

Written evidence submitted by Local TV Ltd

Letter from Lesley Mackenzie, Chief Executive, Local TV Ltd, to the Chair of the Committee, 12 July 2023

As Local TV Ltd, the operator of eight local television licences, we have maintained a strong daily news service for the communities we serve during the past six years of our ownership. Unlike some other larger broadcasters, who suspended regional bulletins during the pandemic, Local TV Ltd has maintained its local output of six hours a day throughout the period.

It is therefore important that we respond to some negative comments and misleading claims made at the Select Committee. It is with great pride that we can dispel concerns about our public service commitment, our editorial independence and impartiality in fulfilling all our licence obligations.

Firstly, we should explain the partnerships that help to sustain our public service content.

The ownership of Local TV Ltd and its licences is quite separate from our partnerships. However, without such partnerships that provide revenue, mostly to employ and train young video journalists, our high quality news provision could not be sustained. Currently this local programming includes substantial original news content every day for each of our channels. In addition we repeat and refresh the content multiple times to reach the largest possible audience during the breakfast, lunch and early prime time hours. The output is richer in news and compliant with all Ofcom guidelines.

Our partner, National World Plc, also broadcasts this local news content across its many online channels. The National World partnership also facilitates our journalists to service other local communities, including Manchester, Glasgow and London - local TV franchises we do not own but are served online by that partner.

As a result of this partnership we have increased the numbers of local news video journalists we train - several hundred to date, many of whom have gone on to be employed by national broadcasters including the BBC, ITV and Sky.

Our journalists follow a key editorial principle of independent reporting on behalf of the communities they serve. The high standards we have set are unrivalled by other media organisations. In the six years of unbroken daily news reporting we have had only one minor complaint upheld against a journalist.

Our other partner, Talk TV is one of a succession of major programmers that we have chosen to simulcast their primetime content on our channels. Talk TV follows similar arrangements that were in place with Sony and then CBS Reality channels since the start of our ownership. The main difference between the previous two providers and Talk TV is that Talk TV is a UK based programmer providing UK specific content and investing in UK talent.

Without the support of these larger scale broadcasters our local news provision would have been either greatly reduced or become unsustainable. Throughout this period the management and board of Local TV Ltd have maintained 100 per cent control of editorial output by its journalists and has taken responsibility for the output of our partners to ensure that it meets Ofcom obligations and

conforms to all UK regulation. We can confirm that there has never been any attempt to influence or seek to direct or interfere editorially by our partners.

Our board consists of senior broadcasters and publishers with decades of experience. These directors maintain control of content matters.

Given all these positives, we are therefore at a loss as to why Kevin Brennan MP continues to question Local TV's commercial decisions. His concerns are not reflective of our supportive audience either in Cardiff or in any of the other communities we serve. We understand that his criticism is not extended to any other local television franchise owners, some of whom carry only a fraction of the local news or public service content that our channels do.

We can only conclude that the partnership with Talk TV, and therefore its parent organisation, is not to Mr Brennan's personal taste. Having said that, we are willing to meet Mr Brennan or any member of your committee to discuss our contribution to independent and reliable local broadcast journalism.

There is little doubt that our service, and that of a limited number of other local television channels are contributing to levelling up UK broadcast media, that has been for too long controlled by London based national organisations.

Unlike these other broadcasters all our content decision making is based in the regions we serve. Unlike other broadcasters we are expanding our services and we do not benefit from any public funding so this is in stark contrast to the BBC which is cutting local broadcast services.

Local TV's shareholders have supported continuous news provision during some of the nation's darkest hours despite an unequal environment for smaller channels. The current TV ratings system means that small channels are left with the crumbs of advertising spend while the lion's share goes to the large broadcasters - and this includes Government marketing spend.

Local TV Ltd and other colleagues in the local broadcast sector are always willing to assist the work of your committee and to give an assurance of our future commitment to promoting independent reliable broadcast journalism produced by people who live in the communities they serve.

Yours sincerely,

Lesley Mackenzie
CEO – Local TV Limited