

Written evidence submitted by Latest TV Ltd

Call for evidence

The future of Public Service Broadcasting

The Government were instrumental in helping to establish a network of local TV channels across the UK – the UK Local TV network on Freeview Channel 7 (and Virgin Media 159) and the time is right to work with this innovative and far-seeing sector to properly establish the Public Service Broadcasting of the future – one which not only reflects the wider digital and streaming arena, but content-wise reflects both the culture and the concerns of the UK, and is properly nation-wide, reaching all parts of the United Kingdom.

There are currently 34 local TV channels in the UK, all embedded within their locality, whether large or small city, or town. In the main, significant cities are represented in the list of 34: Brighton, Sheffield, Belfast, Bristol, Cardiff, Nottingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Liverpool, Birmingham, Teesside, Kent, Oxford, Manchester, Cambridge, Lancashire, Swansea, Dundee, Ayr, Aberdeen, Mold, Reading, Basingstoke, York, Salisbury, Guildford, Scarborough, Carlisle, Grimsby, London, Norwich, Solent, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

This network is able to reach communities and parts of the UK, not reached by the traditional PSBs and we need to reflect and champion the work that has already been produced by these hardworking stations. There is so much more that can be achieved, with appropriate and fair Government support, in such a way that our network of PSBs can truly help to level up the country.

I will focus on the achievements and aims of Latest TV Brighton, the local TV channel for Brighton, Hove and Worthing reaching 400,000 residents along the South Coast, with a regular monthly viewership of 108,000 per month (TV Analytics).

Latest TV was one of the first channels to be awarded a Local TV licence and since then has produced and broadcast over 50,000 hours of local TV content on Terrestrial TV and on other digital platforms plus social media platforms. Approximately 10,000 hours have related to local TV news and current affairs in our communities.

We have been on air 24/7 since August 28th 2014 and prior to that we were publishing local news and content online.

We take our responsibilities as a PSB extremely seriously, and throughout our aim is to reach all parts of the city in terms of giving a voice to those under-represented and to share communication about what is happening both at a civic and cultural level throughout the city.

Our main achievements can be summarised as follows:

- Providing training to over 4,000 students in television news production and broadcast, both in front of the camera and technically, covering skills such as vision mixing (Tricaster), scheduling, filming, editing, pre- and post-production, motion graphics and live-streaming.
- Producing quality television that is focussed on the concerns of our communities
- Broadcasting cultural and sporting events (including live events) with participation from many different communities. Eg, Brighton Pride; Disability Pride; Older People's Festival, Brighton Festival, and Brighton Festival Fringe, Artists Open Houses, many music festivals including Great Escape, Brighton Marathon and Half Marathon, and the many events that make our city and locality unique.
- We have also been proud to feature events filmed and broadcast across our partner local TV channels, opening up areas of culture that are not otherwise seen on the traditional broadcast TV channels.

Latest TV Brighton have been instrumental in promoting collaboration between the local TV stations, and have formed a strong network with both the 4 other independent stations: Notts TV, Sheffield Live, KMTV (Kent) and NVTV Belfast, as well as with the stable of 8 TV stations owned by Local TV Ltd (Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Mold and Tyne and Wear). The collaboration has involved producing a channel 7 news for the 13 cities during the coronavirus crisis which has developed further into showcasing the best of local TV from across these cities.

There is so much that we offer to our communities and we would like the current regulations and framework to fully recognise our position in the PSB landscape.

Regulation: Are the current regulations and obligations placed on PSBs, in return for benefits such as prominence and public funding, proportionate? What (if any regulation) should be introduced for SVoDs and other streaming services?

The current regulations and obligations in return for prominence and public funding are not proportionate in relation to local TV. This sector is hamstrung by having a high level of regulations and obligations against no public funding. The prominence on Freeview Channel 7 is a necessary benefit and this needs to be protected (by law) so that this position is not taken away by larger national broadcasters.

Representation: How would representation be protected if changes were made to the PSB model? How would the nations and regions be affected by changes to the PSB model? Is the 'quota' system the most efficient way to maintain and improve representation in broadcasting?

Representation across the UK, could be improved, by giving due recognition to the role of the UK Local TV network stations. They each already represent a nation or region. For example, NVTV in Belfast represents Northern Ireland. Cardiff TV

represents Wales, Latest TV Brighton represents Brighton and the South Coast. The current quota system is not fair as it penalises the local TV stations, by setting out quotas without regard to the funding required to deliver those quotas to a high standard. Despite this, the local TV stations have all been meeting their set quotas, and in the case of Latest TV Brighton, we have far exceeded our quota levels of original productions, news and current affairs, and local content.

There should be a levelling up of public service broadcasting by recognising the role and reach of each of the local TV stations in relation to their current quotas.

Accessibility: How would changes to the PSB model affect the accessibility of services? How would a wholly internet-based service compare to the current PSB model?

Local TV stations are already hugely accessible in a range of ways. They are accessible to viewers in their locality. And as importantly, they are accessible to people in their area to be represented on television. At Latest TV Brighton, we have a very inclusive policy of inviting residents onto a range of TV programmes to make their views heard and their knowledge shared. A wholly internet-based service would not be fully inclusive, as it could deter older viewers who traditionally enjoy watching terrestrial television. For example, we produce a local history quiz called Our Town in which viewers are invited as guests alongside local experts and there is a huge amount of participation amongst older viewers for this show. Our postbag for this show shows that it is a popular programme, which enables viewers to feel engaged in their locality. People submit letters with questions and memories of their life in the city. From this show, we have produced local exhibitions in older people's homes (Our Town roadshow) to provide even more accessibility.

In addition, we have given people with disability a presence on mainstream TV. We have regular sections on our news, current affairs and what's on programmes related to people with disabilities and this is fully accessible to all. It is not tucked away on an internet channel where people have to search for relevant information about a whole range of services, events or organisations. We celebrate diversity on Latest TV Brighton, and our viewers know the channel is fully inclusive.

Impact: What value, if any, do PSBs bring to the UK in terms of economic (local and national), cultural and societal impact?

It needs to be recognised that the local PSBs bring a huge amount of value to the UK in terms of economic, cultural and societal impact.

At Latest TV Brighton, we have championed the local tourist industry which combined brings in over a billion pounds to the local economy. We have done this by filming the cultural assets of the city and sharing this with a wider public, both on broadcast TV and online. For example, we have created the following:

- A documentary on the West Pier, celebrating its 150 year history. This programme was showcased on BBC's Inside Out programme.

- A documentary on the construction of the British Airways i360, an architectural feat – and one of the world’s tallest moving observation towers.
- A documentary on the Brighton Palace Pier, celebrating its 120 year history. This pier is the UK’s 4th most visited attraction, and the first outside of London.
- We have also filmed the construction of the Cambridge Mosque, the first eco-mosque in the world.
- We have filmed documentaries on the Royal Pavilion and the royals Harry and Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, featuring the original Duke and Duchess of Sussex also.
- We regularly produce advertisements for the Brighton & Hove Tourism Alliance which represents hundreds of businesses in the city covering restaurants, hotels and a range of tourism businesses.
- Every day on our news and since our inception, we have brought viewers up to date on developments across the city, such as the building of the Amex stadium, the expansion of the Universities, and the growth of the city.
- We have achieved all the above in the most filmic way, producing documentaries of a high quality, which we have been able to sell to other broadcasters.

At Latest TV Brighton, we believe there is no other organisation that has highlighted the culture of the city, quite as comprehensively and as accessibly as our own. For many years, we have filmed the following: Artists Open Houses, Brighton Pride, Brighton Festival, Brighton Festival Fringe, The Great Escape, Film Festivals, Brighton Marathon, Brighton Half-Marathon, Disability Pride, Trans Pride, Paddle around the Pier, March of the Mermaids, the Naked Bike Ride, The Children’s Parade, Brighton Digital Festival (the exhaustive list would reach more than 3000 words). All these things make the city unique and by sharing these events in an accessible way, it brings a cohesion to the local community. For example, we have filmed events in collaboration with other organisations such as Carousel, which enables disabled artists to express their creativity.

The other key value local TV stations provide is around training. This cannot be underestimated. We believe the larger broadcasters pay lip service to training, but we are comprehensive training grounds for broadcast television. Like Sheffield Live, KMTV and Notts TV, Latest TV Brighton has developed a significant training base, and has trained thousands of students of all levels to learn a wide range of television skills. Making television accessible and teaching the tools of producing high quality TV has to be one of the aims and deliverables of a public service broadcaster.

Another key value of local TV is holding civic bodies to account. At Latest TV we have always delivered this function in an impartial and respected way. We are invited by the local council to film the annual budgets, all local and general elections, and all meetings of note. From this we have produced programmes watched by hundreds of thousands. This service is appreciated by both councillors in the city and by viewers.

Another key value of local TV is representing local sports in a detailed way. For example, we have filmed and shown hours of non-league football and these often have a high viewership, because fans cannot watch this on TV anywhere else. We

also feature sports that have almost no representation on television. Many of these may have a community benefit, such as our local table tennis community, which has done sterling work with refugees.

All in all, the economic, cultural, training and civic benefits of local TV are enormous and via a full and proper recognition by Government, this network of TV channels can help the Government to level up the UK in a wide range of ways.

- **Looking ahead:** What should a PSB look like in a digital age? What services should they provide, and to whom? In what way, and to whom, should they be accountable? Is the term 'public service broadcasting' still relevant and, if not, what is a suitable alternative?

We believe a PSB should be fully representative of the UK throughout all its regions. It should showcase the best of the UK and cover the concerns of residents up and down the land. Channel 7 – the UK Local TV Network already has the infrastructure, skills and talent to deliver this goal.

A modern development is live streaming events in all the localities. Latest TV Brighton has been live streaming for years – we have livestreamed Brighton Pride, political conferences, music festivals, tourism events to the city and beyond. If this skill is replicated in all cities across the UK, then again, this becomes a tool to level up the UK. No longer do we only have to view large events from London, but we can show the wealth of talent and culture across all our cities. People can take a pride in showcasing their localities, their talents, skills and innovations across the UK.

At Latest TV Brighton we have developed livestreaming for a wider audience, like a "youtube or Netflix which is developed in the UK" and opening up this digital economy for artists and venues. We are working in collaboration with the arts council and with Notts TV and KMTV, with the BFI and Talking Pictures, in order to again, showcase the cultural homegrown talent to a global audience: the films, artistic performances and music that is UK based and internationally loved.

What we recognise ultimately is that a huge wealth of talent and culture is home-grown in small towns and cities across the UK, and local TV acts as a conduit to bring out the best from each city so that the UK is not only levelled up, but places like Grimsby, Newcastle, Cardiff, Bristol, Sheffield, Belfast, Kent and Brighton can shine internationally.

We need to add as a postscript that before local TV was established, in our own region at least, the BBC did not cover any of the events described. Brighton featured minimally in the local news if at all. Since we have been established, the BBC have sent their own journalists to cover events and see us as rivals, rather than friends who can provide great local content. It has always appeared that the BBC want to monopolise local content rather and they do this in a superficial way because they are not properly grounded in these local areas.

There was a short period, whereby we worked for the BBC producing a weekly programme called Digital Nation, highlighting the best of local TV across the UK.

This worked well and should have been continued. It brought in much needed funds for the stations, and provided great content for both the local stations and the BBC. The BBC discontinued it as it did not wish to support local TV, preferring to divert local TV content money to its local News partnership. The local news partnership scheme has not provided any interesting or newsworthy content for our city, therefore we see it as a waste of money. It may be different in other parts of the UK, but the main problem with it, is it has no local TV stations on board – we feel that the BBC deliberately excluded local TV stations from being involved, despite us providing successful pilots with video.

The BBC should remain a national broadcaster, but the public service broadcast landscape needs to be opened up to recognise the value of the UK Local TV network, and be funded appropriately.

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