

Public Interest News in Wales

The issue of public interest news and the challenges it faces have been relatively hot topics in recent years. In January 2023, parliament published the DCMS committee's findings from its inquiry into the [sustainability of local journalism](#).

In November 2024, following an extensive evidence-collecting process, the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee published its report on [The Future of News](#).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The future of news matters. The media sector has defied the gloomiest predictions of the last 15 years and some audiences are better served than ever before. The UK's press offers a healthy variety of viewpoints, broadcasters play an anchoring role, and online outfits are springing up offering unprecedented choice of formats and perspectives. However, many indicators about the future are not encouraging. Trust has fallen and news avoidance is rising. Key revenue streams are declining and will not return. Efforts to silence investigative reporting continue. AI is starting to reshape the nature of internet search and the concept of authoritative information.

The value of honest, accurate and informative news remains as significant as ever—perhaps increasingly so as domestic challenges multiply and the geopolitical context worsens. But importance does not guarantee survival. The outlook for some areas is particularly poor. Local journalism faces long term decline. Several mass market news outlets are following suit. News deserts have been growing. Some audiences are turning away from mainstream news; a growing number are embracing dubious online sources. Others switch off altogether.

Our inquiry left us with no illusions about the stakes: the period of having informed citizens with a shared understanding of facts is not inevitable and may not endure.

It recognised the challenges facing public interest news provision and made several recommendations. The Government published their [response](#) recently.

In Scotland, The Public Interest Journalism Working Group was established as a short-life working group at the request of the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture. The purpose of the Public Interest Journalism Working Group was to consider the long-term sustainability of public interest journalism in Scotland and recommend ways to ensure its ongoing resilience and relevance. The details of the working group, its remit, membership, minutes and final recommendations were all [published online](#).

As a result of the cooperation agreement between the Labour Government and Plaid Cymru, £100,000 was made available annually to support the sector in Wales. Following Scotland's lead, a Public Interest Journalism Working Group was tasked with preparing a report that would set out recommendations for strategic, systemic interventions to build a sustainable public interest journalism sector in Wales.

Its report [Of and for Wales: towards a sustainable future for public interest journalism was published in July 2023](#). The Welsh Government hasn't published a formal response to the report yet. Unlike its Scottish counterpart, the Welsh Working Group's remit,

membership, and minutes have not been published, and it continues to meet with no clear purpose.

This month, the release of Welsh newspaper circulation numbers for 2024 laid bare the seriousness of the situation in Wales. The annual decline in newspaper sales continued by an average of 17%, which was 18% the previous year.

When we look at historical data, the collapse is plain to see. In 2004, the 33 Welsh newspapers that report annual circulation figures were distributing 647,283 copies daily/weekly; today, that number stands at 54,950, a whopping 91.5% fall in circulation.

The situation in some areas of Wales is even more dire, The Celtic Newspaper Group, which is comprised of six titles covering the South Wales valleys, is now distributing 1,541 copies a week. In 2004 those same titles were popping through almost 100,000 letterboxes.

Celtic Newspapers Group	Western Mail & Echo Ltd	January to June 2005	100,140	View
Celtic Newspapers Group	Western Mail & Echo Ltd	July to December 2004	98,764	View
Celtic Newspapers Group	Western Mail & Echo Ltd	January to June 2004	99,408	View
Celtic Newspapers Group	Western Mail & Echo Ltd	July to December 2003	97,464	View

That's a 98% drop in circulation.

Titles like the Rhondda Leader and Pontypridd & Llantrisant Observer, which once sold 13,000 copies a week, now sell fewer than 200 copies.

It's only a matter of time before many of these titles disappear from our corner shops, joining the 300+ titles that have ceased publication in the UK since 2010.

The shift online hasn't filled the gap, especially in the valleys, where Facebook Pages posting occasional news usually relating to court appearances have taken the place of dedicated websites. People aren't being informed about the things that impact their lives daily.

Despite Cardiff University being home to The Centre For Community Journalism, the hyperlocal and community news landscape of Wales remains largely unchanged. stalwarts such as Wrexham and Deeside dot com, My Welshpool and My Newtown, Cwmbran Life, and the Caerphilly Observer serve their communities with distinction. Community radio in Wales, and particular news provision, is lacking, although stations like Bro Radio in Barry strive to keep their communities informed.

With a Welsh General Election on the horizon in May 2026, every political party in Wales should ensure that Wales has an informed electorate with access to news and information that allows them to make an informed decision at the ballot box.

Global bad actors are at work, seeking to influence and disrupt our political institutions by sharing disinformation online. Unless action is taken today, it will likely be too late.

The culture minister and the Senedd's Culture Committee need to respond to the Lords report and take action to support and invest in public interest news in Wales.

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