

Introduction

The BBC would like to thank the Committee for their Future of News Inquiry and their recommendations regarding the BBC's work.

The Committee has produced an insightful and useful report which is of immense value and we are grateful for their interest in a sector that sits at the heart of the BBC. We also welcome the Committee's acknowledgment of the challenges faced by the World Service.

The provision of impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them is one of the BBC's public purposes as enshrined in the Royal Charter. In a world of increasing misinformation, disinformation and bad actors, where there are changes in how people access news, and technological developments such as Artificial Intelligence, this role is more important than ever.

We remain the UK's most used and most trusted news service. BBC News continues to be ahead of any other news provider when audiences are asked to pick the one source they are most likely to turn to for impartial, trusted and accurate news coverage. But we are not complacent which is why our [A BBC for the Future strategy](#) made pursuing the truth with no agenda one of our three essential roles.

We address the recommendations that relate directly to the BBC's work below. Regarding the wider report, particularly suggestions of declining trust in the BBC, we would refer the Committee to the additional evidence we supplied to the Inquiry, [published in May 2024](#). Using extensive data sets this explored how different audiences trust BBC News and responded to evidence from Public First regarding working class and leave voters.

As the Committee is aware the BBC is beginning the Charter Review process, and we welcome this report's interest in how the Charter can be shaped to reflect the changing news landscape. We expect to say more on the matters identified later this year when we respond to the forthcoming Government Green Paper on the issue.

Chapter 3: Financial health

12. The upcoming Charter Review is a key opportunity to refresh the BBC's relationship with local news. The Government should give the BBC an objective to engage with local news providers as strategic partners. This should involve expanding the Local Democracy Reporting Service and increasing the proportion of journalists allocated to small (including online-only) outlets. The BBC should also explore expanding its apprenticeship scheme in ways that support local news. (Paragraph 68)

The Inquiry paid particular attention to the commercial local news industry, its importance in supporting local democracy and tackling misinformation and disinformation, alongside the BBC's role in the sector.

The BBC provides distinctive and essential local services – while working with local partners to help foster a strong local news provision for all and helping to build social cohesion. We welcome the Committee’s suggestions regarding securing local provision and we will keep adapting the BBC’s local services to best serve our audiences and deliver our mission. This includes the role we play in supporting the sector such as through apprenticeships. However, funding challenges remain a consideration.

BBC Local represents, serves and brings together the communities of England and the Crown Dependencies with a unique set of services from Cumbria to the Channel Islands. We connect with our audiences through 39 Local Radio stations, 43 News Websites, Podcasts and content on BBC Sounds, as well as 13 regional television news programmes at 6.30pm on BBC One.

It is also worth noting along-side local services in England, the BBC also offers dedicated services to the Nations including in minority languages such as BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC ALBA in Scotland and BBC Radio Cymru in Wales. While BBC Northern Ireland has Ulster-Scots programming as well as Irish Language content such as on BBC Gaeilge online.

BBC Local delivers investigative and impactful journalism across all our local platforms and across the BBC on network television and the BBC News App. We are the home of local sport on air and online wherever our audiences live in England. Today, BBC Local services are used by almost half the adult population in England each week. Our regional news programmes at 6.30pm are the UK’s biggest TV news shows of all – consistently reaching a bigger audience across England than any other news programme on any channel.

In October 2022, we announced plans to enhance BBC Local’s online news services in England with an additional 130 journalist posts across the country and a greater focus on ‘digital first’ provision. Since then we have seen the following:

1. Over the last two years, BBC Local online news services have seen growth in traffic and weekly active accounts of more than 40%. Average weekly traffic is now 16.9m, over 13% ahead of target. BBC Local online news stories now represent almost 30% of all news stories read on the BBC News website/app.
2. Our market share of local online news consumption in England has grown over the same period from 18% to 33%, according to Ofcom.
3. Since the BBC Local Radio changes were introduced in full in England in Q4 2023, listening reach as measured by Rajar has been broadly flat year-on-year (at approx. 4.9m). BBC Local Radio across the whole UK remains the BBC’s third largest radio network – after Radio 2 and 4 – with approximately 7m weekly listeners.
4. On BBC Sounds, a regular pipeline of local content, particularly *Crime Next Door*, *The Salisbury Poisonings* Podcast and our live FA Cup coverage has seen us reach a

weekly average of 346,000 active accounts using Sounds for BBC Local content in England.

5. Regional TV news also continues to perform above target, with a YTD performance of 31% (viewing share) against a target of 29%. The 6.30pm BBC One regional slot remains the most watched TV news service in the UK, consistently drawing more than 4m viewers each night.
6. Collectively BBC Local services across tv, radio and online platforms reach over 20m people every week, 46% of the adult population (ahead of the 24/25 target of 43%).
7. We created eleven new investigative teams producing in-depth journalism for all our services and documentaries that have sparked national conversation and political debate.

The impact of our changes reflect a significant shift in audience behaviour across society. [Ofcom](#) reported last year that 71% UK adults are now consuming news via online sources, and research continues to show that local audiences of all ages are bigger consumers of local news via online and social media than through radio. So while local radio remains a key platform for our audiences, now for the first time, more people access BBC Local services online than listen to BBC Local Radio services. This is the result of a long-term trend and the shift is not exclusive to the BBC.

We committed that we would review the local changes that we made in 2023 and we will continue to do that this year, led by audience need. In the first quarter of 2025 we have introduced three new Saturday morning breakfast programmes, in Merseyside; Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire; and for the West Midlands and Coventry & Warwickshire.

Our General Election coverage through *Your Voice Your Vote* also harnessed our new multi-platform approach ensuring local voices were heard across our output. All our local radio debates were available on BBC Sounds and BBC iPlayer, and newly elected MPs appeared on their local station. We have also kicked off a new 'Hot Seat' feature on local radio, holding politicians, local decision makers and football managers to account.

BBC Local and the wider local news market

The Inquiry reflected claims by some commercial publishers that by investing in new online and investigative reporter posts we are jeopardising the sustainability of other local news providers.

However, there is no evidence the BBC "crowds out" local competition through its online activity. In fact, successive studies and reviews over the last decade show it is the internet – not the BBC – that has radically challenged the business models of local news operators. The same trends can be seen across the world, in markets with strong Public Service Media and little or no PSM provision alike.

Ofcom reviewed the BBC's local online plans at the outset and determined that they were unlikely to have a significant impact on other local providers. In fact, Ofcom concluded that our plans to strengthen BBC local news provision across 43 areas in England were unlikely to impact more than 0.5-1% of existing local media revenues. In their own words: "We do not consider the change is one that may have a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition."

Further, in their review of Local Media published in November 2024 Ofcom concluded that structural challenges are primarily driving this trend rather than the BBC's own investment and growth.

Local Democracy Reporting Service

The BBC continues to be a strong partner in the wider local news ecosystem. As reflected in the Inquiry report, the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news initiative, managed by the BBC in partnership with the News Media Association (NMA) to help fill a gap in the reporting of local democracy issues across the UK. The service currently employs 165 reporters. It is funded by the BBC but delivered under contract by the local news sector.

A new procurement process is ongoing, ahead of the new contract period starting on July 1 to initially run to the end of the current Charter. From July there be 118 contracts maintaining the existing number of 165 LDRs.

We are working very closely with the NMA to ensure the continued success of the scheme into the future. We are also exploring new ways to partner with the wider sector. Increased effort took place ahead of the opening of the procurement process to reach as many small partner outlets as possible. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of different partner organisations bidding in the 2025 procurement process and we will announce those which have been successful shortly.

On the wider subject of delivery, the LDRS has now produced more than 460,000 stories since launch in January 2018, including 10,000 in the first seven weeks of this year. While content from the Local News Partnership is now used by 224 individual media organisations, which jointly deliver for in excess of 1,100 individual online/print/broadcast brands.

13. The BBC must pursue transformational innovation as new technologies fundamentally reshape the news environment. In doing so, it should benefit the wider health of the UK media sector. (Paragraph 69)

14. Developing a public interest news generative AI tool is one option the BBC could explore as it seeks to keep pace with new technologies and changing consumer habits. This might involve a service that is designed to improve public access to authoritative information—perhaps with a particular focus on partnering with local news organisations. Any major projects of this nature would need to be subject to industry consultation and relevant public value and market impact assessments. (Paragraph 70)

The BBC believes the impact of AI, particularly Generative AI, will be felt far and wide, including in the news sector. We can see already that it will bring significant

opportunities. In parallel, it is also widely recognised that it will bring big significant challenges for our sector and our audiences.

We agree that the BBC should pursue transformational innovation for the public good, ensuring standards are upheld. This position is not new for the BBC. For example, the BBC is a founding member of the C2PA, which aims to address the twin problems of disinformation and declining trust. The C2PA has focussed on developing and deploying technical signals for media provenance such as the date and location of a piece of video. In practice, that means that if we shared a piece of content containing a signal, information about that content remains bonded with the piece of content as it travels around the internet.

We are currently pursuing a range of activity in relation to Generative AI, in line with the three core principles that guide our development work, namely:

- to always act in the best interests of the public
- to prioritise talent and creativity
- to be open and transparent with audiences.

We know that AI will create immense opportunities in newsrooms around the country and the world, if used responsibly and with sufficient human oversight.

In our news operation, this development work includes new tools to help summarise stories and to [translate content into different languages on BBC News](#) such as using AI to assist the translation of the BBC Mundo article on the 20th Anniversary of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami for our BBC Brasil service.

The AI tools around translation are particularly promising. Largely through the BBC World Service, at present BBC News reaches audiences of 414 million on average every week across its 42 language services, including English.

If used carefully, AI tools could unlock significantly more value for audiences globally with the potential to reach a greater number in more languages.

We are also exploring other uses that have potential application to news. For example, using AI to help our editorial teams create live text pages of football league games and to add subtitles to programmes on BBC Sounds.

To support our pilots and use of Gen AI, we have developed task-specific BBC Large Language Models. These AI models have been trained on and “understand” the BBC style and tone and ensure their output is closer to what the BBC needs than alternative off-the-shelf models. A key activity during the next 12 months will be developing this work.

However, we must move carefully in order to retain our high standards. AI also brings threats to the trust people have in journalism and jeopardy to the accuracy of the news and information delivered. The BBC has previously set out one of the major challenges in this nascent technological space in commissioning new research into [distortion](#). This

found [serious inaccuracies in how third-party chat assistants](#) use BBC News content to generate output, including factual errors and the misrepresentation of source material:

- 51% of all AI answers to questions about the news were judged to have significant issues of some form
- 19% of AI answers which cited BBC content introduced factual errors – incorrect factual statements, numbers and dates
- 13% of the quotes sourced from BBC articles were either altered or did not actually exist in that article.

Our priority will be to use Gen AI to deliver accurate and trusted news, in line with the BBC's Public Purposes as set out in our Royal Charter. It would be helpful to understand further any issues that the Inquiry has identified when it comes to this recommendation.

Chapter 5: Generative Artificial Intelligence

28. Any proposal for a new text and data mining regime must include transparency mechanisms that enable rightsholders to check whether their data has been used. It must offer technical enforceability that goes beyond the likes of robots.txt indicators, which remain inadequate. Meaningful sanctions for non-compliance are essential and the Government's anticipated IP consultation should explore the options for independent regulatory enforcement. Requirements for web crawlers to identify their purpose are needed too. The Government should encourage good practice by championing an emerging market for licensed AI data training providers. We urge the Government to dedicate significant technical, policy and political resource to address these challenges at pace. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology should outline its plans in response to this report. (Paragraph 127)

We welcome the Inquiry's recommendations around text and data mining and comments regarding an opt-out regime. Alongside a range of partner organisations, the BBC is concerned the proposed changes to copyright law outlined in the Government's consultation are unworkable and would undermine the strength of the UK's creative economy.

To be clear, we support the Government's ambition to grow the creative and AI sectors; to support rightsholders control of their content and the development of world-leading AI models; and to foster greater partnership, trust and transparency between the creative and AI sectors.

But we do not believe securing these goals requires changes that weaken how content is protected under the UK's Intellectual Property regime - a regime recognised internationally as a 'gold standard' and a critical foundation of the UK's £124.6bn creative industries.

We believe an alternative model based on greater partnership between the UK's creative and AI sectors could achieve the outcomes the Government has set out. This partnership would help grow both the creative and AI sectors. Underpinned by fair licensing arrangements and the authorised use of content, it would bring together the experience,

skills and resources of both the creative and AI sectors to create new value for our users, the creative sector and the UK.

Chapter 7: Mis/disinformation

37. The Government should focus more on strengthening long-term resilience. We suggest four priorities.

(1) First is recognising more explicitly the value of a financially sustainable news sector: this is the best way to maintain a shared understanding of facts.

(2) Second, the Government could engage further with media organisations about protocols for responding to major foreign interference efforts, particularly around elections.

(3) Third, the Government should adopt a more muscular deterrence posture to impose greater costs on adversaries, for example using responsible cyber power to degrade adversary infrastructure. This could feature in the Strategic Defence Review currently underway.

(4) Fourth is media literacy. We are not yet convinced that the Government has a good plan. More resources and effort are needed to scale 'what works' in media literacy, and avoid a tangle of short-term fragmented projects. Ofcom is already taking on major burdens: we hope it is not left to be the main lead for such a complex policy issue. The Government needs its own strategy. DSIT should set out its future plans for media literacy and timeline for evaluating its current activities in response to this report. The Department for Education should use the opportunity of the Curriculum and Assessment Review to ensure that media literacy is given more time and prominence in schools. (Paragraph 192)

As detailed above, pursuing truth with no agenda is a BBC priority and we welcome the Inquiry's focus on the challenges presented by misinformation and disinformation and recognising the need for media literacy.

We strongly agree that "recognising more explicitly the value of a financially sustainable news sector" should be a priority, as it is "...the best way to maintain a shared understanding of facts".

Russia, China and Iran are the most prominent state actors spreading disinformation. Russia and China are committing huge resources (an estimated £6-8bn) to growing their audiences in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America whilst deploying technology as a tool for influence and disinformation. And they are winning audience trust as a result.

Indeed, where the World Service has retreated due to the need to make savings, state funded media operators invest and grow. For example, Africa TV partners are now taking programmes supplied by others to fill gaps we left. Russian-backed media now transmit on the radio frequency previously occupied by BBC Arabic in Lebanon. This has become even more of a concern following recent decisions in the United States regarding Voice of America.

Therefore, securing the long-term future of the BBC supported by sustainable public funding is becoming increasingly important, as is putting the BBC World Service on a strong footing.

Data shows that the BBC, as the world's most trusted international news provider, can help to counter foreign interference efforts. Independent research demonstrates that the BBC is the UK's greatest cultural influencer, promoting British values and a belief in multilateralism, and increasing democratic participation (Tapestry research (BBC) 2022). Indeed, the BBC carries the UK's voice, values and influence to a weekly audience of 450m people worldwide. In the UK 75% of adults use BBC News on average per week – well ahead of the next nearest provider.

Our work to ensure people can understand the facts and get an impartial assessment of the news includes:

- **BBC Verify** – a new multi-media brand which is tasked with fact-checking, verifying video, countering disinformation, analysing data and explaining complex stories in the pursuit of truth. Verify has a physical area in the BBC London newsroom from which its experts regularly appear across BBC News content on all platforms
- **BBC InDepth** - a [new digital destination](#) that offers deeper analysis, longer reads and thought-provoking journalism providing more context beyond rolling news.
- **BBC World Service** produces a wide range of journalism that takes on disinformation. Some examples include:
 - BBC Russian's [Counting the Dead](#) series charts the staggering scale of Russian soldier deaths and is the only way for Russians to see the estimate of those losses, given local censorship. And this reporting is amplified across our 42 language services so audiences in markets of increasing Russian activity see this.
 - The **BBC Eye investigative documentary team** also focuses on the impact of disinformation and false information across the globe as part of its work – investigating a cryptic pregnancy scam in Nigeria, where women are tricked into believing they are pregnant, and fake loan apps in India – where the work of the Eye team led to a change in the law.
- **BBC Monitoring**, a key part of BBC News, tracks and analyses open-source broadcast, online and social media to make sense of what is happening around the world.

Media Literacy and Education

As the world's most trusted news provider, and a public service organisation with education at the core of our public purposes we look to support children and young learners to 'pursue truth with no agenda', just as we do in our output.

We do this by seeking to equip young learners to do this for themselves through high-quality children's news content on Newsround and social-first and outreach activation for teens that explains the dangers of misinformation and fake news and teaches how to combat them.

The BBC will be submitting evidence to the Committee's new inquiry into media literacy, which we very much welcome. But in summary:

- **Newsround**
 - Reaches 3.4m 7-11 year olds every week at school, with a BSL version reaching every registered deaf child in the UK.
 - Now a school-focussed resource, Newsround brings high-quality news and current affairs to the classroom, helping teachers, parents and kids understand and cope with issues from Covid, through to the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

- **Other Side of the Story**
 - Other Side of the Story [OSOTS] is BBC Education's partnership with BBC News to help young people learn how to spot and respond to misinformation and fake news on social media and elsewhere.
 - Our resources are available on BBC Bitesize for young people and on BBC Teach to be used by schools, reaching over 2.4m learners in 2024. We also distribute content via social media channels, where over 3m viewers have engaged with our content.
 - Materials take people on a journey through myth-busting 'Fact or Fake' and 'AI or Real' quizzes and offer explainers of the key issues from 'fake news' to 'echo chambers'. Content is often presented by personalities recognisable to young people from social media and youth facing TV shows such as Love Island, Strictly and the Traitors.
 - Our work includes a small outreach programme focussed on schools in targeted areas with high volume of C2DE employment, who Ofcom research suggests are most susceptible to disinformation. The OSOTS outreach programme has reached around 10,000 young people in 24/25 and more than 18,000 since 2022, with 96% of participants feeling more able to spot fake news, and 90% more likely to check sources as a result of participating.

- **Teen 24** - BBC Education partnered with BBC 5 Live last year on our second annual Teen Day, [Teen24](#). We co-commissioned a survey to get an informed view of the challenges and experiences of teenage life across the country, including the impact and use of AI and influencers such as Andrew Tate on young men. BBC 5 Live delivered a day of programming based on the outcomes from the survey, while Other Side of the Story and BBC Young Reporter worked together to delivery media literacy sessions to young people in Birmingham and Manchester.

- **Safer Internet Day** - We host an annual BBC Teach Live Lesson for Safer Internet Day alongside Childnet and the UK Safer Internet Centre. This year it reached approximately 800,000 learners.
- **Social Media**
 - Both Newsround and Other Side of the Story produce ‘social-first’ content which goes out on their TikTok channels
 - Newsround’s daily bulletin is also available via YouTube, with select content packages from BBC Bitesize going live for the 2025 exam season.

Watermarking

We also note the Committee’s comments on watermarking (Chapter 7, paragraph 191). We agree that content verification is a critical part of our information ecosystem. Watermarks (of which there are many types, visible, invisible and designed for a range of use cases) are one specific approach but more effective as part of a wider provenance ecosystem which includes signed metadata-based approaches like Content Credentials.

Effective content verification also requires close working between platforms and publishers to ensure different types of content authentication mechanisms are fully and effectively implemented. As referenced above the BBC is a co-founder of C2PA. It is an open standard that can show where, when and how a piece of media was created, including any use of generative AI. It adopts similar security methods used for other secure internet technology to protect the metadata (the description of the content).

March, 2025.
