

## **Inquiry into News Journalism in Wales:**

request for views on proposed Welsh Government budget allocation for hyperlocal news

10th November 2017

### **1. About the IWA**

1.1 The Institute of Welsh Affairs is an independent think-tank. Our only interest is in seeing Wales flourish as a country in which to work and live. We are an independent charity with a broad membership base across the country. We aim to bring people together from across the spectrum in a safe space where ideas can collide and solutions can be forged in our five priority areas: the economy, education, governance, health & social care, and the media in Wales.

### **2. IWA Media Policy Group**

2.1 The IWA Media Policy group guides and informs our policy priorities. Its members include practitioners, academics and policy professionals with expertise across a diverse range of media platforms and issues. A list of members is available on request. The purpose of the IWA Media Policy Group is to develop, influence and improve media policy for an engaged and connected Wales.

### **3. How this funding could best be used?**

3.1 We are pleased to see the Welsh Government's proposed investment in hyperlocal news. Our [original submission to the Committee's inquiry](#) (May 2017) identified sustainability and plurality as the primary issues affecting News Journalism in Wales. We consider these two issues should form the two strategic priorities for this new investment, and any action underneath this fund should further these priorities.

3.2 It is unclear on what evidence this fund has been designated to provide start-up grants, rather than to support existing hyperlocal news outlets that are facing immediate challenges. Our original submission shared evidence that there has been encouraging growth in hyperlocal news in Wales, however many sites rely on the work of volunteers. This can result in the production of content being vulnerable and dependent on individual's personal circumstances. It is worth noting that in addition to hyperlocal web sites, community radio stations also have a contribution to make to local news and information. There is also some evidence of growth in this area, for example [Ofcom has recently provided a licence](#) for a new service starting in Rhondda.

3.3 Joint research<sup>1</sup> between Cardiff University's Centre for Community Journalism and NESTA found that 46 of the 400 active hyperlocal sites in the UK are in Wales, almost twice the proportion expected based on population share. It is unclear why Welsh Government has decided to encourage start-ups when Wales has a comparatively thriving hyperlocal market. Investment in the sustainability of hyperlocal sites that have succeeded but continue to face challenges would arguably be a more evidenced use of public funds.

3.4 When deciding which activities to support through a finite budget, it is vital that the Welsh Government (and the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, when deciding on its own recommendations) considers what is already available, where the gaps are, and where any additional investment can amplify the impact of existing initiatives; adding to, rather than subsidising, market activity. In our 2015 Media Audit and original submission to the Committee's inquiry we recommended that the Welsh Government and Ofcom jointly commission a study of the future of those local media in Wales which are particularly vulnerable, and this study should include commercial and community radio, local newspaper and hyperlocal sites. We consider that this study should be a priority, and that the findings from such a study would build understanding of those actions likely to have the greatest impact.

3.5 There are a number of initiatives in process that are having or have the potential to have significant impact on hyperlocal news. Here we illustrate some of the major initiatives which this new spend should take account of and amplify rather than replace or compete with.

3.5.1 The Centre for Community Journalism (C4CJ) at Cardiff University is the only centre of its kind in the UK. It is a unique fusion of research and training and works with publishers at a grassroots level, where journalism is most valued but most at risk. The Centre has a strong track record in providing free training for community and hyperlocal journalists at all levels:

- C4CJ has run a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in community journalism that taught more than 32,000 learners from 131 different countries. They have 9,000 learners worldwide on a waiting list for the next run of the MOOC, which they will be updating and running in partnership with a leading industry body or organisation.
- C4CJ offer face-to-face training across Wales, often in partnership with NUJ Training Wales and Goldsmith University's Centre for Investigative Journalism. This training is readily available, along with online resources and a telephone helpline. All these are free to access and use, and the Centre updates the training in response to changing needs.
- C4CJ has recently launched the Independent Community News Network, ICNN, which is a UK wide representative body for the independent community and hyperlocal news sector. As well as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/137125-intervention-for-uks-hyperlocal-journalism-sector>

offering representation and lobbying on behalf of its members ICNN affiliates have access to free legal advice from the UK's leading media law expert.

3.5.4 [The Local News Partnership](#) (LNP) is an agreement between the BBC and the regional news industry to provide a commitment to full and fair reporting of decisions taken by local authorities and other public bodies across the UK. In addition to increased and improved reporting on decisions taken by public bodies, the LNP will ensure expertise is shared around the industry. In detail, the LNP includes:

- A News Hub giving external media organisations access to BBC video and audio material for use online.
- A Shared Data Unit - staffed by the BBC alongside reporters on secondment from local news providers - that will share data journalism with news organisations across the media industry.
- The employment of Local Democracy Reporters, who will cover councils and other public services on behalf of the BBC and local news organisations. There will eventually be 150 of these reporters, funded by the BBC and based in the offices of regional news organisations across the UK. In Wales, it is expected that there will be 11 licence fee funded local democracy reporters operating from early 2018 onwards. These reporters will generate copy focusing solely on local government. The content will be made available to more than 50 media organisations representing more than 600 print, online or broadcast news titles which have already signed up to Section One of the partnership to receive content generated through the News Hub, Shared Data Unit and Local Democracy Reporters.

#### **4. Is it a sufficient amount of money to make a difference to the provision of quality news journalism in Wales?**

Whilst it is not possible to say categorically whether the money will be enough to make a difference, it would be beneficial to consider the size of each grant and how many publications this could realistically support. The political independence of the awarding body should also be taken into consideration.

It is our opinion that strategic investment which a) amplifies the impact of existing support and b) focuses in particular on the sustainability of hyperlocal news will make the greatest difference to quality news journalism in Wales.

For further information, please contact:

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