



From the Director-General

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Bethan Jenkins AM
Chair Culture, Welsh language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Bethan

The Big Picture – The Committee’s Initial Views on Broadcasting in Wales

Thank you for your recent letter and for a copy of the Committee’s detailed report into Broadcasting in Wales.

In my letter dated 21 February I updated you on the work we have been doing to review our provision of programmes and services in Wales and to share our plans to increase investment in English language programming for Wales by 50% over the next three years. The additional £8.5m p.a. of new funding will make a real difference and deliver significant new programming for Wales across a wide range of genres.

Under our plans for Wales, total investment in English language TV services is expected to reach almost £30m p.a. by 2019/20. The investment will also boost news services for Wales, with plans to increase specialist coverage and an expansion of online and mobile services. Details of these plans will be published later in the spring. Further to the Committee’s request for information about the Local Democracy Reporting Service, a briefing note is included with this letter.

I know we will have further opportunity to discuss these matters later this year.

Best wishes



Tony Hall
Director General

Local Democracy Reporting Service

Further to the Welsh Assembly Committee's Broadcasting Report, the Committee has requested further details regarding how the Local Democracy Reporter Service (LDRS) will work. This briefing provides a summary of the LDRS and responds to issues raised in the Committee's report.

What is the LDRS?

- The LDRS will recruit 150 new journalists that will be employed by local news providers across the UK and cover local institutions and public service issues underreported by the market
- The BBC will fund the LDRS, but it's not a BBC service or BBC reporters.
- LDRS output will be available to a wide range of news organisations (including the BBC) that meet an agreed set of eligibility criteria¹

What is the rationale for the LDRS?

- It is in the public interest to have a thriving local news sector in the UK. Increased devolution and economic challenges facing the local news industry have led to less reporting in some regions, especially in the coverage of public accountability and local democratic issues
- It is not the role of the BBC to support the economics of the incumbent local news sector; instead, over the course of Charter discussions, the BBC developed proposals with industry to improve the provision of local journalism for all audiences and help address the democratic deficit. Improving the quality of the UK's local news provision and increasing coverage of underreported local issues will also deliver value to licence fee payers.

What content will the LDRS produce?

- LDRS reporters have a specific editorial brief to cover top-tier local authorities including county councils, unitary authorities and metropolitan boroughs. Where agreed, the service might report on other public bodies
- Reporters will be required to produce multimedia content, although the expectation is that the majority of output will be text-based reports.

How will the LDRS work in practice?

- The BBC (in consultation with industry) has a draft distribution of 139 of the reporters. 11 posts will be retained to respond to unforeseen circumstances at the end of the allocation process
- The 139 reporters will be bundled into 54 regional 2 year contracts which third party providers can bid for; bids are open to any provider that meets a set of agreed eligibility criteria
- In the current allocation of reporters, 11 reporters are allocated to Wales, each to cover two local authority areas.

Mechanisms to review the service

- Each region or nation will form a user group to provide feedback on the service. It will be chaired by the BBC with cross-sector representation from users and providers
- A steering group will be formed to assist the BBC with matters relating to the whole service

¹ These criteria ensure that partners are committed to the provision of local journalism, but are open and not limited to the newspaper sector

- All of the BBC's local news partnerships proposals are subject to an annual review to ensure the terms of the partnership are being met and that the LDRS is delivering its intended purpose

The Committee's report raises the concern that the LDRS will unintentionally result in local news organisations cutting back their own provision. It suggests a 'wire' type service as an alternative.

- The purpose of the LDRS is to provide an additive contribution to the UK's local journalism. It is not the BBC's intention to use licence fee payer's money to fund the market's existing activities
- The BBC has worked in close partnership with industry to ensure the proposal delivers its public service role, benefits all licence fee payers and helps sustain local media market plurality
- Key areas of the proposal serve to mitigate local news organisations cutting back their provision:
 1. The purpose of the service is to cover 'underreported issues' and fill gaps in the market's reporting. It will be a distinct service that adds to existing resource, rather than replaces it
 2. The LDRS will cover local institutions and public service issues; its remit is wholly public service journalism that has less commercial value.
 3. The reporters will be given a clear and tightly defined editorial brief. The reporters are required to remain within the scope of that brief and not undertake other reporting that might benefit the host news organisation.
 4. The service has been developed to benefit all eligible local news providers and not confer advantage to any individual news organisation or sector; for example, all eligible providers will have an opportunity to bid for contracts, and LDRS content will be distributed to all qualifying users simultaneously.
 5. Review mechanisms will ensure the service delivers its objectives. The BBC will invite feedback and suggestions from the wider industry as to how the service might be improved.
- Embedding the LDRS journalists within local news organisations will deliver greater value to licence fee payers. It boosts plurality and ensures the benefits reach a wide range of local news organisations. It is also a more collaborative approach and supports the BBC's wider commitment to be a more open partner.
- The LDRS will not cover courts as the Committee's report suggests, as that is considered a less valuable use of licence fee payer funds. It is also excluded in the interests of market impact, since courts coverage is a more commercially attractive form of journalism