HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on Communications and Digital

Corrected oral evidence: The future of journalism

Tuesday 9 June 2020

3 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Gilbert of Panteg (The Chair); Lord Allen of Kensington; Baroness Bull; Baroness Buscombe; Viscount Colville of Culross; Baroness Grender; Lord McInnes of Kilwinning; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Meyer; Baroness Quin; Lord Storey; The Lord Bishop of Worcester.

Evidence Session No. 12 Virtual Proceeding Questions 99 - 107

Witnesses

I: Edward Iliffe, Chief Executive Officer, Iliffe Media; Adam Cantwell-Corn, Co-founder, *Bristol Cable*.

Examination of witnesses

Edward Iliffe and Adam Cantwell-Corn.

Q99 **The Chair:** Welcome to this hearing of the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee. We are conducting an inquiry into the future of journalism and are joined by two witnesses today. I will introduce them in a moment. Can I remind our witnesses that we will record today's session and a transcript will be taken? Our first witnesses are Ed Iliffe, chairman of Iliffe Media, and Adam Cantwell-Corn, co-founder of the *Bristol Cable*.

Thank you both very much for joining us, giving us your time and giving evidence to our inquiry. You have both submitted written evidence, which is available on our website. We are very grateful for that. I will start by asking you to introduce yourselves and give us your perspective on the future of local journalism, which is the focus area for us today, and the prospects and issues it faces.

Edward Iliffe: Thank you for asking me to join you today. I hope I can provide some useful insight. You have a brief history in your papers, I believe, but I am the owner of Iliffe Media, a private company publishing around 38 local weekly newspapers with associated websites, six local radio stations and a members-only app, providing access to all our published content. My family has been in this business under various names since 1891. We still print our own titles in-house. I am also a 50% shareholder of Highland News & Media, which recently took on 17 weekly papers based out of Inverness that had gone into administration.

I would like to think we take a long view, remain committed to news media and believe that demand for it will never diminish. Beyond the world of media, my business interests lie in malting, marinas, agriculture and real estate. I simply mention that because I try to see the various business interests in a similar light. Long-term trust is what we are trying to achieve.

As far as local journalism goes, our intention has always been to be trusted, be respected, maintain very high standards of reporting, inform readers of useful, relevant and entertaining facts and be a force for good. I am not sure I completely agree with the premise mentioned in the previous papers about a lack of trust outside London. That is not our experience anyway. As a force for good, it is, therefore, a key component of local democracy.

No matter what industry you operate in, the latest technology should always be embraced and used where appropriate, but in our view it does not drive the news agenda. If used correctly, it can reduce the cost of news gathering and increase the impact through enhanced communication. It cannot substitute the journalist. I do not believe journalism can be done by AI or in any other form. It requires a human.

I have one piece of paperwork that I did not quite get the chance to circulate, because I only just found it, but it makes the point. I found the editorial of our first paper from February 1891, which talks about

impartiality, being political without being partisan and so on. The last sentence is quite succinct. "Daily journalism in the Midlands: we have confidence that we shall be able to send out a journal which will win public appreciation and support". In my view, journalism needs to be demanded and it is our responsibility to provide something that the public wish to support by ultimately buying it and reading it. The future is bright.

The Chair: That is very encouraging. Before we move on, you slightly disagreed with the point we were making when we launched the inquiry: that some people say there is a lack of trust in journalism. You said that in your experience, there certainly is not at a local level. Is there generally a lack of trust in journalists and journalism, except at local level, or is the trust issue overstated more broadly?

Edward Iliffe: The phone-hacking arrangements that were in the national agenda have been hugely damaging. We fight on a daily basis to explain that we did not do that. It is illegal. People should not have been doing it. Action against those who did should have been taken more swiftly. That is probably where the biggest damage to trust arises. Then you have the fake news agenda, which does not really apply to local journalism. We may come on to that a bit later.

The Chair: I am sure we will. Thank you very much indeed, Edward. Adam, can we have a brief introduction and your perspective on the future of journalism, to see whether you are as optimistic as Edward?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: Good afternoon, everyone. I am the co-founder, contributing editor and operations co-ordinator of the *Bristol Cable*. The *Bristol Cable* was founded in 2014 in Bristol. We are a 100% member-owned, not-for-profit newspaper publishing in print and online. Our focus is quality local journalism, primarily focusing on features, investigations and longer-term forms of journalism, as opposed to daily news and publishing. That is an important niche for us, to contribute to the scope and quality of journalism, particularly on a local level.

We pioneer different methods of community and member engagement with a member base of 2,000 paying members at the moment. They are all democratic and legal shareholders of the *Bristol Cable*, who contribute a small amount in subscriptions every month, some more and some less.

The *Bristol Cable* is recognised as a pioneer in the sector and internationally for building a new model for journalism that is rooted in communities and quality journalism. Last year we were awarded the British Journalism Award for local journalism and we were shortlisted for an Orwell Prize this year. This is part of a global movement in the broader journalism sector, which is trying to face the challenges of technology, public attitudes and the financial crisis across much of journalism.

A lot of this is down to the potentially slightly ambiguous concept of trust. There is often a lot of talk about trust, but it is not really clear why a lot of people do not trust journalists or which journalists or media in particular they do not trust. We are based on the premise that the future

of journalism depends on a pivot to the audience—turning to and focusing more closely on the audience as the primary aim. Although it might be the intention, that has too often been substituted by advertising and the commodification of the journalism business model versus its public purpose.

There is a saying in my part of the industry that refers to those people no longer as the audience, but as the people formerly known as the audience. That indicates a larger expectation of engagement, impact and dialogue. Ultimately, it is about bringing down the passive receipt of journalism, with journalists as the sole gatekeepers of information. If we respond to that in a proactive way, we can build trust, build habit and, in turn, ideally, build revenue.

The situation is quite severe, although Edward has pointed out some positives and there are many. Recently, the impact of coronavirus has made acute a pre-existing chronic crisis in the journalism business model which has existed for at least 10 years, maybe even 20. At the moment, we are supported by philanthropic foundations from the United States, because it is next to impossible to get funding in the UK. I am sure we will talk about that. They fund us because they recognise the influence that even a small organisation such as ours can have on the sector. That is the impact we hope to have, as well as the immediate impact on a local level.

The Chair: On your business model, are the people who produce journalism for you salaried staff, freelancers, volunteers or a mixture of all three?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: They are primarily salaried staff. We are a small team of 10. That includes editorial staff as well as everything else it takes to run a business. We have a number of freelancers who contribute in various ways: written, video, graphic design and that sort of thing. We then have occasional contributors, whom we might commission for a one-off opinion piece on a matter of their concern or expertise.

The Chair: If I was looking at your output, what would I think you are? I do not mean this disparagingly. Would I think you were an agenda-driven campaigning organisation or a news service? How do you think a consumer would describe you?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: It is an interesting question. I am not sure there is an archetypal consumer. People would have different perspectives. We are on the progressive end of the political spectrum and that is reflected in our journalism. I would challenge anybody here today to point me to a journalism organisation that does not a political flavour or bent, visible and transparent or not. It is critical to understand that, if and when we get to AI, it will be programmed by a human and, therefore, imbued with their subjectivity and angles. Ultimately, the point of journalism is to find angles on human events and tell that story.

Q100 **Baroness Buscombe:** I will begin by declaring an interest. I have worked with Edward Iliffe commercially, but that ceased about five years ago. I had a question for you both, in two parts. The first part goes to

the point you have just raised, Adam, about the key challenges for local news organisations. What are the financial sustainability challenges? What can the industry or you as local organisations do to support yourselves? Secondly, is there a role for public policy to assist local journalism in overcoming these challenges?

Edward Iliffe: The recent obstacles to local financial sustainability are both systemic and a slowness to respond to new methods of distribution. The financial issues in the existing sector are primarily defined pension fund deficits, which have hit most of the established local and national media very hard, and an overgearing of businesses by a number of shareholders. These are not unique to the media sector, but are particularly visible. The others are a fall in paid-for circulation and a decline in advertising. Overall, advertising has gone up, but advertising in local media and newspapers has gone down.

The first two, defined pension fund issues and gearing, are of the industry's own making. The second two can be addressed by doing business slightly differently. To answer the question on public policy, there are three areas that could help. The main one is to widen the principles of what is deemed to be published and, thereby, ensure that content abides by long-established publishing rules. As a direct point, why should social media have immunity from publishing rules that long-established media has to abide by?

If these were to apply, social media would, in my view, seek to buy content from those that produce quality content and content originators would indemnify the platforms for their content. Social media will not become a publisher in its own right by originating content, but it can disseminate the content and pay for it. Therefore, some means of getting social media platforms into the realm of publishers would be extremely helpful. In our industry, we are regulated by IPSO for press and online, and Ofcom for our radio output. Why should social media be exempt?

This thing of data journalism has been bandied about a bit. To my mind, central and local government have an awful lot of data, which could be made more accessible through the use of the internet, technology and so on. An example would be transcripts for court reporting. We have been led to believe that court reporting is of limited interest to the general public. We do not believe that to be the case. We did a micropayments test in one of our newspapers, where we would charge 20p to read content. Strangely, most of the content that people paid for was court reporting.

The problem we have with court reporting now is that the courts have generally been centralised and, therefore, do not sit in many areas where our publishing offices traditionally are. Bury St Edmunds, for instance, is 50 miles from Ipswich, which is where the court now resides. If I want to cover a court case relating to some misdemeanour in Bury St Edmunds, I have to travel 100 miles, as a round trip, on the off chance that the court is running to timetable and so on, to get the story. If that story could just be transcribed and made available online, our journalists could deal with that from anywhere in the world, quite frankly. It is not a

transcript that the general public want to read. They want to read the journalist's view and opinion. That is what we are trying to provide. This could apply to an awful lot of government data.

Thirdly, I believe the Government are looking at the role of search engines in general terms and the large media companies, particularly Google, Apple and Microsoft. They substantially control the advertising markets by virtue of controlling both the hardware and the software. It is a bit opaque as to how all that really works. The Competition and Markets Authority could look into making that more widely available to other entrants, other market providers and so on.

Then we have some general ideas, just to widen it a bit further. I have not been in education for some time, but there may some way of educating younger people to recognise where information comes from and whether to trust it. That does not mean the newspaper output is good necessarily, but people should understand how their information gets round and start to address the fake news agenda.

That is probably enough. Our organisation is not advocating any form of local funding. We do not want government backing in that sense. We do not see that subsidy of any form is helpful. We need to remain independent and stand on our own two feet.

Baroness Buscombe: To what degree do you think quality of content makes the difference to financial sustainability?

Edward Iliffe: Long term, quality is everything. I would certainly go along with what Adam is trying to do. We have been trying to do that recently in one of our newspapers. We opened a new newspaper in Cambridge. We have been running it for the last two or three years from scratch, with no press releases. We employ our own photographer. We print it on a higher grade of paper.

The industry is strange. Unlike any other industry I am involved with, when the going gets tough, we make the product worse. Really, we should do the opposite. We need to invest in the journalism. Our ultimate strategy is to have, as we used to, a long time ago, the circulation revenue equivalent to the cost of the journalists employed to produce the content. The advertising will follow. We are, realistically, some way off achieving that.

The online subscriptions we are trying to move towards, or membership, depending on which way you look at it, will probably come. Interestingly, the *Telegraph* has returned all its furlough money as of yesterday, because the number of subscriptions it achieved during the coronavirus output more than bridged the gap. The *Spectator* has done the same. I do not have the full story, but there was a newsflash yesterday. I thought it was very interesting.

Adam Cantwell-Corn: I agree with much of what Edward has said. For independent or singular titles such as ours, and this may also apply to groups, there is this question of scale. A lot of people look to, for example, the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph* or other prime examples of organisations that have managed to raise significant revenue from their

readership as the advertising base has eroded. They have national and even global audiences. For organisations such as ours, the question is whether we can bring in enough people from our target market to support us financially and whether that is equivalent to what we need to be sustainable.

I will skip the stuff you have heard before and go straight to public policy. I deviate here from what Ed said. Of course, this needs to be handled carefully and some of the debates are particularly vexed, but public policy can help in three broad categories: protecting the industry, supporting innovation and in the long term. On protection, there is scope for a positive contribution of direct or in-kind financial support for the sector. I am not sure whether you are aware of DCMS's smallish funding of the Nesta initiative, which supports innovation in the sector. *Bristol Cable* is a recipient of that. There is a debate about charity status or equivalent that will give the sector the benefits and privileges afforded to other activities determined to be in the public interest and to the public benefit.

That sort of in-kind support would help protect the industry from the ravages of the market, which have accelerated fake news, clickbait and, in turn, distrust, disengagement and news avoidance. All these phenomena have significant consequences for our society and democracy. It would support the industry with those structural changes, for example unleashing charitable or equivalent funding. It is odd that, as an organisation, we have to turn to philanthropists in the United States, who fund stuff internationally, to support what we do because we cannot get it nationally. That is partly because of the regulatory and legal rules on charitable giving.

There are examples across the world of public funding. In Scandinavia, there is direct or indirect public funding of public service broadcasting and journalism. In Australia, as you may have heard, there is a relatively advanced debate and policy formation regarding a tax on technology companies and platforms, to support the journalism they rely on in order to fill their platforms with content.

On innovation, we could use universities and independent organisations, such as Nesta, to provide incubator-style hubs and accelerator programmes for organisations that push the boundaries of innovation in the sector, whether it is the production of journalism, distribution, new models, use of tech, skill development or industry-wide sharing. This comes with a big debate on what counts as the public interest, who benefits and who is eligible for that. That is a really difficult debate.

Edward, you mentioned the *Telegraph* and the *Spectator*, which you could credibly call agenda-driven newspapers or magazines. It is a question of where we draw the line to ensure commitment to high standards and accountability with regards to governance, ownership, dividends and profits, if there is to be public subsidy for these organisations. You will know as well as I do that organisations and industries that are considered important, of public interest, of strategic and long-term interest for the country and beyond, have protection and

subsidy. The manner in which that is done just needs to be discussed a little further, in an open and transparent way.

Finally, in the long term, there are the technical and policy fixes, and then the stuff about building a culture from an early age and for everyone, with education on the value and purpose of journalism and how to fact check. It needs to be embedded in curriculums and general public discourse that this is a valid and useful thing that has often been denigrated, sometimes by journalists and journalism organisations themselves. We need to push back on the intangible erosion of value, as well as consider the hard policy solutions to what, as I am sure you will hear, is a big question for us in terms of the health of the public and democracy.

Q101 **Lord Storey:** It is good to hear of successful local journalism. My question is in two parts. First, despite your successes, we are seeing literally dozens and dozens of local newspapers across the UK closing down, and, incidentally, local radio stations and local TV being syndicated. It is not just the closure of provision of local news. It means there is nobody there to hold local politicians to account, expose any particular scandals or report on particularly important court cases. Bearing in mind your success, I wonder if you would pick out particular ingredients that could be used, across the local news industry as a whole, to help reverse some of these losses.

Secondly, this is not a view I hold particularly, but do people actually want local news? If they want local news, presumably they would be buying local newspapers, switching on local radio stations and looking at local websites. Why are people apparently turning away from local news?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: First, I have to add a caveat about the nature of success for the *Cable* and in this particular business. You had a submission from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford. I remember having a conversation with the director there. He said, "In this industry, survival is success". In many respects, that epitomises where we are for quality journalism. The type of success we have had is born of trying to face the challenges for local journalism and all journalism head on.

There are questions of trust, accountability, transparency and perceived or actual influence of proprietors or others. You see that raging, particularly on social media. There is a lot of distrust and the media is often seen as part of "the establishment". We need to both challenge that and recognise those concerns. We have done that by saying, "We are 100% transparent. We are democratically owned. We are not for profit. We produce journalism that does not contribute to the outrage conveyor belt that journalism can often be". There are a lot of great journalists who continue to work in legacy publications, including in Bristol.

In terms of the ingredients, it is a really difficult question, but it has to be about quality first, rather than chasing ever-dwindling returns from advertising. Advertising will never be able to support journalism again.

The harder we work now to win the confidence of the people formerly known as the audience, the better.

That comes to your second question: why are people not paying for it? First, as Edward mentioned, in this industry the response to financial pressures has too often been to cut or revert to quantity over quality. It is a generalisation, but that has eroded the public trust. Now, when we turn to them and say, "Do you not want to pay for this important, useful and vital product?", they say, "Why? We were used to having it for free for ages".

Younger people in particular, who have been brought up in the culture of never paying for or supporting journalism, are now being asked to pay by organisations that have not communicated that what they do is of value and backed up that communication, so that people will pay for it, in the same way they pay for Netflix, Spotify and other subscription-based services. We have a long way to go. That comes back to the question of how we build a culture where journalism is respected. We need a frank conversation about which journalism is worth supporting and which might be okay if it is for free.

Edward Iliffe: We are moving to a paid-for model. I do not see free as the way forward. You make a couple of interesting points there. The audience is actually bigger now. We are probably serving more people now than we have ever done, predominantly online. We have 9 million supposed individual readers per month. We never had anywhere near that audience before. Paid-for circulation is still in slow decline. The reality is that the screen is probably of greater use. It is more practical for many people. In the end, we will migrate mostly to a screen of some description. I do not think I could sell my printing press; there is no market for it. We will continue to print while we can.

I agree with Adam. Quality will drive an audience, as it will drive any product. It does not matter—whatever you produce, the better it is, the more likely you are to have a marketplace for it. We have been lazy for the last 20-odd years. We have really only had TV and radio to contend with. You mentioned local TV. We were involved in a local TV project about 20 years ago and it simply did not work. There was no audience for it. The only local TV station that worked, as Lord Allen will probably be aware, was Channel TV, one of the ITV franchises, which had a distinct marketplace but was heavily subsidised by his company, I think, at the time.

The model does not really work from that point of view. The demand and audience for local news are good, but it will not work until you produce something that people really want. There are people doing that. It is a cultural change. The education point is a really interesting one. That does not mean that what we produce is necessarily always supported or understood, but it is about learning, understanding and valuing the time and effort that someone has put into it.

Our general view is that we wish to produce constructive, positive news wherever possible. People do not want to come back to a rape-infested, pillaged local community. They want to know how the schools are doing,

how their house prices are going up, how the local football team is doing, sports and that type of thing. People really engage in that.

Adam Cantwell-Corn: On the question of readership, the guiding metric for many digital businesses of late has been the number of page views or eyeballs on that piece of journalism content. It is because that is how people made money from the fractional bits of advertising that could be torn away from Google, primarily.

Sometimes, when we publish an investigation, a series or an in-depth feature, we get lower page views, a smaller number of people looking at what we do, but they stay for longer. They return, are more loyal and might even end up contributing to our journalism financially. The sector needs to move away from those metrics—"Can we make this go viral? How can we prime the headlines so it promotes outrage and sharing online?"—to ask, "Can we go for quality, loyalty and returning habitual use?"

The Chair: We are slipping a bit for time and we have a lot to get in. Can I ask for succinct questions and answers, please?

Q102 **Baroness Grender:** One of the huge challenges in journalism is the lack of diversity. How very apt, Adam, that we have you here today from what has been a centre of controversy on the issue of Black Lives Matter. In UK journalism, there is a very low percentage of non-white people and of people from a working-class background.

What is the challenge that both of you face? How do you overcome it? Trevor Phillips in the *Times* today lays out a route plan for everyone to challenge themselves to involve more BAME people in their walk of life; how are you meeting those challenges? What do your metrics look like at the moment on that? What needs to change for the future of journalism?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: It is a really important question, which plays into the issue of trust and viability. We approach this by having a proactive role in organising events in the community, with partnership organisations that have a base in the community. We are trying to do more video and bring people into the process. We offer training; we have early career journalism schemes. We cover issues in a way that tries to centre the voices of different people's experiences. We have a long way to go on that. We are a small organisation, but that is an ongoing conversation we have been having, which has been brought to the fore by recent events.

We need to be proactively having that conversation internally and making sure it is resourced to create opportunities for aspiring young journalists from underprivileged backgrounds. That is really critical. We should not then fall into the trap of saying, "You are from X community or background. Therefore, that is what you should write about. That is all you have a legitimate or interesting perspective on". Many people from BAME or working-class communities want to write about policy issues, history or something totally unrelated. We need to work on and acknowledge that.

Edward Iliffe: The short answer to the question is that there are a huge number of potential journalists coming out of the higher education sector. It always amazes me how many of them there are. People aspire to the job, even now. We run our own apprenticeship schemes, in conjunction with the NUJ and so on. Beyond that, I do not have anything much to say. We do not mind who comes along. We will train them, if that is what they ask for. We have a relationship with Kent University in particular, which runs a journalism course for TV, radio and newsrooms.

Q103 **Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall:** I am very interested, Adam, in what you said about the people formerly known as the audience and your interactions with them. I wonder whether you can, in answering this question, talk about the diversity or otherwise of that audience. It has been put to us that there is a place for public policy in trying to make the career of journalism available to people who perhaps have neither the resources nor the will to go to university and take a degree. We all understand that there are many people coming out of universities who want to be journalists. What about the people who do not, who are likely to be more diverse and represent a wider cross-section of society than those who do? Can you both tell us who your team are and what place there is for public policy in broadening the base of journalists?

Edward Iliffe: Where you pick your potential journalists up from is a really important question. In our organisation, we take people of whatever age, from 16 upwards, and train them to work in our news organisations and make them aware of what is going on. We are not university-led necessarily. We take people from wherever, if there is a general interest in the subject and they can construct a sentence, and help them to deliver that. It is not something we particularly feel is a major issue, if I am honest, and maybe we should.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Which bit of it do you not feel is a major issue?

Edward Iliffe: It is the diversity of people coming towards us.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Is that because they are diverse or because you have not regarded it as a particularly high priority?

Edward Iliffe: We do not have an affirmative position on what we are trying to create, in terms of who is in our newsrooms or not. We are much more interested in people who really have a genuine need, wish and desire to tell the stories and do the inquiries.

Adam Cantwell-Corn: Our team is small. It is a team of 10 people. Everybody is between 25 and 35, so it is a young team. I worked, along with the co-founder of the *Cable*, Alon Aviram, nights and weekends to make this happen, until we could raise enough money in grant funding and membership to get a paid team going. Our organisation demographically is not particularly diverse, although we make proactive efforts towards that. On the question of journalism and training, efforts need to be made to find more accessible avenues for journalism training.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: On this small team you have, are they

all university-educated? If they are, how many of them have degrees in journalism?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: They are all university-educated. I do not think any have degrees in journalism. To run a journalism organisation, you do not just need journalists. You increasingly need product managers, digital experts, audience experts, community engagement, newsroom management processes, business development, fundraisers and all these other aspects. That is overlooked in the current journalism training. I spend a lot of my time doing that. I probably spend about 20% of my time doing editorial and the rest is working with others to make sure the whole thing works. There are not, either in university or with the NCTJ, opportunities for developing those skills.

I would encourage you to look at—I can send you information on this afterwards—the convergence of the business schools and the journalism schools at American universities, who are saying, "Look, you need to know how to write a feature, and about ethics and law, but you also need to know about apps, potentially computer programming, newsroom management and all these other aspects to build a modern newsroom". That is a really important part of pipelining new skills into the sector. It is not just about the people you see on TV or by-lines on an article.

Q104 **The Lord Bishop of Worcester:** Greetings and thank you for being with us. I can certainly confirm from a West Midlands perspective how important local newspapers are. I can confirm what was found in a YouGov poll: that there is a considerable degree of trust in local news, as it compares with national news, and in journalists. I can attest to the importance of local newspapers, particularly to community cohesion. I am a huge fan of them. They are really important for the common good. There is a problem of reach. There are all sorts of people who would not generally search out news outlets. You have touched on this already, but I wonder whether you could both say a bit more about how you might encourage what used to be called the audience from those parts of the community that are not in your reach at the moment.

Edward Iliffe: It is incumbent on us to extend our audience as far as possible, not just online, to the point Adam referred to, which I agree with. Having a longer read is what we are trying to get to. We are trying to do that by hosting, managing and dealing with events, and being more in the community. The local papers used to be in the community a lot, particularly when we used to run newspapers in Birmingham and Coventry. We used to host all sorts of things. That has just been cut from the newsroom agenda of a lot of businesses. It does not work just to put out a piece of paper in your local shop. We need to be visible. We are opening up town centre "offices", where we can encourage people to walk in and communicate that way.

Ultimately, most of it will be online and that goes to Adam's point. We need to train people or be understanding of how you get your message out online. I am not personally on Facebook, but we use Facebook. I do not quite understand social media sometimes, but it is a massive avenue to promotion. We just have to keep promoting what we do well, why we

do it and market ourselves. We have been lazy. We have not marketed ourselves for a long time and produced content that people really find useful. We do not produce any generic content throughout our entire portfolio of titles. Each title produces its own content, apart from possibly the TV listings and the weather. We cannot really avoid that.

The rest is all based on what is going on in that particular community. Otherwise, it is not relevant. We will not talk about Donald Trump unless he happens to visit the individual town we are in. We ran a story in Bishop's Stortford when he landed at Stanstead Airport and they did some inappropriate mowing at the end of the runway, which you may have seen. Beyond that, it is the local agenda. It is incumbent on us to market that, promote it and extend it wider. With the benefit of the internet, we can publish to a far wider community than with the 90 pages that we used to do. We have much more space.

Adam Cantwell-Corn: There are interesting forms of journalism. There are organisations pioneering publisher-directed WhatsApp or TikTok groups, social video and ways that are more targeted at younger audiences, who are really important and have a relatively low level of engagement with traditional journalism.

The phenomenon of news avoidance worries me a lot. High numbers of people are turning away from journalism as a whole, because they look at it and feel disempowered. They are thinking, "Why do I need all this information?" I am particularly talking about the bigger issues of the day. They feel disempowered and they are just shut off. "You get all this information and you cannot do anything about it. Why would I want to know it? What is my agency to do with it?"

For example, we had a series and a special edition recently on this concept called solutions journalism, which tries, from a solutions-oriented viewpoint, to unpack problems with public transport, the retrofitting of homes or all these other things. Instead of just saying, "The public transport system is terrible and homes are totally energy inefficient", it looks at it from the public accountability point of view, but also brings in voices, expertise and information that says, "This is why it is worth knowing". That is a really important part of informing the public on how to use journalism.

In terms of groups and individuals that we are not reaching or are not generally reached, we need to tap into the conversations, networks, individuals and organisations that have purchase with them. They might be musicians, community leaders or youth groups who are reaching an audience that is not engaging with traditional journalism. Then we adapt the product to serve them. Organisations that have a target audience, as you must, cannot appeal to everyone and we need to acknowledge that. Journalism needs to target somebody as the audience. If you are for everybody, you end up being for nobody, in a way.

The Chair: We really need brief answers now, because we still have quite a bit to get through and we have you gentlemen for less than 10 minutes.

Q105 **Baroness Meyer:** I am going to ask about citizen journalism. I will start with Edward, because you mentioned court reporting and how the public are interested in reading about it. In fact, the Cairncross review highlighted court reporting as one area of public interest that needs to be sustained. On the other hand, a lot of local newspapers probably cannot afford to send journalists to sit through magistrates' court hearings. Is this an area where you think citizen journalism could or should play a role? If so, how do you organise them? Do you pay them or should they do it on a volunteering basis?

Edward Iliffe: The short answer is that no one should be volunteering. Ideally, we should pay people, as a general principle. I asked my group editor about this particular question. His view is that citizen journalism is a slightly outdated concept, because the ability to publish and self-publish on the web is enormous. People can pretty well say whatever they like.

On the court reporting point, there is a perfectly sensible technological solution to that. The cost is not in sitting and watching the court. It is in getting to court. It is down to the fact that our courts are so far away now. It is not practical. If the court could come to us in a virtual way, a bit like these meetings today, we would have no issue with our journalists sitting down, reviewing and writing, because we know which cases are coming up and which are of interest to our readers. We will write and there is demand for it. I do not know if that helps or answers the question.

Adam Cantwell-Corn: Absolutely, there is a place for citizens in journalism. I agree that the concept of citizen journalism is perhaps a little dated. The way in which we use citizen journalists is through sourcing, feeding back voices and contributions. As a good example, we are now building a piece of software, with the support of the Nesta funding, which we are calling Cable Links. All our membership and eventually the audience will be able to identify themselves if they want and say, "I live here. This is my professional experience. This is my personal experience. I am a parent. I am interested in this. This is my neighbourhood". Then they will be able to contribute to what we work on.

At the moment, we are working on an investigative series regarding a particular industry in the city and we have sourced a dozen different people who have contributions to make on that. That is engaging them in the process of journalism, showing how it works, but is ultimately a software version of the source book or contact book. These innovations could be and will be shared with the rest of the sector once we have rolled them out properly.

The Chair: Sadly, we are out of time, but we have one final question area, which relates to the role of the BBC. Given its scale, the BBC is going to have a huge impact on the future of journalism.

Q106 **Viscount Colville of Culross:** I have a question that I want to ask you first, Ed. Then I have a slightly separate question I want to ask Adam.

Ed, your newspapers are members of the BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service. Should the BBC be supporting local commercial media? If so, should that support be extended? In your answer, can you talk to me about the BBC's Shared Data Unit? That trains journalists in how to analyse and share data from public bodies so it can be useful. That is building on Lady Meyer's question.

Edward Iliffe: We are in the BBC scheme. Personally, I have slightly inherited them because they have come with the companies I have amalgamated. The individuals do a great job. I personally think we should be doing that job ourselves. I do not think the Government should be funding journalists through the BBC. Individually, they do a fine job. There are technological solutions that can lead to that type of content being shared.

The data unit is really worth spending more time on. That is a really good idea, but at the moment it is a bit complicated and we are still finding our way. We think that is a good step in the right direction.

Viscount Colville of Culross: Adam, in your submission you said the scheme should be rigorously evaluated to assess whether public service journalism can be delivered in a more high-impact way. How should that high-impact journalism happen?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: We do not have a reporter working in our newsroom, but we use the content. We have some reader feedback that the content is a series of facts and information—"he said; she said"—but does not really help illuminate the key issues, such as court reports or what is happening in the council. Something we are trying to do with our journalism, which the BBC reporter scheme could improve on, is helping us understand how the criminal justice system works, a little more about the systemic processes, issues, policies and legal structures around it, as well as the facts: "This person was sentenced for this crime and here is their mugshot". What does that actually tell us as a public about our legal system and justice in this country? That is what I meant: "Why is this happening?" It is not just what is happening.

Q107 **Lord Allen of Kensington:** I was hearing mixed views on the engagement of public service broadcasters, and the BBC in particular, supporting local newspapers. We hear that data and data infrastructure are positive areas. I would like to hear exactly what would be helpful there. Is funding something you would want? Obviously, it comes with strings. Thirdly, when we think about public bodies, the other area is the engagement of universities and how they could play a supportive part. I would like to understand what you would like and what you do not want from other public bodies.

Edward Iliffe: We are not advocates of subsidised journalists. We would wish to avoid that. As you say, it is not just government but universities and local government. All these public bodies have huge datasets. If they could be gradually made more achievable and accessible, our journalists would be able to interpret those more easily and add value to them from wherever their offices might happen to be. Court reporting is a good one,

because that is, broadly, at the moment, how it happens in the courts themselves. I can see some real value there.

I am not massively up to speed with the BBC data unit, but those types of ideas are the way forward. We currently have a link with the Press Association, for instance, which is a private body. It provides us with national news, so I do not have an issue with taking syndicated content, but I do not think it is necessarily a public view that should be taken with regard to the journalists themselves. We should run and manage our journalists, accessing the data in the most effective and technologically advanced way as possible.

Adam Cantwell-Corn: I will start with the BBC. The Local Democracy Reporting Service has been a good attempt at this, but it is ultimately a bung in a ship with a hole, or it is a prop, and it is a subsidy. Pretty much the vast majority of them have been accrued to profit-making organisations that are still taking out dividends and often not reinvesting back into journalism. I would like to see BBC money drive towards innovation in journalism. The underlying principle of any public financial support, direct or indirect, is taking the long-term view: "We are trying to build a sector that is financially sustainable and independent in the long term and does not need an ongoing subsidy".

For example, with the universities I would love to see—and this already happens in some respects—organisations formed with a collaboration between the business department and the journalism department, to create incubators and work with local organisations to build new products and help with marketing support or other resources that are quite hard to draw on for small organisations in particular.

I would probably steer clear of local authorities, just because of the necessity of independence and distance between local authorities and local journalism in particular. Coming back to the initial points, the market at the moment is failing to provide this public service. There is a role for public policy to mitigate the impacts of that, carefully try to protect the future of journalism and build a more resilient future.

Lord Allen of Kensington: I have a last point on cross-promotion. Would you want the BBC, Channel 4, et cetera, to be able to practically promote local journalism? Would that be helpful?

Adam Cantwell-Corn: Yes, absolutely. We have worked with the *Times*, the *Guardian*, the BBC and many others. When we do, as a small organisation, we see a big impact on profile, membership and opportunities.

Edward Iliffe: I would back that as well.

The Chairman: Edward and Adam, thank you both very much. It has been a very interesting session. You both seem to be very optimistic about the future of journalism at a local level. You presented us with some challenges and interesting things to take away, particularly this issue about the availability of data to journalists and what can be done by government and organisations at all levels to improve that. Thank you both very much for your evidence, for taking time out this afternoon to

give us that evidence and for the written evidence you have sent us. I hope you stay well.