocal news sites: around a fifth are based in the capital. A survey by academics of 183 UK hyperlocal sites found the majority cover local council meetings and local business, and seven out of ten see what they do as “a form of community participation.”²⁷
- 3.5 The Brixton Bugle and City Matters are two examples of successful hyperlocal newspapers. The Brixton Bugle is a monthly free newspaper run part-time by Tim Dickens, a freelance journalist and Zoë Jewell, who works in television. The newspaper and accompanying blog is funded through advertising and one-off grants from The Journalism Foundation and the Carnegie Trust. According to its website, its blog attracts around 25,000 hits a week. City Matters currently puts out about 15,000 free copies each week, and is also close to breaking even after six months of publishing. The newspaper has a strict Square Mile focus, and delivers around six thousand copies to select offices within the City.
- 3.6 Blogging sites have also found success by identifying niche markets. Mayorwatch, which is run by Martin Hoscik, has been covering London politics since 1998. It regularly covers Assembly, TfL, Met and MOPAC meetings, and has good access to the Mayor’s team and the Assembly. Mayorwatch has been credited with breaking stories such as the Mayor’s TfL fares freeze pledge.
- 3.7 Hyperlocal newspapers and news blogs deserve to be recognised as credible news sources. According to Martin Hoscik, some London councils do not treat hyperlocal and bloggers in the same way as they do the mainstream media. He said the GLA and the functional bodies were an exception and he would like to see London councils adopt the same ‘gold standard’ for how local council press and communications teams work with hyperlocals and bloggers in sharing information and providing access.

- 3.8 Despite the growing importance of hyperlocals and blogs, there are questions about their ability to generate revenue and grow. Many hyperlocals rely on volunteers. They also do not have the resources that local newspapers have, for example, legal and administrative support. But, while the Brixton Bugle is currently run predominantly by volunteers, Linda Quinn said it had ambitions to employ staff using a combination of advertising from companies fulfilling their corporate social responsibilities and crowdfunding.
- 3.9 Running local newspapers as co-operatives could create a sustainable future for the local press. Linda Quinn said the Brixton Bugle was also exploring a co-operative model with community groups and businesses which would enable it to operate on a more stable financial footing. Eric Gordon, which is “commonly-owned”, was also in favour of not-for-profit models for local newspapers. He referred to the Berlin newspaper Die Tageszeitung, which was saved by the community and is now owned by a co-operative of 12,000 readers.
- 3.10 Embracing digital innovation can also support local news. One option could be the development of an app which serves as a single news hub for London. The idea, suggested by Professor Phillips to the committee, would enable the most interesting local interest stories from across the boroughs to be shared with a wider audience. The proposal is based on a model currently being developed by a small team of entrepreneurs in the UK. CompassNews is an app which will curate a range of different national news stories. The app has agreement with news organisations in the UK and some in the US. It is initially being targeted at students through a subscription-based model, with the majority of the revenue shared with news publishers. But if the app is successful it could be made available to the wider public.
- 3.11 The Mayor can support digital innovation in local news through apprenticeships. The Mayor is investing £7 million to help young people train for jobs in the digital, creative and technology sectors in London. As part of the programme, he has committed to establish “new courses and apprenticeships.” As well as supporting the development of a bursary scheme for BAME journalism students and those from low income families, the Mayor could establish a digital journalism apprenticeship, which could encompass the latest in data journalism techniques. The apprenticeship could be designed in partnership with the NUJ, which has argued that London should be at the “forefront of a dynamic digital media economy.”

Recommendation 4

In partnership with the National Union of Journalists, the Mayor should investigate the potential to establish a digital journalism apprenticeship.

- 3.12 There are other ways the Mayor could support local news and democratic engagement. The Mayor could also establish a fund for projects related to democratic engagement, social cohesion and local enterprise. According to a report by the Media Standards Trust, in the US, \$67 million has been invested in civic technology through grants to involve people in planning decisions (Openplans.org) and to set up crowdfunding platforms for civic projects (Citizinvestor.com). The Mayor's Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement has spoken of the importance of ensuring people in London are "well connected with what is going on" and that they have an input in what the Mayor does and the Mayor "has an understanding of what is going on within those communities."
- 3.13 While the landscape of local news has changed, there is still demand for it. The rise of hyperlocals and blogs shows people still want to read local news, but how they are doing this has changed. The local news industry is at a crossroads. Digital innovation has the potential to reimagine local news provision while also supporting new journalistic talent. However, this cannot be achieved without investment. This report only scratches the surface, but the development of a London local news app which curates news content rather than generating it offers a glimpse of what is possible.

Our approach

The Economy Committee agreed the following terms of reference for this investigation:

- To examine how local news provision in London has changed over the past decade and what is driving that change.
- To consider the impact of these changes on local news in London, and how local news might be delivered in the future.

At its public evidence session, the committee took oral evidence from the following guests:

- Laura Davison, National organiser, National Union of Journalists
- Hannah Walker, Editor-in-Chief, South London Press/Mercury
- Ceri Gould, Editor-in-Chief, Trinity Mirror
- Eric Gordon, Editor, Camden New Journal group
- Professor Angela Phillips, Goldsmiths University
- Michael Macfarlane, Head of BBC London and BBC South East
- Martin Hoscik, journalist and commentator, Mayorwatch
- Linda Quinn, Editor-in-Chief, Brixton Bugle

During the investigation, the committee also received written submissions from the following organisations:

- The National Union of Journalists
- London Weekly News
- Camden New Journal

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If you, or someone you know, needs a copy of this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email: assembly.translations@london.gov.uk.

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