

## The provision of hyperlocal news journalism in Wales

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There are in the [region of 40 hyperlocal news publications across Wales](#) which we are aware of, in addition to more than 50 Welsh language Papurau Bro, which have been printed and sold for over 40 years in communities across Wales. It is of vital importance that we recognise the value these publications bring to communities, and that we find a way to nurture them and help them grow.

Among the valuable work contributing to civic discourse, hyperlocal and community news publishers are holding authority to account, delivering contemporaneous and in-depth election coverage, campaigning, encouraging civic participation, giving communities a voice, storytelling, reflecting cultural identity, promoting civic pride, changing perceptions, and plugging gaps in news provision.

Shining examples of leading local news publications across Wales – which are small in terms of staffing but huge in terms of impact and importance to the communities they serve – are the Caerphilly Observer, Wrexham.com, My Newtown, My Welshpool and Deeside.com. Each is run by a handful of individuals who regularly publish new, original and up-to-the-minute newsworthy content.

They tackle issues that matter and report on all aspects of civic life, including courts and council meetings. These micro businesses are agile and entrepreneurial, and are vital to ensuring a thriving news sector in Wales.

We need to ensure that smaller run organisations such as these are no longer disadvantaged in that they cannot access the same level of funding and support as the large traditional newspapers, which have a monopoly across Wales.

The Port Talbot Guardian closed its doors in 2009, which overnight left 139,000 residents without access to a single source of local news or information. Around the same time seven journalists all lost their jobs from other mainstream media organisations. They formed a co-operative and created the Port Talbot Magnet. This was of great importance to residents during the uncertainty over the future of Tata Steel. However, without access to funding or support, and small local business cutting back on their advertising spend, the Magnet was forced to cease operations. No town in Wales should be deprived of their local news publication, particularly when a small amount of help could have ensured the Magnet continued to provide good quality, and essential, local journalism.

Last year Nesta produced a [report into revenue streams for hyperlocal publishers](#) across the UK and Europe. The findings show that a sustainable business model is an increasing challenge, and evidence suggests that the ‘hardest to fund has been local news reporting’. Advertising is a common, yet unpredictable, income for hyperlocals yet few have the capacity or skills to market their service or sell advertising.

[The Centre for Community Journalism \(C4CJ\)](#) is part of Cardiff University's Transforming Communities engagement projects that demonstrate the University's commitment to the communities of Cardiff, Wales and beyond. We were established in 2013 to support new forms of local digital journalism and to explore new, sustainable models for news. Our focus is at the local level; the place where journalism is most valued, but also most at risk. As well as sitting on the National Assembly's Digital News and Information Taskforce, the BBC's Local Journalism Working Group and the Institute of Welsh Affairs Media Policy Group we have trained more than 32,000 learners from 130 different countries. We also provide training to Welsh Government, PR professionals, universities and members of the community.

Our mission is to promote quality journalism, help address the democratic deficit in news poor communities and help create more jobs in journalism at the local and hyperlocal level.

We are in the process of launching Independent Community News Network (ICNN), which is the UK representative body for the independent community and hyperlocal news sector.

There are currently over 400 independent community publications, across the UK, many of which are holding decision makers and public services to account; they are now a mainstay of the modern media ecology.

But they still face numerous challenges. Chief among these is economics – how to make community publications sustainable or viable.

To this end, our objectives are to increase recognition of community publishers, make representations on their behalf to policy makers, regulatory bodies, third sector funders, businesses and other organisations, and fight for opportunities and fair treatment.

In addition to lobbying and advocacy work, the network will draw upon C4CJ's ongoing research in order to inform high quality journalism and sustainability in the local and community news sector.

ICNN will broker collaborations with industry partners to contribute to sustainable and innovative development within the sector.

ICNN will offer free consultancy services to start-ups and established publications alike on issues concerning media law guidance, funding, and new media.

ICNN is in a unique position to deliver the recommendations of this consultation to the drastically under-funded community news sector.

ICNN will promote and protect the shared interests of the community news sector in the UK by:

- acting on behalf of all community news publications, from start-ups to established businesses; for profits and nonprofits; committed volunteers and experienced journalists, and entrepreneurs;
- to attain recognition and accreditation for the valuable contribution they provide to their respective communities and to the democratic process, and to advance the case for strong community journalism;
- by seeking to enhance and foster a dynamic and sustainable community news sector through lobbying, advocacy, training, networking, research and monitoring
- to ensure the success of our members' organisations through leveraging economic opportunities;
- to lead innovation and collaboration that serves the aims and ambitions of the sector;
- to promote and help maintain the highest possible standards of journalism;
- to seize opportunities to strengthen job growth in the sector by researching and investing in models of good and effective practice and in technology based solutions.

There is a myth that we need to continue to support and prop up traditional print media in order to save local journalism from certain death. Whilst continued support is important, what is even more important is that hundreds of other deserving news publishers are no longer ignored.

[The BBC reported](#) that Newquest was awarded £245,808 in 2015 to secure 50 jobs and safeguard a further 15 positions in Newport. This is in addition to the £95,226 support it received under the Skills Growth Wales programme in 2013/14.

Giving money to a single news provider, which has continued its steady flow of job cuts for a number of years, was never going to be the solution to saving jobs in journalism. However, sharing a slice of the pie among many smaller independent publishers would be of far greater democratic and economic benefit to tax payers across Wales.

We need to stop thinking in terms of 'newspapers' and start thinking in terms of 'news publishers'. This is as crucial when deciding who can publish public notices as it is when giving out funding. It's time to balance the scales and ensure that all news publishers are given the same opportunities to grow and flourish.

We live in a digital era and news providers no longer look the same. The media ecology has expanded far beyond local news simply being provided via a local newspaper.

The growing hyperlocal and community news sector thrives in various guises across the UK. Many are plugging the gap left behind by traditional print media, which have either diminished in communities or left altogether.

The smaller news publications may not all look the same, but they have one thing in

common – they play an increasingly important role in addressing the democratic deficit and supporting the information needs of communities. These individuals choose to suffer long council meetings and monotonous briefings in order to scrutinise those representing them and provide civic value.

Look at the amazing work they do with only one or two members of staff, and imagine the impact they could have as a team of three or four. A relatively small amount of funding can go a long way, in the right hands.

Local news needs reporters who are embedded in the communities they serve, not filing remotely from the other end of the country. Geographic proximity delivers nuance, accountability, and better journalism. It helps build trust between journalism and local people. Something that is needed now more than ever.

It's time to start looking at the big picture and provide funding to those who really can make a difference: hyperlocal and community news publishers.

Instead of ignoring the individual contributions of these relatively smaller publishers, it is the recommendation of C4CJ and ICNN that governments and public bodies start to realise the potential of the sector as a whole and its capacity to affect positive change in communities.

Money shared between several grassroots publications across Wales could have a much bigger impact and genuinely helped revive journalism at the local level.

The [NJ News Commons](#) is a groundbreaking initiative established to connect news organisations throughout the state of New Jersey. It reflects the commitment of Montclair State University and its innovative Center for Cooperative Media at the School of Communication and Media to ensure that New Jersey's news ecosystem is healthy, vibrant and dynamic.

A project which is this inquiry may be interested in looking at is [The NJ Story Exchange](#). It is an initiative to facilitate sharing within the New Jersey news ecosystem. The Story Exchange is powered by [iCopyright](#), which allows news organisations to offer their content for embedding on other sites for free (with ads) or for payment (without ads). iCopyright also helps publishers brand and sell reprints of their stories.

There are advantages to sharing content: views you receive on embedding sites counts toward your overall web traffic; click-throughs bring you new readers; there is no Google indexing penalty for stories running on other sites; and you can send ads with your content.

Another project of interest is [The Knight Foundation](#), which funds journalism projects in the USA. Wales has no equivalent offering seed corn funding for small start up news organisations. Like any other sector, journalism start-ups need support in order to be sustainable and viable.

Hyperlocal media is already an established part of the Welsh media ecology. We

believe all that is needed is a perception change about the value it adds, so that not only communities and publishers are actively aware, but that businesses, potential advertisers, public bodies, funders and governments are too.