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Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol**

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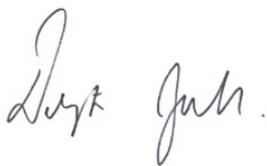
11 March 2025

## **Public Interest Journalism Working Group**

Dear Jack,

At our meeting on 5 March 2025 we considered a letter from Huw Marshall about public interest news provision in Wales (which is attached for your information). Having considered that letter, the Committee would be grateful if you could provide an update about the work of the Public Interest Journalism Working Group. As noted in Huw Marshall's letter, details of the Working Group's remit, membership and minutes are not publicly available. It would also be helpful if you could let us know when the Welsh Government intends to respond to the Working Group's report Of and For Wales: Towards a Sustainable Future for Public Interest Journalism published in July 2023.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS

Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



**Senedd Cymru  
Welsh Parliament**

I am writing to the committee chair and its members about the crisis currently facing public interest news provision in Wales.

The letter I've attached sets out what the different legislatures of Wales have undertaken concerning public interest news provision and information about the decline of traditional local news provision. I have also attached the circulation numbers for the Welsh newspapers published by Reach, Newsquest, and Tindle. The collapse in circulations is astonishing. In the South Wales Valleys, circulations have declined over 98% during the past two decades. It's an industry in terminal decline, and a new approach is required.

I would be more than happy to discuss the matter further and give greater context.

Diolch

Huw Marshall

Project Lead – Talking.Wales

## 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

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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	<a href="#">View</a>
Celtic Newspapers Group	Western Mail & Echo Ltd	July to December 2004	98,764	<a href="#">View</a>
Celtic Newspapers Group	Western Mail & Echo Ltd	January to June 2004	99,408	<a href="#">View</a>
Celtic Newspapers Group	Western Mail & Echo Ltd	July to December 2003	97,464	<a href="#">View</a>

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.

Huw Marshall

Founder

Talking.Wales

Title	Publisher	2004	End of 2022	End of 2023	End of 2024	Annual fall	
Western Mail	Reach	43247	6119	5271	4463	15%	
South Wales Echo	Reach	57852	6026	4574	3175	31%	
South Wales Evening Post	Reach	56487	7223	5471	4212	23%	
Daily Post	Reach	40835	10292	8350	6843	18%	
South Wales Argus	Newsquest	30295	4436	3623	3154	13%	
The Leader	Newsquest	26331	3495	3041	2697	11%	
South Wales Guardian	Newsquest	9373	1838	1513	1367		
Western Telegraph	Newsquest	27295	5067	4240	3920		
Powys County Times	Newsquest	18280	6715	6187	5697		
North Wales Pioneer	Newsquest	34676	2714	2442	1943		
Barry and District News	Newsquest	6631	1583	1408	1251		
Penarth Times	Newsquest	5852	1462	1276	1185		
Rhyl, Prestatyn, Abergel Journal	Newsquest	32839	4797	3862	3500 estimate		
Tivyside Advertiser	Newsquest	8562	2625	2037	1894		
Denbighshire Free Press	Newsquest	7328	1595	1329	1077		South Wales Valleys
Free Press Series	Newsquest	13699	1808	1614	1424		
Glamorgan Gazette	Reach	22819	1240	870	627		627
Gwent Gazette	Reach	13008	347	279	152		152
Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald	Reach	14965	429	270	184		
Rhondda Leader	Reach	13339	420	331	188		188
Pontypridd & Llantrisant Observer	Reach	12868	343	262	158		158
Merthyr Express	Reach	18725	534	388	230		230
Llanelli Star	Reach	16807	2630	1923	1331		
Holyhead & Bangor Mail	Reach	12470	347	220	166		
Cynon Valley Leader	Reach	11002	336	260	186		186
Carmarthen Journal	Reach	22447	3250	2451	1762		
North Wales Weekly News	Reach	21191	726	439	308		
Wales on Sunday	Reach	48060	3081	2514	1856	26%	
Abergavenny Chronicle	Tindle		2243	1986		1558	
Brecon & Radnor Express	Tindle		3360	2982		2556	
Cambrian News	Tindle		6877	5685		4845	15%
Monmouthshire Beacon	Tindle		2119	1928		1606	
Tenby Observer	Tindle		2012	1505		1109	
			98089	80531	54950	32% fall in 2 years	91761
		647283			66624	91% fall in 20 years	1541
				18%	17%		98.3% fall in 20 years for Valleys Papers

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