

## **Local TV Network—written evidence (FON0038)**

### **House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee inquiry: The future of news: impartiality, trust, and technology**

1. The Local TV Network (“**LTVN**”) is the trade body for the 34 local digital television programme (“**local TV**”) services in the UK, including services in all of the nations and regions.
2. All 34 local TV services are Ofcom licensed, and their content must comply with all Ofcom regulatory codes. The services are free to air and can be found on Freeview Channel 7 or 8 (dependent on location). Local TV services bring local news to over 16 million homes in the UK (around 60 per cent of the potential Freeview household coverage). They frequently deliver stories that matter to local people that would not otherwise be covered by other mainstream broadcasters.

#### **The importance of maintaining local news**

3. The LTVN welcomes the Committee’s concerns regarding challenges facing the future of news, including issues regarding trust and impartiality. Local TV provides a vital service within the wider media ecosystem, particularly in providing trusted and impartial local news that communities rely on.
4. As the consultation acknowledges, trust in news remains in long-term decline, falling from 51 per cent in 2015 to 33 per cent in 2023, and concerns have been growing over the challenges around due impartiality. In this context, the value of local news and trusted local journalism has never been more pertinent.
5. Local TV reporters work independently of other television broadcasters and local radio, and bring credible, and impartial content to millions of viewers, in some areas being the only regular source of local news on terrestrial television. Impartial local news serves a key democratic function in its role as a robust news source.
6. Communities rely on local TV services to be informed about local issues that affect them, issues that may not otherwise be reported. When considering immediate and long-term actions to ensure a healthy news system, maintaining the future sustainability of local TV is therefore critical. This response references the challenges facing the sector, and what measures the LTVN would like to see implemented, particularly in relation to the Media Bill.

#### **Q1. How well are news organisations responding to factors affecting their business models, and are any changes needed?**

7. The consultation acknowledges that changes are underway with regards to news provision, particularly in terms of audience habits. Whilst the LTVN would caution that the proportion of audiences that are predicted to still

watch broadcast news on linear channels is likely to remain at high levels for the next few years, the sector cannot ignore the transition to IPTV.

8. Audiences will want to continue to be able to access trusted content, in an environment where doing so reliably is becoming increasingly difficult. The challenges are particularly acute in respect of local TV.
9. Within news provision, the local voice is increasingly at risk not only from within the UK but also from international companies and platform manufacturers. In a world in which even the main PSBs face increasing competition, this local voice can only continue to thrive if there is a robust regulatory regime that recognises that support has to be given to it, as a legitimate part of the overall public service broadcasting ecosystem.
10. It is critical that local TV service providers can secure carriage and prominence on internet-connected TV sets on appropriate terms (just as access to Freeview is regulated for local TV). For this to be achieved, the local TV sector prominence to be guaranteed under the new framework.

## **Q2. Are changes needed to the Media Bill?**

11. Whilst the sector welcomes the Bill in its aims to reform the public service broadcasting framework for the digital age, the LTVN was disappointed that the Bill does not include local TV, on the grounds that it is a terrestrial service only. Amending the Bill is critical to the sustainability of the sector, to ensure carriage of services on internet-connected TV platforms and to ensure ease of discoverability. Unless the the Bill is amended in the Lords, Ofcom-regulated public service local TV services are at risk.
12. The LTVN welcomes the Committee's scrutiny of the challenges facing the news sector. In considering how best to ensure a healthy, trustworthy and impartial news system, the LTVN urges the Lords to acknowledge the value of local TV in providing Ofcom-regulated news and information.
13. The LTVN is currently reviewing the opportunity for an amendment to the Media Bill to ensure local TV is included in its framework for the future of public service broadcasting. The sector hopes that the Committee might be moved to endorse such an amendment.

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