

Written evidence submitted by Baylis Media Ltd

Submission from Baylis Media Ltd to the DCMS Committee's Inquiry on the Sustainability of Local Journalism.

Baylis Media Ltd (BML) is an independent publisher predominately operating in the East of Berkshire. BML publishes the Maidenhead Advertiser and the Slough and Windsor Express and prides itself on the quality of the independent journalism made available via its publications and associated websites.

BML believes passionately in the value that trusted, independent local news plays in the democratic process in England and the vital role it has in being the voice of the community. Our news is rooted in the concerns and interests of our community and speaks to, for and with everyone in the community whatever their backgrounds or beliefs.

Recent years have proved exceptionally challenging for BML with the pandemic having a significant impact on our financial performance but despite this, BML has continued to serve its community with informative trusted news and information.

BML is focused on transforming itself into a digitally focused business, a process that is underway in earnest, but this will not be a change that will happen overnight. It will take time, but we believe with our determination and innovation, coupled with the right policy interventions, there is a strong future for independent commercial Journalism.

BML is a member of the News Media Association, which represents national, regional, and local publishers across the UK. BML has fed its view into the submission that the NMA will present on behalf of the sector and these points are listed below for clarity of BML's support for them.

- Maintaining the statutory obligation to place public notices in printed local newspapers to protect the public right to know and safeguard this important revenue stream for local journalism
- Providing a package of targeted short-term financial measures to support local publishers transition to digital-first business models, including extending local newspaper Business Rate Relief, and introducing new tax credits for journalism and advertising. The point needs to be made here that the removal of VAT on digital publications, to date has been of virtually no benefit to local publishers to date. It is important that support is targeted at the local/regional sector.
- Bringing forward legislation early in the next parliamentary session to provide the Digital Markets Unit with statutory powers; including a requirement for large tech platforms to negotiate with local, regional, and national news publishers over payment for content
- Limiting the scope and scale of the BBC's online news output, expanding the Local News Partnership, and encouraging negotiation and collaboration with commercial publishers

- Building on the success of the 'All Together' Covid-19 advertising campaign, with a long-term government advertising partnership with news publishers
- Ensuring a robust, watertight and workable exemption for news publishers' content in the Online Safety Bill, as supported by this Committee

There have been several inquiries into the sustainability of the local independent journalism that BML has submitted evidence to in the past. The outcomes of the inquiries have been limited. Now really is the time for decisive action to be taken by the government to support the sector to enable the transformation to a digital first business model to be developed at speed to ensure the community BML serves benefits from the ability to access trusted local journalism.