Public Interest News Foundation

UK Local News Report

December 2025

The PINF UK Local News Report.

December 2025

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Contents

Introduction

This report provides a detailed and data-driven account of the state of local news provision across the United Kingdom in 2025. It is based on the Public Interest News Foundation database created two years ago to power the local news map[1], which has been updated on a yearly basis.

This year's report presents the most comprehensive picture yet of local news provision across the United Kingdom, for two reasons. First, user-submitted information and feedback since our 2024 report has helped us enlarge and improve our database. Second, we have conducted novel research by collating our database with external data sources such as ONS' rural-urban classification of Local Authorities, the English 2021 Census and 2025 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, as well as company reports.

As of October 2025, the PINF database includes **1,267 outlets** operated by **432 publishers.** Despite promising growth among independent and digital-first outlets, the evidence points to a sector under continuing strain and characterised by stark inequalities of access. Local news remains **highly concentrated in a minority of districts**, leaving **4.4 million people** — particularly in parts of England — without meaningful coverage of the places where they live.

Digital dominance continues to shape the sector. More than **seven in ten** outlets now publish at least online, and digital-first launches — many on platforms such as Substack and Ghost — outnumber print launches. The emergence of new digital publishers offers valuable experimentation, yet their distribution mirrors wider social divides: affluent and well-connected areas are most likely to gain outlets, while economically deprived and densely urban communities continue to lose them.

Ownership structures have changed little since the last report. The **dominance of a few national groups** continues to shape the character of local journalism, often prioritising scale and automation over local depth. At the same time, the independent sector, though growing, operates on precarious foundations, sustained by volunteer labour, micro-revenues, and limited institutional support.

Finally, we looked at the geographical distribution of the new round of **Local Democracy Reporting Service** contracts, awarded by the BBC. We note that numerous contracts were awarded to large publishers despite the district and regional presence of smaller, locally embedded outlets.

Together, these findings confirm that while local journalism in the UK is adapting technologically and creatively, geographic, economic and organisational differences intersect problematically with citizens' access to local public interest news.

Before we head into our findings, a small final note: there are numerous charts in this report. These charts are interactive and enriched with custom-made tooltips to provide additional context and information: head to the Appendix to see the full directory. From there you can click on any chart to explore it in full detail.

[1] https://map.publicinterestnews.org.uk/

1. Summary of Findings

	October 2025
Outlets	1,267
Publishers	432
Monopoly districts[2]	80
Closures / Launches (since April 2024)	22 / 22
Outlets per people	1/53,351
Mean outlets per district	3.73 (sd[3] = 3.7)
Mean publishers per district	2.87 (sd = 2.4)
News deserts (LADs)	27 absolute deserts & 10 relative deserts
People living in a news desert (millions)	4.4 (3.0 in an absolute desert and 1.4 in a relative one)
Independent outlets (%)	51.8

1. **News deserts affect 4.4 million people**: As of October 2025, approximately one in ten Local Authority Districts (37 in total) qualify as news deserts, with 27 absolute deserts having no local news outlets covering the area at all and ten relative deserts lacking dedicated coverage by a local news outlet. This leaves 4.4 million people without dedicated local news provision.

2. **Geographic inequality remains stark**: Nearly half (48%) of districts have two or fewer outlets. London has the lowest coverage ratio with roughly one outlet per 100,000 residents, while Scotland, Wales, and the South West have approximately three times more outlets per capita.

3. **Urban areas are worse served**: Contrary to patterns in the US, UK news deserts are predominantly in urban districts rather than rural areas. Statistical analysis confirms that urban areas have significantly lower outlet density per capita compared to rural regions.

4. **Corporate concentration dominates**: More than one in three outlets (over 35%) belong to just three companies—Newsquest, Reach, and Iconic Media (formerly National World). More than one in five Local Authority Districts (81 districts) operate under single-owner monopolies, with no ownership diversity.

5. **Digital transformation accelerates**: Over seven in ten outlets now publish online, with digital-first launches outnumbering print launches. The year saw 22 launches and 22 closures, with launches predominantly independent and digital-first (many on Substack or Ghost).

6. **Closures hit deprived communities hardest, so news inequality is widening:** Closures disproportionately occurred in the most deprived urban districts with few titles, while launches spread across moderately affluent or mixed urban-rural communities. Over 40% of closures took place in the North East, the most deprived region affected.

7. **The independent sector prevents news deserts**: For nearly half of districts served by one title only, it is an independent news provider that prevents the district from being a news desert.

[2] These are districts where one news company provides news, regardless of how many outlets there are in the district.
[3] Sd stands for standard deviation, which is a statistical measure used to describe the spread of data around the mean. A low standard deviation means data points are clustered closely around the mean, while a high standard deviation indicates the data points are more spread out over a wider range.

8. **Demographic disparities exist**: Statistical analysis reveals that districts with higher median age have more outlets per capita, while areas with larger Black, Asian, Indian, or non-British White populations have fewer outlets. Districts with higher crime deprivation also tend to have fewer outlets.

2. Comparing Local Authorities

Local News Provision across Local Authorities

Local news provision across UK districts is uneven, with **the majority of areas experiencing critically low outlet numbers**. The distribution is heavily concentrated at the lower end of the spectrum of number of outlets per district, with 82 districts having exactly two outlets. This means that **nearly half (48%) of districts in the UK have two or fewer news outlets serving them** (median = 3). In contrast, a small number of exceptional districts — mostly in the South West — have substantially higher provision, with Somerset the maximum reaching 30 outlets. This creates an enormous gap between typical provision (0-3 outlets) and the news-rich minority, indicating that **local news is highly concentrated in a few areas while most UK districts operate with minimal journalistic capacity**. These patterns suggest fundamental structural inequality in citizens' access to local news across the country.

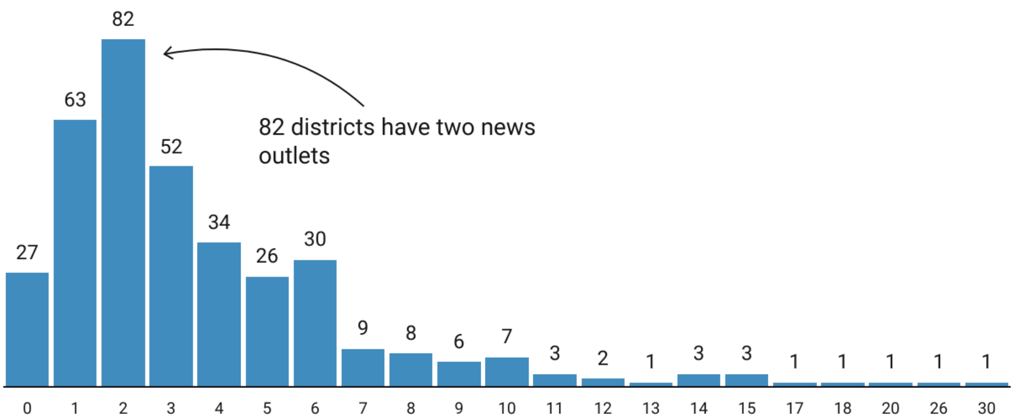
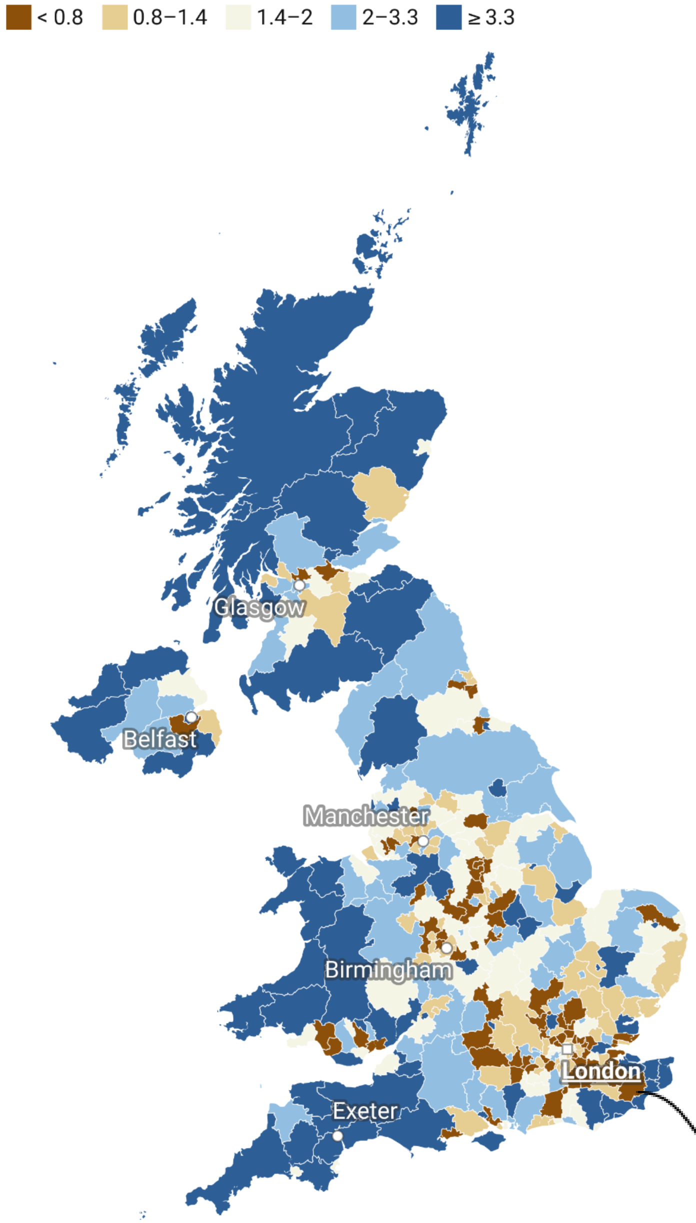


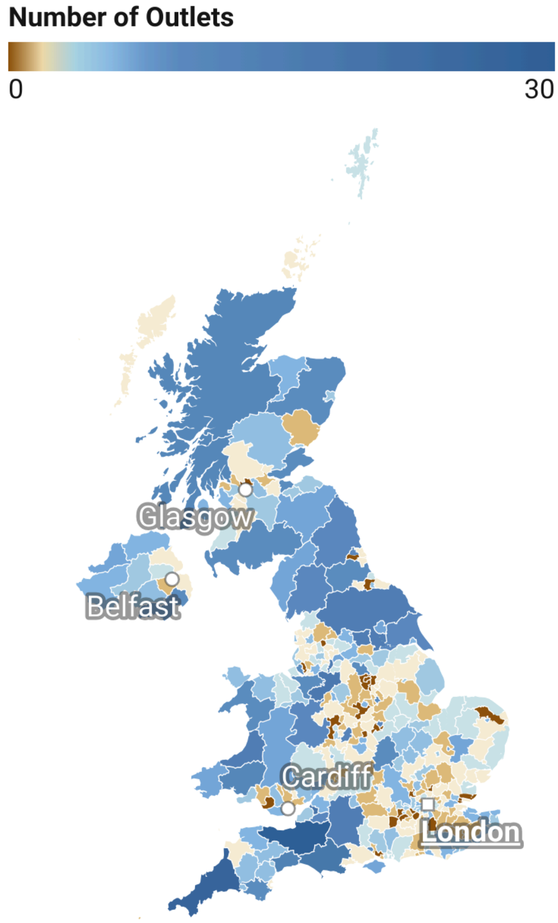
Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: Public Interest News Foundation • Created with Datawrapper

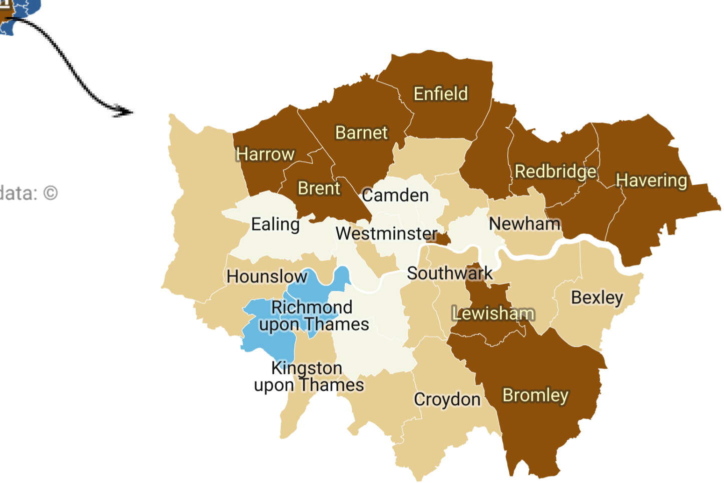
Across our now three-year long analysis of local news provision across the UK's Local Authority Districts, one coverage pattern is remarkably clear: **England, and particularly the belt around London and in the central part of the nation, is the worst served in the country**, adjusted by population. At first view, this could be dismissed as a result of higher population density in those local authorities. But even in absolute terms, the pattern remains unaltered (see figure below). What the data instead suggests is rather a lack of news provision in commuter belts across metropolitan centres and urban conurbations in the country.

Number of outlets per 100,000 people

Districts are divided in groups of equal size. The darker brown ones are districts that belong to groups that perform worst in terms of local news provision, while darker blue ones perform best.







Map: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF Database • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

Aggregating districts into regions confirms some of these patterns. **The South West, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland have on average three times the number of outlets per 100,000 people than people living in London**. The capital records the lowest ratio, with roughly one outlet per 100,000 residents. Most English regions fall between 1.5 and 1.9 outlets per 100,000 people, revealing a relatively consistent but modest level of provision across much of England. Overall, the pattern suggests that **per capita access to local news is strongest in devolved and more peripheral regions**, while the capital and parts of central England appear more thinly served.

Outlets per 100,000 in UK regions

Region	Population	Total Titles	Outlets per 100k People
South West	5,764,881	210	3.64
Wales	3,131,640	102	3.26
Northern Ireland	1,910,543	56	2.93
Scotland	5,447,700	149	2.74
North West	7,516,113	143	1.90
South East	9,379,833	166	1.77
East	6,398,497	112	1.75
North East	2,683,040	47	1.75
East Midlands	4,934,939	85	1.72
Yorkshire and The Humber	5,541,262	92	1.66
West Midlands	6,021,653	89	1.48
London	8,866,180	96	1.08

Another aspect we looked at is **how local media structures in the UK vary by region and medium type**. **London** has a predominantly digitalised local media environment, with **nine in ten outlets appearing online only**. In contrast, **Scotland (59%), Northern Ireland (64%), and Wales (46%) display the highest shares of print-and-online outlets**, suggesting stronger retention of hybrid publishing models that maintain both print and digital operations. The North East has the lowest online-only presence (12%). Community radio represents a notable component of local media in several English regions, accounting for between 22% and 29% of outlets in the Midlands, South East, and South West, compared with minimal presence in London (8%) and devolved nations. Overall, these patterns indicate that the composition of local media ecosystems differs markedly across the UK. Note our data exclude large multi-district radio stations such as BBC Radio London, as they do not fit our definition of 'local' (see Appendix).

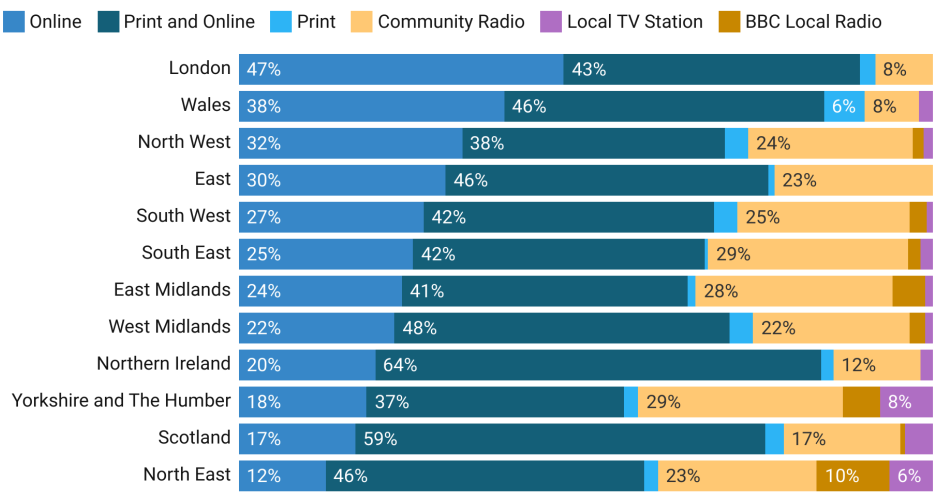


Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: Public Interest News Foundation • Created with Datawrapper

News Deserts

There are 37 news deserts in the UK, which means that **around one in ten districts has no dedicated local news outlet,** i.e. that there is no local news outlet that solely covers that local authority. Relative to 2024, Lewisham and Dartford disappeared from the list (due to outlet launches and the addition of a previously existing news outlet which was flagged to us as missing), and instead City of London joined the list following the closure of City Matters.

We distinguish between absolute and relative news deserts: absolute deserts have no outlets, whereas relative news deserts have no *dedicated* outlet. Instead, they are covered by an outlet which serves multiple districts. For example, there is no local news outlet that covers South Derbyshire: it is an *absolute* desert. Another example, there is a local news outlet that covers Newport, but it is not dedicated solely to Newport as it also covers Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, and Torfaen: so Newport is a *relative* desert. Some 27 districts are absolute news deserts, and ten are relative deserts.

Absolute news deserts

There are 27 absolute news deserts. Two such districts are Blaby, and Oadby and Wingston. These two districts were historically served by the Oadby, Wigston & Blaby Mail (founded 1978 as Oadby & Wigston Mail, Blaby added 2010), a freesheet that was a sub-edition of the Leicester Mail, both part of Northcliffe Media (later Local World and then Reach plc). Bolsover (Derbyshire) had the Bolsover Advertiser until it closed in 2011. In Castle Point (Essex) a local paper called the Castle Point Clarion once circulated[4].

The data shows that absolute news deserts are **disproportionately concentrated in England's non-metropolitan districts** (smaller administrative areas often located between large urban centres and rural hinterlands). The **East and South East regions** feature prominently. A smaller number of **unitary and metropolitan districts**, such as Gateshead and Knowsley, illustrate that even densely populated urban areas can become news deserts.

Overall, the data suggests that the retreat of local journalism has hit hardest in England's administrative mid-tier: areas large enough to warrant independent civic scrutiny, yet small enough to be deprioritised within regional commercial strategies.

Absolute news deserts		
	Local Authority	Population
East Midlands	Blaby	104,182
	Bolsover	81,553
	Chesterfield	104,110
	North East Derbyshire	103,783
	Oadby and Wigston	58,341
	South Derbyshire	111,133
West Midlands	Nuneaton and Bedworth	135,481
	South Staffordshire	111,527
East	Broadland	133,872
	Broxbourne	99,103
	Castle Point	89,731
	Rochford	87,216
	Three Rivers	94,123
London	City of London	10,847
South East	Bracknell Forest	126,881
	Elmbridge	140,024
	Fareham	114,547
	Hart	100,910
	Spelthorne	103,551
	Surrey Heath	91,237
	Tandridge	88,707
North West	Hyndburn	83,213
	Knowsley	157,103
North East	Gateshead	197,722
	Stockton-on-Tees	199,966
Scotland	East Dunbartonshire	108,980
Wales	Bridgend	146,136

Relative news deserts

Across the **ten districts identified as relative news deserts**, local coverage appears to **rely heavily on a small number of large corporate publishers**, and in most cases, on outlets whose editorial attention extends well beyond district boundaries. Newsquest and Reach plc account for the majority of titles that nominally cover these areas. In several districts, such as Sutton, Hertsmere, and Newport,

[4]https://www.canveyisland.org/category/arts-2/literature/papers/local-newspapers/castle-point-clarion

coverage is provided exclusively by Newsquest titles, while others like South Tyneside, North Tyneside, and Neath Port Talbot depend primarily on Reach outlets.

The presence of regionally oriented titles in relative news deserts, such as the *South Wales Argus* or *South Wales Evening Post,* suggests that these districts are served more as part of wider metropolitan or county-level catchments than as self-contained news communities. For example, the *South Wales Argus*, founded in 1892, is distributed across Newport, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, and Torfaen—meaning the only outlet serving Newport (0.62 outlets per 100,000) must also cover four other areas[5]. In the London Borough of Sutton, the Sutton & Croydon Guardian reflects a consolidation: the Croydon Guardian was launched in 1986, and in 2019 it was merged with the Sutton Guardian to form the current title under the ownership of Newsquest Media Group[6]. A blog commentary on the combined paper noted that coverage of Sutton itself was quite thin and often mixed with neighbouring boroughs, suggesting a shift from distinct local title to a shared geographic edition[7].

Ownership concentration in relative news deserts is high, with most areas having just one or two active outlets and, typically, a single corporate owner; only the Cotswolds show slightly greater plurality, though still within the Newsquest–Reach duopoly. The presence of one independent, *West Bridgford Wire*, stands out as an exception but does not offset the broader pattern. Collectively, these data indicate that coverage of these districts is likely limited in depth and local specificity, shaped more by regional editorial economies than by sustained, district-level reporting.

Some of these areas once enjoyed far richer local news ecosystems that have been systematically dismantled over the past two decades. Neath Port Talbot provides a striking example of this long-term erosion of local journalism. Once home to the *Neath Guardian* and *Port Talbot Guardian*, the district has seen its dedicated newspapers disappear and its local newsroom capacity dismantled. Rachel Howells's doctoral research into Port Talbot[8] described the town as a "news black hole," showing that following the 2009 closure of the *Port Talbot Guardian*, the quantity of local news halved while its quality steadily declined. The study found that journalism had retreated from the community, with reporters increasingly replaced by remote, press-release-driven coverage and official sources, resulting in a public that was under-informed, under-represented, and less able to access scrutiny or participate meaningfully in civic life.

Relative news deserts

	Local Authority	Population	Title list
England	Cotswold	91,311	Cotswold Journal (Newsquest Media Group Limited); Gloucestershire County Gazette (Newsquest Media Group Limited); Gloucestershire Echo (Reach Regionals Media Limited)
	East Cambridgeshire	89,394	Cambridge News / Cambridgeshire Live (Reach Regionals Media Limited)
	Hertsmere	108,106	Times Series (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
	North Tyneside	210,487	Newcastle Chronicle (Reach Regionals Media Limited); Shields Gazette (Media Concierge Limited)
	Rushcliffe	121,582	West Bridgford Wire (Unspecified Owner)
	South Tyneside	148,667	Newcastle Chronicle (Reach Regionals Media Limited); Shields Gazette (Media Concierge Limited)
	Stevenage	89,737	North Herts Comet (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
	Sutton	210,053	Sutton & Croydon Guardian (Newsquest Media Group Limited); Your Local Guardian (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
Wales	Neath Port Talbot	142,158	South Wales Evening Post (Reach Regionals Media Limited)
	Newport	161,506	South Wales Argus (Newsquest Media Group Limited)

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Wales_Argus
[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sutton_%26_Croydon_Guardian
[7] https://diamondgeezer.blogspot.com/2019/11/the-sutton-and-croydon-guardian.html
[8] https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/87313/1/2016howellsrphd.pdf

Drylands

We also note the existence of "dryland" districts — the twenty districts with the lowest number of outlets per 100,000 people after absolute news deserts. A district can be a relative news desert and a 'dryland'. Almost all have **only one active local outlet**, and in most cases that outlet is owned by one of a few major regional publishers: Newsquest Media Group, Reach Regionals, or Iconic Media (previously National World, rebranded as Iconic by Media Concierge). A small number of exceptions involve independent or community-based operations, such as *Enfield Dispatch* (Social Spider CIC) or *Kennet Radio* in West Berkshire, but these are rare.

Regionally, the pattern is mostly similar but there are clusters in **southern England** (particularly the South East and East), **outer London boroughs** (Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Bromley, Redbridge, Enfield), and several **metropolitan districts in the Midlands and North** (St Helens, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Wakefield). Only a few cases appear in **Wales (Newport, Caerphilly)** and **Scotland (Falkirk)**. The majority of drylands are in medium-sized, suburban, or semi-rural areas rather than large cities or very remote rural zones.

In numerical terms, these areas have **fewer than 0.64 outlets per 100,000 people**, well below the national average (2.32). The near-total dominance of a single outlet per district points to **limited plurality and vulnerability to coverage loss** if that outlet were to close or consolidate further.

Region	District	Outlets per 100,000	Outlets (Owner)
East	Dacorum	0.64	Hemel Hempstead Gazette & Express (Media Concierge Limited)
East Midlands	Charnwood	0.54	Loughborough Echo (Reach Regionals Media Limited)
London	Barking and Dagenham	0.45	Barking and Dagenham Post (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
	Brent	0.29	Brent & Kilburn Times (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
	Bromley	0.30	Bromley News Shopper (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
	Enfield	0.61	Enfield Dispatch (Social Spider Community Interest Company); Enfield Independent (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
	Redbridge	0.32	Ilford Recorder (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
North West	St. Helens	0.54	St Helens Star (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
Scotland	Falkirk	0.63	Falkirk Herald (Media Concierge Limited)
South East	Cherwell	0.61	Banbury Guardian (Media Concierge Limited)
	Maidstone	0.55	Maidstone News (Iliffe Media Limited)
	West Berkshire	0.62	Kennet Radio (Newbury and Thatcham) (Kennet Community Radio)
	Wokingham	0.55	Wokingham Today (The Wokingham Paper Limited)
South West	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	0.50	Bournemouth Daily Echo (Newsquest Media Group Limited); Hot Radio 102.8 (Poole) (Dorset Community Radio Ltd)
Wales	Newport	0.62	South Wales Argus (Newsquest Media Group Limited)
	Caerphilly	0.57	Caerphilly Observer (Caerphilly Media Ltd)
West Midlands	Sandwell	0.58	Great Barr Gazette (Pioneer Publishing Limited); Raaj FM (Sandwell) (Community Development Horizons Ltd)
	Solihull	0.46	Solihull Observer (Bullivant News Corporation Limited)
	Walsall	0.35	Ambur Radio (Walsall) (Unspecified Owner)
Yorkshire and The Humber	Wakefield	0.28	Wakefield Express (Media Concierge Limited)

News Oases

The data on the UK's top 20 news oases, which we define as the districts with the highest levels of local media provision, show two complementary patterns, depending on whether one looks at absolute outlet counts or population-adjusted density. When ranked **by the number of outlets**, the strongest local media ecosystems are found in **large unitary authorities in the South West, Scotland, and parts of the North West.** Somerset, Cornwall, and Dorset all host between 18 and 30 outlets each, with a diverse mix of ownership (10–17 owners), reflecting relatively plural local media markets. Similarly, **major urban centres** such as Manchester, Bristol, and Glasgow maintain high absolute numbers of outlets (14–20), although their large populations lower their relative outlet density. When adjusted **by population**, the picture shifts decisively toward **rural and peripheral regions**, particularly in **Scotland, Wales, and the South West of England**. Areas such as the **Isles of Scilly, Shetland Islands, and Orkney Islands** top the rankings, followed by Ceredigion, Argyll and Bute, and several rural Devon districts (East, West, and South Hams). Smaller authorities such as Argyll and Bute (12.5 per 100k) and Ceredigion (19.6 per 100k) combine modest outlet counts with very small populations, producing exceptionally high per-capita availability. Across both measures, the data indicate that **media resilience is strongest in rural or semi-rural contexts with established traditions of local and community journalism**. These districts also boast ownership diversity, ranging from five to twelve different owners.

News oases adjusted for population

Region	District	Outlets per 100,000	Outlets	Owners	Rank
East Midlands	Melton	5.72	3	3	20
	Rutland	7.29	3	2	10
Scotland	Argyll and Bute	12.51	11	8	4
	Dumfries and Galloway	6.17	9	5	15
	Moray	6.36	6	4	14
	Na h-Eileanan Siar	7.66	2	2	9
	Orkney Islands	9.08	2	2	5
	Scottish Borders	5.99	7	4	16
	Shetland Islands	13.03	3	3	3
South West	East Devon	8.41	13	6	8
	Forest of Dean	6.82	6	4	12
	Isles of Scilly	43.84	1	1	1
	Mid Devon	5.97	5	4	17
	North Devon	5.97	6	6	17
	South Hams	8.91	8	4	6
	West Devon	8.59	5	4	7
Wales	Carmarthenshire	5.82	11	6	19
	Ceredigion	19.55	14	5	2
	Gwynedd	6.80	8	3	13
	Isle of Anglesey	7.24	5	3	11

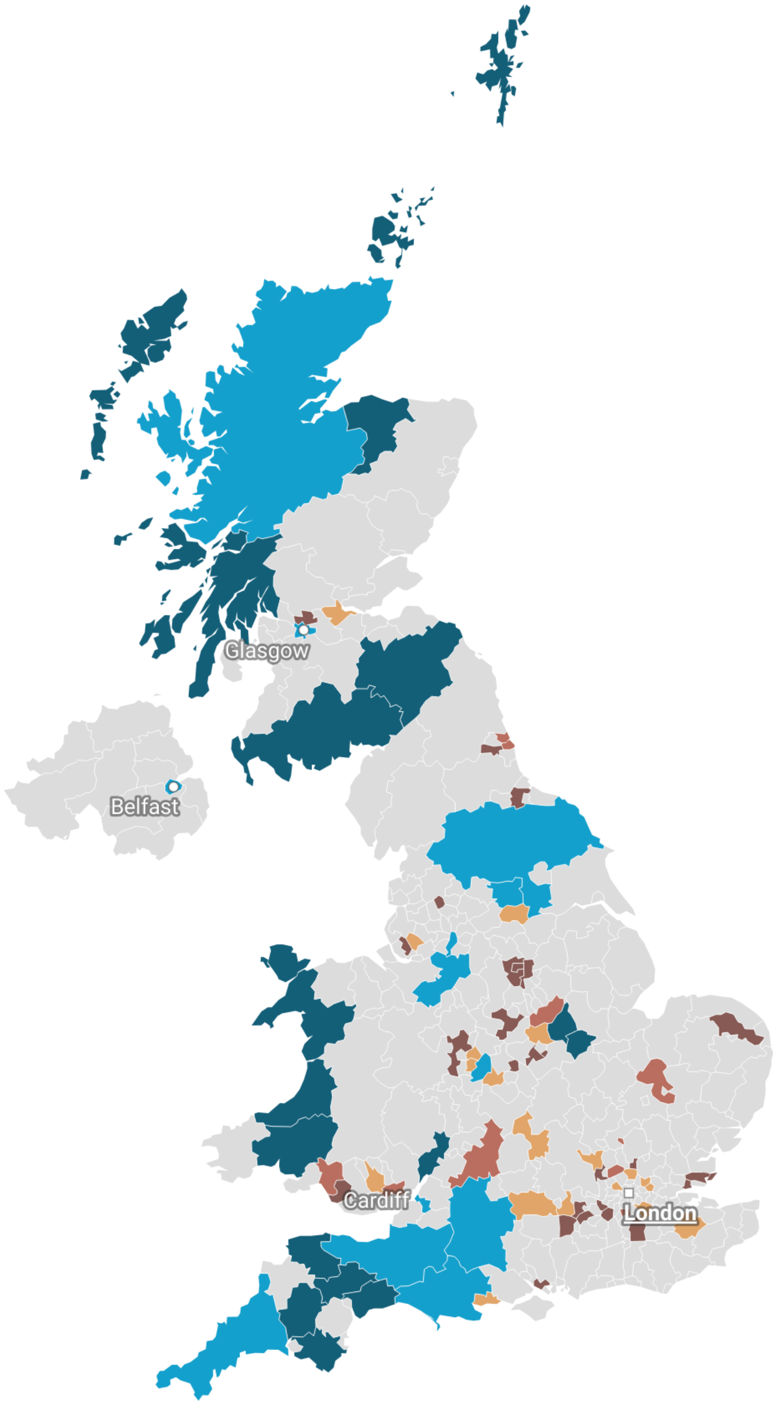
News oases by number of outlets

Region	District	Outlets per 100,000	Outlets	Owners	Rank
North West	Cheshire East	4.18	17	9	46
	Manchester	2.46	14	14	112
Northern Ireland	Belfast	3.45	12	10	65
Scotland	Argyll and Bute	12.51	11	8	4
	Glasgow City	2.41	15	10	115
	Highland	4.67	11	6	32
South West	Bristol, City of	4.18	20	13	46
	Cornwall	4.52	26	12	34
	Dorset	4.70	18	12	31
	East Devon	8.41	13	6	8
	Somerset	5.20	30	17	26
	Wiltshire	2.91	15	10	87
Wales	Carmarthenshire	5.82	11	6	19
	Ceredigion	19.55	14	5	2
West Midlands	Birmingham	1.04	12	9	261
Yorkshire and The Humber	Leeds	1.70	14	12	177
	North Yorkshire	2.41	15	11	115

News deserts, drylands, and oases across the UK's local authorities

News oases are concentrated in rural parts of the UK, including Scotland, Wales, and South West. News deserts and drylands are scattered predominantly across England, in urban commuter belts outside major metropolitan centres.

Absolute news desert | Relative news desert | Drylands | News oasis | News oasis (population adjusted)



Source: PINF Local News Database • Created with Datawrapper

3. Launches and Closures

Launches

We identified **a total of 22 launches between the last report (April 2024) and October 2025.** Digital-first dominated with **most new launches occurring on Substack or Ghost** platforms, reflecting the **shift toward newsletter-based, subscription-funded local journalism.** The Splash Glasgow exemplifies this trend, launched by a veteran editor who took redundancy from traditional media[9]. Since reporting on the launch of The Blackpool Lead in our last report, the Lead network has gone through significant expansion with five launches between April and November 2024, establishing its presence across northern England with Hyndburn, Altrincham & Sale, Warrington, and Calderdale editions joining earlier Bolton, Teesside, and Stoke-on-Trent titles. The network moved from its own custom site to Substack in October 2024, after reaching 2,000 subscribers. Mill Media expanded into Scotland with The Glasgow Bell (September 2024), complementing their existing Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Sheffield operations, and into London via the launch of The Wimble.

Outlet	Publisher	District
Altrincham & Sale Lead*	The Lead Newspapers Ltd	Trafford
Ballymoney Buzz	Pops Media	Causeway Coast and Glens
Calderdale Lead*	The Lead Newspapers Ltd	Calderdale
Folkestone Dispatch*	Rhys Griffiths	Folkestone and Hythe
Hyndburn Lead*	The Lead Newspapers Ltd	Stoke-on-Trent
ipswich.co.uk	Anglia Ventures Ltd	Ipswich
Nantwich News	Nantwich News Ltd	Cheshire East
Salamander News	Salamander Media Ltd	Lewisham
The Beagle+*	Beagle Media Holdings Ltd	Plymouth
The Canterbury Courier	Brightside Publishing Ltd	Canterbury
The Chelsea Citizen	Rob McGibbon	Kensington and Chelsea
The Crowborough News	Crowborough News Ltd	Wealden
The Glasgow Bell+	The Millers Publishing Company Ltd	Glasgow City
The Ilkley Journal*	Narinder Purba	Bradford
The Moonraker	Counterpress Media Ltd	Swindon
The Rochdale Times	Crosby Associates Media Ltd	Rochdale
The Splash Glasgow*	The Splash Glasgow C.I.C.	Glasgow City
The Wimble*	The Millers Publishing Company Ltd	Merton
Warminster Journal	Wiltshire Publications Ltd	Wiltshire
Warrington Lead*	The Lead Newspapers Ltd	Warrington
Watton & Wayland Times	Watton & Wayland Times Ltd	Breckland

* published on Substack; + published on Ghost

Closures

A total of **22 local outlets closed since our latest report**. While some closures reflect the long-term financial fragility of local journalism, others point to the volatility of small-scale digital and community radio ventures established over the past decade. **Community radio** saw multiple losses across the UK. *Halton Community Radio* (Cheshire) dissolved in January 2025 after its operating company was struck off at Companies House, ending a 17-year run. *Harpur Radio* in Bedford survived little more than a year before closing in April 2025, despite being founded by experienced commercial radio professionals[10]. In Northern Ireland, *Lisburn's 98FM* went silent in June 2024 when its parent college withdrew funding amid cost-of-living pressures[11], while *Calon FM* in Wrexham ceased operations in

[9] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2024/news/weekly-editor-who-took-redundancy-launches-new-substack-site/
[10] https://www.bedfordindependent.co.uk/two-new-radio-stations-launch-on-dab-in-bedford/
[11] https://radiotoday.co.uk/2024/06/three-community-radio-stations-in-northern-ireland-to-cease-transmission/

April 2025 following a licence transfer[12]. Earlier in the period, *Carillon Wellbeing Radio* and *Hermitage FM* both closed in March 2024, marking the loss of two long-standing community broadcasters in the Midlands. Among **print and online news titles**, several established outlets ceased publication after decades of service. The *South London Press*, one of the capital's oldest local papers, abruptly shuttered in May 2025 after 160 years in print, with staff informed days before the final edition[13]. *Rochdale Online* closed in March 2025 after 27 years in operation, marking it as the second oldest hyperlocal site in the country[14]. Its closure in Rochdale is offset by the launch of The Rochdale Times, led by Northern Echo and Bolton News editor Karl Holbrook. The *Lincolnite*, once regarded as a model for independent online journalism, closed in September 2024 citing unsustainable finances[15].

At the smaller end of the local news ecosystem, numerous **hyperlocals** disappeared. *East Durham Life* and *Stockton and Billingham Life*, both community weeklies founded in 2019, ended publication in May 2024, unable to cover production costs[16]. *Your Local Voice*, serving south Manchester neighbourhoods, folded in October 2024 when its publisher stepped away from local media[17]. *The QT*, a digital magazine for the North East, published its final issue in July 2024 after 24 weeks due to insufficient subscriptions[18]. *The Norwich Seeker*, which had relied on Innovate UK grant funding, was dissolved in September 2025 after funding expired[19]. Overall, closures during this period highlight pressures on both legacy and digital-born outlets.

Outlet	Publisher	District
Beds Bulletin	Rosetta Publishing Ltd	Bedford
Calon FM (Wrexham)	Wrexham Community Broadcasting CIC	Wrexham
Carillon Wellbeing Radio	Carillon Wellbeing Ltd	Charnwood
Chorlton Post	Drawing Board Productions CIC	Manchester
City Matters	City Publishing Ltd	City of London
East Durham Life	East Durham Life Ltd	Hartlepool
Felixstowe Nub News	Nub News Ltd	East Suffolk
Groove City Radio	Groove City Radio	Glasgow City
Hadleigh Nub News	Nub News Ltd	Babergh
Halton Community Radio	Halton Community Radio	Halton
Harpur Radio	Harpur Radio Ltd	Bedford
Hartlepool Life	Hartlepool Life Ltd	Hartlepool
Hermitage FM	Hermitage FM	Charnwood
Lincolnite	Stonebow Media Ltd	Lincoln
Lisburn's 98FM (Lisburn)	Lisburn Community Radio Ltd	Lisburn and Castlereagh
Rochdale Online	Rochdale Online Ltd	Rochdale
South London Press	Msi Media Ltd	South London Boroughs
Stockton and Billingham Life	Hartlepool Life Ltd	Stockton-on-Tees
Stoke Gifford Journal	North Bristol Press	South Gloucestershire
The Norwich Seeker	The Norwich Seeker CIC	Norwich
The QT	QT Regions Ltd	North East of England
Your Local Voice	In Touch Local Media Ltd	Manchester

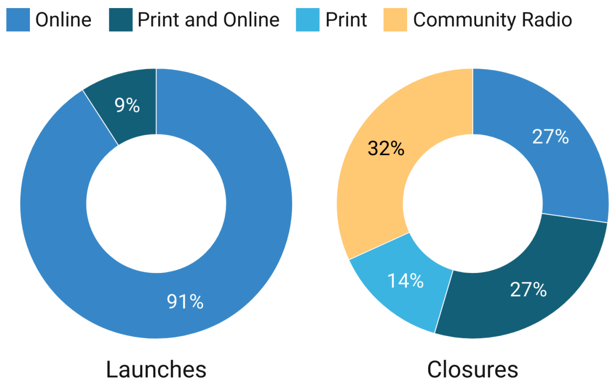
[12] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calon_FM
[13] https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/regional-newspapers/south-london-press-closed/. Technically, our definition of local news outlet excluded the South London Press, as it served six local authority districts. Our cut-off point for 'local' is no more than four LADs, but the outlet would have still been important for the news ecosystem in those districts.
[14] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2025/news/local-news-website-ceases-trading-after-27-years/
[15] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2024/news/independent-news-publisher-shuts-down-with-nine-jobs-lost/
[16] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2024/news/good-news-titles-cease-publication-after-five-years/
[17] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2024/news/hyperlocal-newspaper-ceases-publication-with-regret/
[18] https://northeastbylines.co.uk/region/north-east/blow-to-regional-journalism-as-the-qt-closes/
[19] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2023/news/city-title-seeks-fresh-funding-in-find-to-stay-afloat-beyond-2023/

Analysis of Launches and Closures

When comparing launches and closures, **we identify three key trends**:

1. **Launches occur mostly in the independent sector and through platforms like Substack and Ghost.** These platforms are enabling a new wave of focused, often hyper-local, journalism that is often deep and narrow in its coverage. Many journalists start on Substack for its ease of use, and a growing number, like Mill Media, are migrating to Ghost once they achieve significant scale or want more control over their brand. These platforms empower independent journalists to connect directly with communities willing to pay for local information, demonstrating a promising, though still precarious, business model for the future of local news.

2. **Closures and launches are unevenly distributed across media types.** Closures occur across print, online, print and online, and community radio, whereas launches are predominantly online; this shift towards digital is in line with shifts in audience news consumption, which in 2025 finds social media as the third main source for local news (22%) after BBC regional bulletins on TV (39%) and word of mouth (26%)[20].

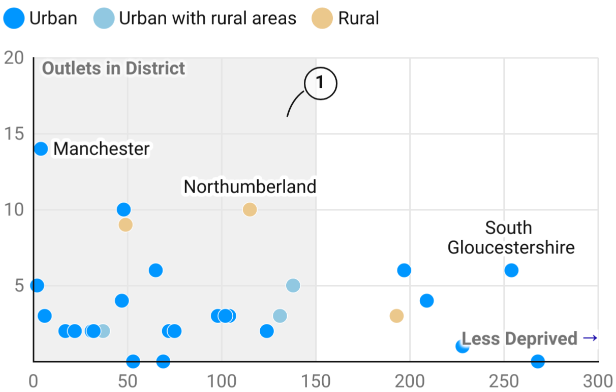


Source: Public Interest News Foundation • Created with Datawrapper

3. **In England, closures tend to occur in deprived urban districts with few titles, whereas launches occur across a broader spectrum of districts**. Local news closures in 2025 occurred predominantly in districts falling in the top 50% for multiple deprivation (see figure in the next page). Almost all closures were in urban districts (a finding that echoes the State of Local News Report in the United States)[21]. Notably, **the closure of news outlets in Gateshead, City of London, and Stockton-on-Tees converted these districts into news deserts.** By contrast, new outlets appeared across a wider socioeconomic range. Start-ups such as The Chelsea Citizen added a publication to the affluent Kensington and Chelsea, while North Yorkshire, Wiltshire, and Cheshire East (which belong to the least deprived 10% districts in England) saw the addition of a title to their already news-rich portfolios. Overall, **news contraction tracks deprivation, whereas new provision favours moderately affluent or mixed urban–rural communities**. The pattern signals a widening social gap in local news resilience: poorer urban areas continue to lose outlets fastest, while launches concentrate where audiences and advertisers can better sustain independent or digital-first models.

[20] Ofcom News Consumption in the UK Report (page 60).
[21] In Medill's latest State of Local News report, a "festering, 20-year-old problem" looms larger than ever | Nieman Journalism Lab

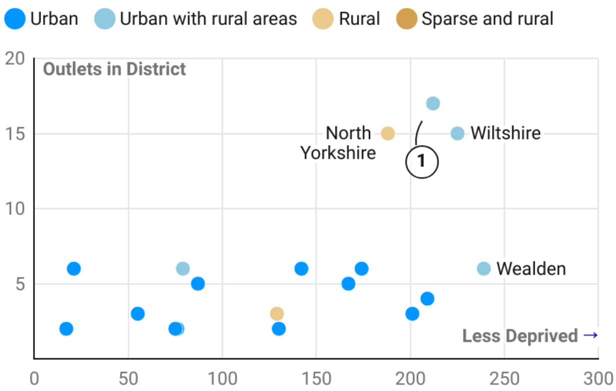
Closures occurred in mostly urban and deprived districts



1 most districts are in the top 50% for deprivation

Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: ONS + PINF • Created with Datawrapper

Launches took place across the deprivation spectrum



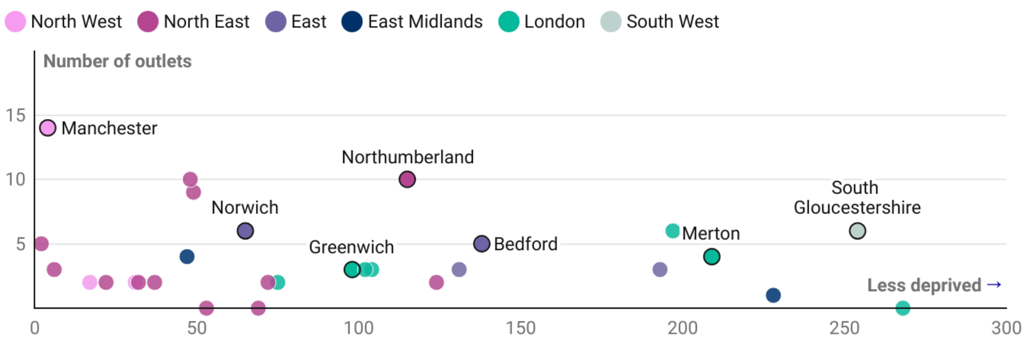
1 These outlets are already well served and relatively not deprived

Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: ONS + PINF • Created with Datawrapper

4. **Closures took place disproportionately in the North East, whereas launches spread more evenly across a variety of regions.** Over four in ten outlet closures took place in the North East, followed by London (24%), and the East of England (14%). In contrast, launches took place more evenly across English regions, yet no launches took place in the North East, leaving the region with fewer titles per capita compared to 2024. Notably, the North East districts where closures took place are also the most deprived (see figure below).

Region	Closure (%)	Launch (%)
North East	41	0
London	24	15
East	14	10
North West	10	20
East Midlands	7	0
South West	3	15
Northern Ireland	0	5
Scotland	0	5
South East	0	15
West Midlands	0	5
Yorkshire and The Humber	0	10

Most deprived districts where closures occurred are in the North



The number of districts with closures surpasses the number of closures due to some outlets covering multiple districts.

Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government + PINF • Created with Datawrapper

4. Correlates of Local News Provision

At this stage, we understand that there are inequalities in news provision across geography. But how do these intersect with social indicators? There is relatively little research in the UK on the intersection between news provision and deprivation, for example.

One study has looked at the relationship between the indices of multiple deprivation and newspaper presence[22], finding that England's most deprived communities are nearly three times more likely to lack local news outlets.

We took a step in this research direction **in our 2023 report**, where **we looked at the association between outlet counts in a district and income deprivation**, adjusted by population. **We found then a small but significant relationship between the two,** suggesting that more economically deprived areas are also worse served in terms of local news.

Indices of Multiple Deprivation

In this report, we repeat and expand this analysis, by incorporating the complete Indices of Multiple Deprivation. The indices capture deprivation across seven dimensions: income, crime, employment, education, housing and services, health, and living environment. Multiple deprivation is a variable created through the combination of these seven dimensions. In October 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government released the new Indices for England. We intersected this dataset with our database.

At first glance, **visual patterns suggest a negative but weak relationship between deprivation and local news provision.** This means that as deprivation increases, the number of outlets per 100,000 decreases.

To formally test this association, **we ran a series of linear regression models linking multiple deprivation to the number of local news outlets per 100,000 residents**. We repeated this exercise for each individual dimension of deprivation (crime, income, etc.).

Most domains showed weak or statistically insignificant relationships. In particular, overall deprivation, as well as income, employment, education, and health, were not significantly associated with outlet density. However, three domains did stand out.

Areas scoring higher on Barriers to Housing and Services also tend to have more news outlets per person. For every one-point increase in deprivation, the number of outlets per 100,000 residents rises by about 0.07 on average. This means that districts that are more

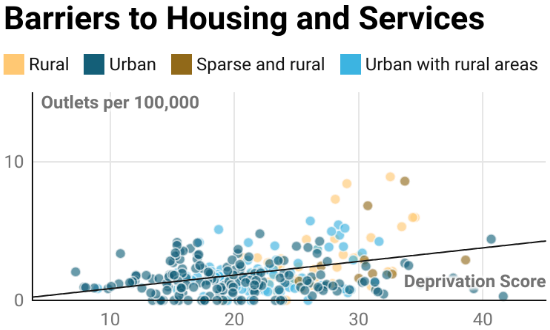


Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF + English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2025) • Created with Datawrapper

[22]https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003173144-2/local-news-deserts-agnes-gulyas

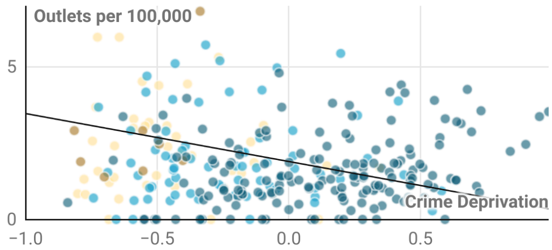
remote or have poorer access to housing and services are generally better supplied with news outlets. The pattern suggests a rural dynamic, where dispersed communities sustain more outlets relative to their population.

Areas with higher levels of crime deprivation tend to have fewer news outlets per person. For every one-point increase in crime deprivation, the number of outlets per 100,000 residents falls by about 0.5 on average. Although the relationship is weaker than for other deprivation domains, it suggests that districts facing greater crime-related challenges are somewhat less well served by local outlets.

Districts with poorer living environments tend to have slightly more news outlets per person. For every one-point increase in living environment deprivation, the number of outlets per 100,000 residents rises by about 0.02 on average. The effect is small but significant, suggesting that places with lower housing quality or higher pollution—often urban areas—host somewhat more local outlets relative to their population.

Overall, while these deprivation dimensions show associations with local news presence, they explain only a small share of the variation in outlet density[23]. This suggests that deprivation alone is not a key driver of where local outlets are located. Instead, the strength and distribution of local media ecosystems likely reflect broader structural and contextual factors such as population scale, digital infrastructure, economic concentration, and patterns of media ownership.

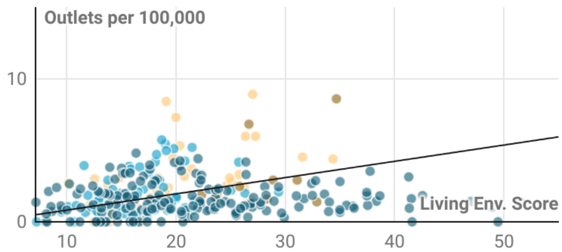
Crime



Outliers (City of London and Isles of Scilly) excluded for visual purposes.

Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF + English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2025) • Created with Datawrapper

Living Environment



Outliers (Isles of Scilly) excluded for visual purposes.

Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF + English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2025) • Created with Datawrapper

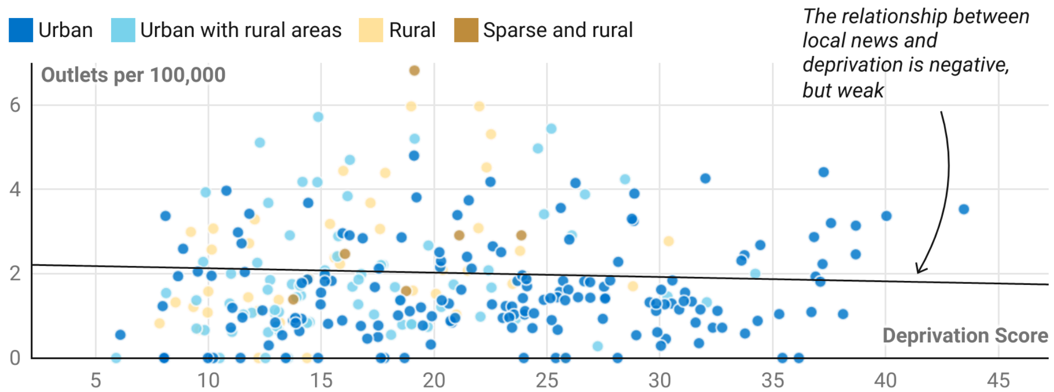


Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF + English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2025) • Created with Datawrapper

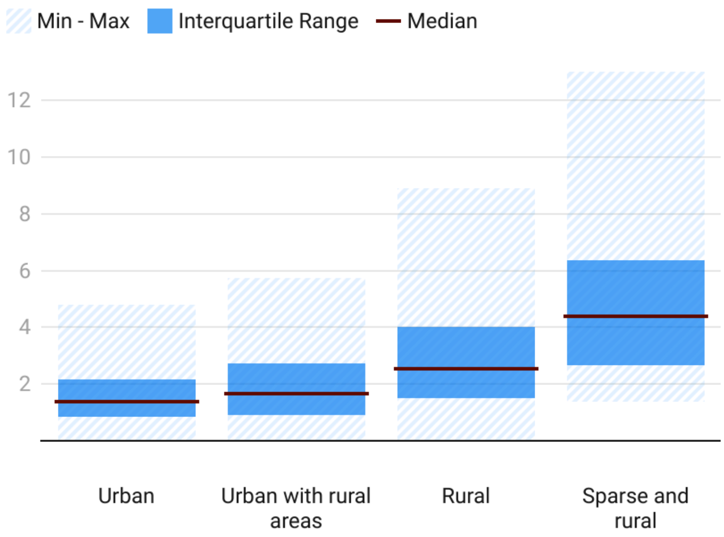
[23] $R^2 \approx 0.02–0.08$

Urban-Rural Divide

In the United States, the 2025 *State of Local News Report* from Northwestern University found that most news deserts—around 80%—are located in rural areas[24]. In the UK, however, the picture looks different. When we compare districts by their level of rurality, we find that **urban areas are actually less likely to have strong and diverse local news provision**. This pattern holds both when we adjust for population and when we simply count outlets by district. Statistical tests confirm that the average number of outlets per person differs sharply across the urban–rural spectrum, with rural districts showing consistently higher outlet density[25].

We also find that **urban districts are significantly overrepresented among news deserts**. While urban areas account for 51.5% of all Local Authority Districts, they comprise 67.6% of absolute news deserts—a ratio of 1.31. Conversely, rural districts show near-proportionate representation (16.2% of deserts vs 14.4% of all districts, ratio 1.13), while urban-with-rural-areas and sparse-and-rural districts are markedly underrepresented.

These findings align with earlier parts of the report, suggesting that **the greatest concerns lie in commuter towns and urban conurbations**, rather than in remote countryside areas. In Sweden, similar areas have been described as *"media shadows"*—urban peripheries that receive limited coverage, typically picked up in national media to discuss social problems or crime[26].



Boxplots showing the distribution of Number of Outlets per 100,000 by type of districts. Shaded area showing the range from Min to Max. Interquartile range inbetween, and median.

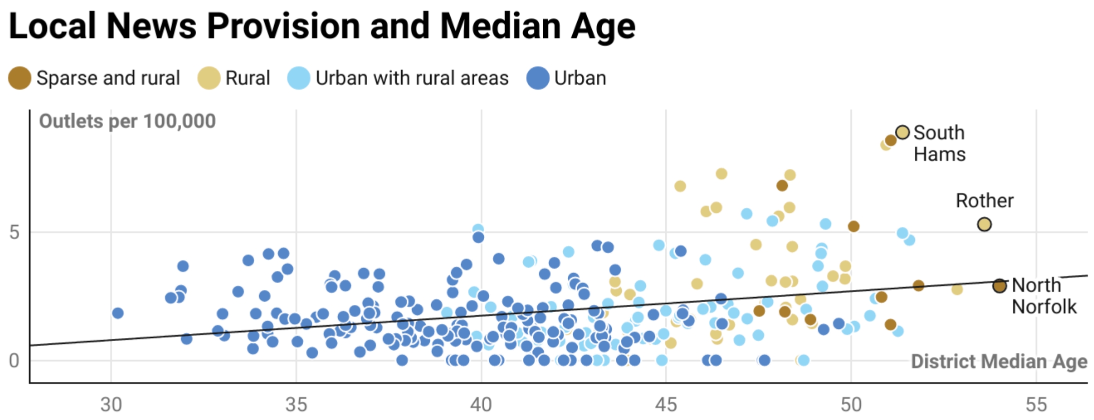
Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF + Urban/Rural Classification from ONS and mysociety.org • Created with Datawrapper

Age

We also examined whether age demographics are associated with the density of local news outlets across English and Welsh districts, leveraging data from the 2021 Census. We tested the relationship between a district's median age and the number of news outlets per 100,000 residents through a linear regression, finding a **statistically significant positive association between age and news provision** ($\beta = 0.096$, $p < 0.0001$). In practical terms, this means that for every one-year increase in a district's median age, the number of local news outlets per 100,000 people increases by approximately 0.1 outlets. In other words, **older populations are more likely to live in areas with a greater density of local news outlets**. The overall model

[24] https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/projects/state-of-local-news/2025/report/#local-news-landscape
[25] A statistical **analysis of variance (ANOVA)** was conducted to test whether the average number of news outlets per 100,000 residents differs significantly across four levels of rurality, as defined by the UK's urban-rural classification. The results revealed **a highly significant difference between groups** ($F(3, 355) = 41$, $p < 2 \times 10^{-16}$), indicating that rurality level is strongly associated with the density of local news outlets. To validate these findings under fewer assumptions, we also applied a **non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, which confirmed the association** ($\chi^2(3) = 57.4$, $p < 2.1 \times 10^{-12}$)
[26] https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1375495/FULLTEXT01.pdf

explains about 8% of the variation in outlet density (R^2 = 0.08), which is modest but meaningful given the complexity of factors influencing media presence. This finding suggests that districts with older populations have stronger or more resilient local news ecosystems, potentially due to higher demand for traditional media, greater civic engagement, or more stable community structures that support local journalism.



Only English and Welsh districts shown.
Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF + ONS • Created with Datawrapper

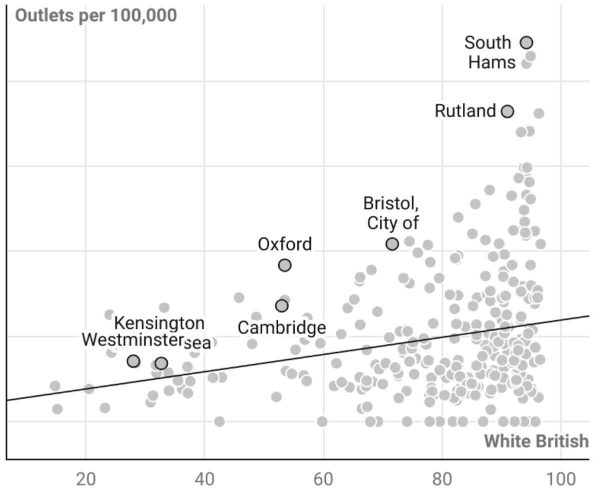
Ethnicity

We examined whether the ethnic makeup of districts across England and Wales is associated with the density of local news outlets, using 2021 Census data. Linear regression models were fitted for each of the main ethnic groups to test whether variations in population composition correspond to differences in local news availability.

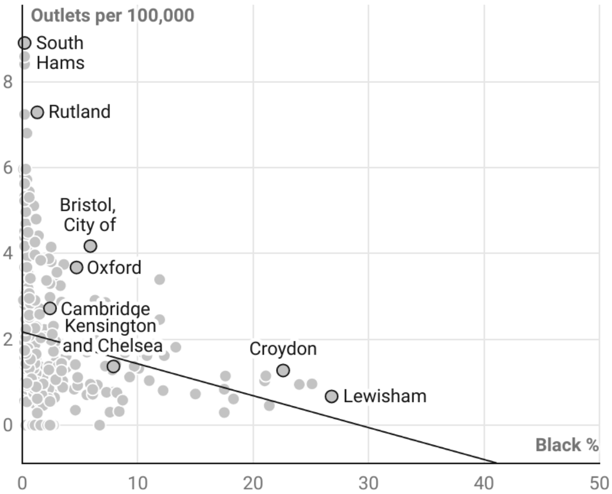
The results reveal clear but modest patterns. **Districts with a higher share of White British residents tend to have more local outlets per person**, whereas those with **larger Black, Asian, Indian, or non-British White populations generally have fewer.** The strength of these associations is small[27], but the direction is consistent across groups. When urban–rural context is taken into account, most of the ethnic effects weaken, suggesting that part of the relationship reflects geography: ethnically diverse populations are concentrated in urban areas, which tend to have fewer outlets per capita. Yet ethnic diversity could also constitute the factor driving low presence of local news across urban districts: the causality direction here is not definitive. The persistent, albeit reduced, effects hint that **ethnic composition may influence local news provision alongside spatial and structural factors**. In other words, areas that are both more diverse and more urban remain less well served by local outlets, pointing to potential inequalities in how local media systems are distributed across different communities.

[27] $R^2 \approx 0.02–0.06$

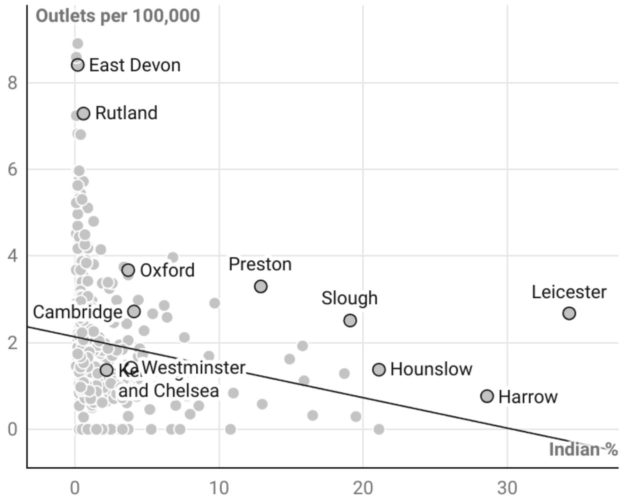
White British



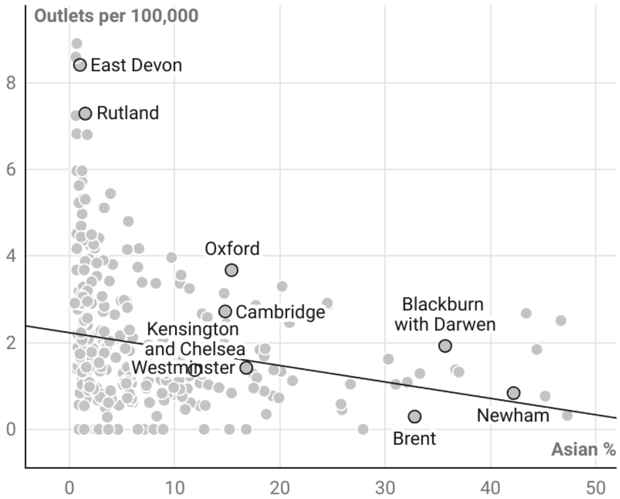
Black



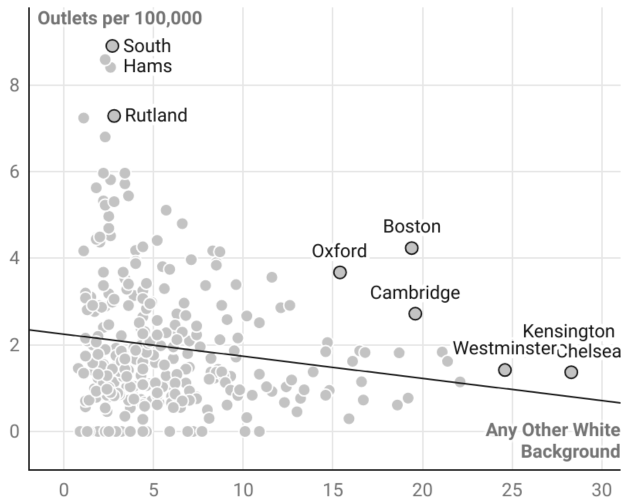
Indian



Asian



Any Other White



Only English and Welsh districts shown.

Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF + ONS • Created with Datawrapper

5. Ownership

The launches and closures we previously discussed took place across a variety of small publishers. While some of the small publishers expanded (notably the owners of Mill Media and the Lead Network), the lack of launches or closures on part of large publishers such as Newsquest, Iconic Media, or Reach plc means that the sector remains in equilibrium in terms of ownership concentration. This entails that **more than one in three outlets in the UK belong to just three companies, with the remaining four-hundred-and-sixteen publishers sharing the remaining two thirds**. Notably, this figure includes community radio stations and public service broadcasting. Excluding these, the 'big three' would own just over half of all outlets in the corporate and independent sector[28].

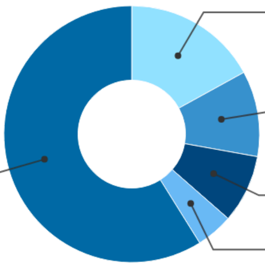


Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF Data • Created with Datawrapper

Given the amount of power these companies exercise over the provision of local news, we looked into key trends and events that took place over the last year. Across the major regional publishers, three overarching dynamics defined the year: **deep restructuring, digital acceleration, and automation.**

- **Reach plc** pursued the most aggressive transformation, implementing its *largest-ever reorganisation* and risking shedding more than 300 editorial roles in 2025[29]. It centralised news production through a new *Live News Network*, closed all but 15 news offices, and leaned heavily on its in-house AI tool *Gutenbot* to repurpose content across titles. The company remains primarily ad-funded, but has begun trialling paywalls and reader revenue initiatives while doubling down on video and live content.
- **Iconic Media** (previously National World, which was rebranded following its 2025 £65.1m acquisition by Media Concierge) continued its *consolidation and diversification* approach. This move brings the company under the same brand as another two-three dozen Irish local newspapers and news websites owned by Media Concierge[30] (not included in the outlet count in this report). The company experimented with events and AI-generated explainer content as a means to diversify income in its primarily ad-funded business model. However, heavy newsroom cuts over the past few years triggered staff protests and National Union of

[28]The Media Reform Coalition has looked into our database to produce this estimate (https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-Who-Owns-The-UK-Media-report.pdf).
[29]https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-decries-new-job-cuts-by-reach-plc.html
[30]https://ireland.mom-gmr.org/en/findings/at-one-glance/

Journalists (NUJ) backlash[31]. The new ownership promises fresh investment, but it also recently pulled the plug on the supply of circulation figures to auditor ABC[32].

- **Newsquest** maintained steadier operations, avoiding mass layoffs and instead embedding *AI-assisted reporters* within local offices. It strengthened its hybrid business model combining ad revenue, growing digital subscriptions (over 135,000 by 2025), and marketing services via its *LocaliQ* division. Newsquest's approach (incremental technological integration and sustained local presence) has earned it a reputation as the most stable of the three, even as it quietly automates up to 30% of its routine content production.

Taken together, these trends reveal a sector where **Reach drives scale and automation, Iconic Media experiments with diversification and rebranding, and Newsquest evolves toward a service-based hybrid model.** All three are navigating declining print revenues and volatile digital markets, but their contrasting strategies illuminate different visions of how local journalism survives in the digital economy.

Monopoly Districts

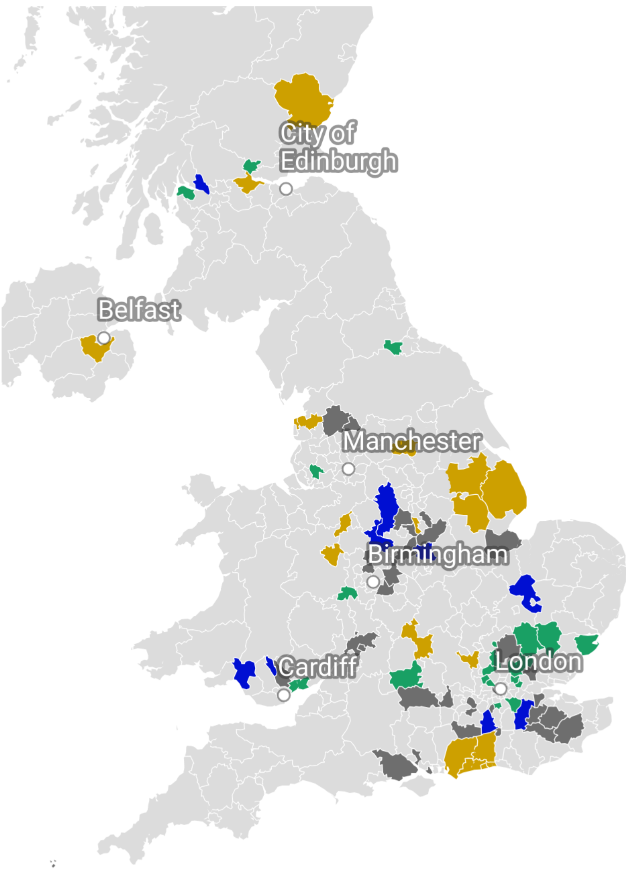
In 2024, we identified 101 monopoly districts: districts where there is only one company that owns the title(s) covering the district. Given the substantial number of database additions, this number drops to 81 in 2025. This still implies that more than one in five local authorities are news monopolies. The vast majority of monopolies are Newsquest or Iconic Media dominated.

Publisher	Number of outlets	Number of LADs	Number of monopolies	Monopolies
Newsquest Media Group Limited	200	137	20	Brent; Bromley; Redbridge; Barking and Dagenham; St. Helens; Newport; Vale of White Horse; Harrow; Welwyn Hatfield; Hertsmere; Sutton; Wyre Forest; Uttlesford; Stevenage; Braintree; Inverclyde; Tendring; Epping Forest; Darlington; Clackmannanshire
Iconic Media Limited (previously National World)	127	86	18	Wakefield; Cherwell; Falkirk; Dacorum; Lisburn and Castlereagh; Horsham; Newcastle-under-Lyme; North Kesteven; Angus; Worthing; Broxtowe; Telford and Wrekin; Arun; Adur; Wyre; West Lindsey; Chichester; East Lindsey
Reach plc	101	84	9	Charnwood; Neath Port Talbot; East Staffordshire; Sevenoaks; East Cambridgeshire; West Dunbartonshire; Derbyshire Dales; Merthyr Tydfil; Mole Valley
Nub News Limited	55	32	2	North Warwickshire; North West Leicestershire
Tindle Newspapers Limited	45	17	2	Woking; Waverley
Iliffe Media Limited	26	21	3	Maidstone; East Hertfordshire; South Holland

[31] https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/support-the-national-world-strike.html
[32] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2025/news/national-world-to-rebrand-as-iconic-media-as-denmark-explains-abc-move/

Local News Monopoly Districts

Iconic Media Newsquest Reach plc Other



Map: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: Public Interest News Foundation • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

The map on the left shows where local news monopolies occur across the UK and which publisher controls each monopoly area.

Iconic Media (gold) dominates many regions in central England and parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland, while Newsquest (green) and Reach plc (blue) have scattered monopolies across England and Wales.

Overall, monopolies are **geographically widespread but concentrated near major urban centres** (e.g., around Birmingham, Manchester, and London).

We formalised this observation by plotting monopolies against urban-rural classification data. We found that **monopolies are** most common in urban districts (45% of all monopolies) but **disproportionately prevalent in mixed urban–rural areas** (36% of monopolies are urban-rural against only 27% of districts in general), while rural and sparse areas show fewer monopolies overall (see figure below).

Whether the level of ownership concentration and increasing consolidation are causes for concern for the industry is increasingly the subject of investigation in empirical research in and outside of the UK. In the US, Belgium, and Sweden, **chain ownership and mergers have been statistically linked, sometimes in a causal manner, to a decrease in local and original**

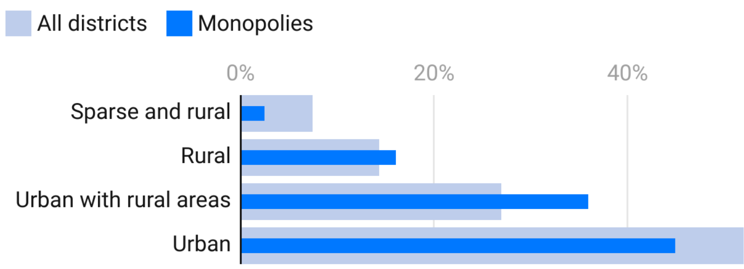


Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: PINF Local News Database • Created with Datawrapper

news coverage[33]. In the UK, analysis of one week of election coverage of the 2019 elections across 579 digital news sites found that **more than three in four articles about the election by Iconic Media (formerly National World) consisted of generic election coverage with no specific relevance to local contests**[34]. The share dropped for Reach plc and Newsquest, yet when contrasted with the members of the Independent Community News Network (ICNN), **those members provided double the amount of election coverage, particularly local coverage** (94% local, against 76%, 70%, and 31% across Newsquest, Reach, and Iconic Media respectively). This research, although cross-sectional, takes a first step in the direction of tapping into properties of news coverage to determine the real impact of ownership consolidation on local news, with possible repercussions on democracy. Notably, it highlights that **public interest news provision is not even or equal across outlets, but it is associated with ownership.**

Journalists

There is little data on the size or composition of the workforce behind local journalism in the UK. In 2018, a report by DCMS estimated the number of journalists, including reporters at national newsrooms to be 17,000 for the year 2017, down from 23,000 in 2007[35]. A follow-up downsize reveal came from PressGazette in 2024, which looked at Reach plc, Newsquest, and then-National World[36]. Looking through Companies House reports, they found that the number of journalists at these three companies sat around 3,000 in 2022, down from 8,847 in 2007, meaning **for every three reporters in 2007, only one remained in 2022**.

Borrowing the Press Gazette methodology, we looked at publicly available reports of these publishers in Companies House. We were able to build a timeline going back five years. We found that **Reach plc saw the biggest shrinkage in workforce (35%), compared to 13% at Iconic Media, and no change at Newsquest**[37].

What this signals is that **newsroom reductions have persisted, if not accelerated, at scale-driven companies** such as Reach plc. Still unaccounted for in our figures are recent cuts: in September 2025, Reach announced 321 editorial redundancies (its "biggest ever" reorganisation) with 135 new roles added: a net loss of 186 jobs . This came after three rounds of cuts in 2023 (nearly 800 jobs cut in that year). At Iconic Media, there has been moderate downsizing in specific locales: the NUJ quantifies the downsizing across editorial at 25% between 2021 and 2024[38], a proposed ~40% cut of reporter roles in Sunderland and 50% in Manchester (late 2024), plus elimination of six local editor jobs (replaced by two new regional "Metro editor" roles)[39]. The impact of these cuts on working conditions remain unclear, but **the lack of outlet closures at these companies implies that ever fewer reporters must sustain the delivery of ever more stories per (reporter) capita**.

Despite these worrying trends, these numbers stand in contrast to the independent sector. In our 2025 Index of Independent News Publishers, we found that **the average independent provider employs 1.9 people on a full-time equivalent basis**, and 2.75 people in any form[40]. Given an estimated range of 300-400 providers, there may be around 665 reporters working at independent brands.

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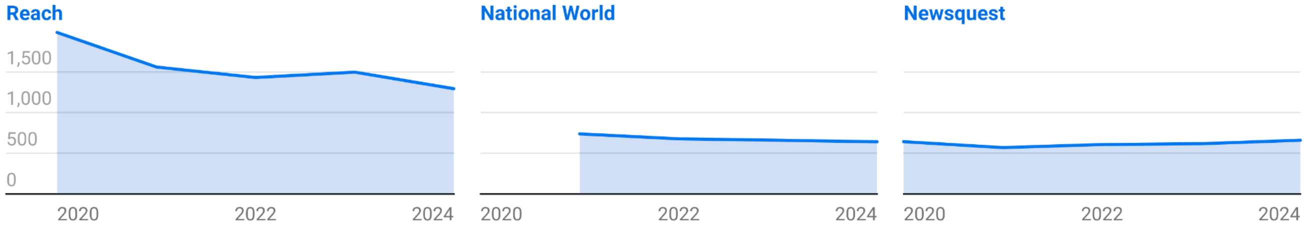
[33]See for example Garz and Ots, 2025 (https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqae053); LeBrun at al, 2024 (https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221079030); Martin and Mccrain, 2019 (https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000965); Hendrickx and Ranaivoson, 2021 (http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1464884919894138)
[34]Moore and Ramsay, 2024 (https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2024.2333827)
[35]Overview of recent dynamics in the UK press market, Mediatique (2018)
[36]https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/regional-newspapers/colossal-decline-of-uk-regional-media-since-2007-revealed/
[37] For Reach plc, we divided the figure by half, following PressGazette's approach for isolating regional and national reporters. For Iconic Media (ex-National World), we were unable to find data going back to before it acquired JPI Media in 2020.
[38]https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-response-to-media-concierge-takeover-of-national-world.html#:~:text=group%2C%20which%20was%20formerly%20JPI,Media%20and%20Johnston%20Press
[39]https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-condemns-national-world-cuts-as-company-u-turns-on-commitments.html#:~:text=Current%20proposals%20would%20see%2040,Preston%2C%20South%20Shields%20and%20Sunderland
[40]https://www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/research/pinf-index/pinf-index-2025

Between 2020 and 2024, Reach plc reduced its editorial staff by 35% relative to 2020 staffing levels, National world by 13% relative to 2021, and Newsquest remained stable.



For a long-term reference, in 2007 Reach plc employed 4,050 journalists, National World 2,555, and Newsquest 2,242.

Chart: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: Companies House and PressGazette • Created with Datawrapper

Newsrooms

The place of production has also shifted. **Reach plc has consolidated local newsrooms into 15 regional hubs** and made the **vast majority of journalists permanent home-workers**. Company reports indicate that staff can choose whether to work from home, or mainly remote with the occasional use of the hub office. Specific figures in terms of newsrooms are not known for Iconic Media and Newsquest (thought to be around ~50), though the former has mentioned relocating its main base in Leeds to London and promoted working from home, while **Newsquest has recently made the news for encouraging staff to work from the office**[41]. At the end of 2024, then-National World had "433 agile or hybrid workers, and 577 home workers, with the remaining 204 staff working from office locations or in the field."

Use of AI

The adoption of **Artificial Intelligence (AI) has also varied across companies**. Reach began using an in-house AI tool called "Gutenbot" in early 2024 to speed up rewrites of articles for syndication across its ~120 titles. This AI-assisted "ripping" allows one story to be quickly repurposed on multiple local sites, expanding output[42]. Reach's leadership has also voiced concern that generative AI in search (e.g. Google's AI snippets) is cutting into its web traffic, as users get answers without clicking through[43]. In 2023, reports emerged that then-National World was exploring AI-generated content. The company discussed using tools like ChatGPT to produce routine news stories and SEO-driven "explainer" pieces. This shift toward quick, algorithm-friendly content ("churnalism") concerned staff and observers who feared it prioritised clickbait traffic over quality[44]. While full deployment of AI in writing was limited, the intent signaled then-National World's interest in automation to cut costs and boost output. Finally, Newsquest has developed an in-house tool (dubbed a "News Creator" or draft checker) powered by AI technology to turn structured data into news copy. Starting in 2023, it hired "AI-assisted reporters" and a "Head of Editorial AI": trained journalists who use this tool. By May 2024 Newsquest had 14 such reporters producing over 3,000 AI-generated articles per month (from inputs like council minutes and press releases) . This expanded to 36 AI-assisted journalists by early 2025, with numerous open

[41] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2022/news/chief-executive-urges-publishers-journalists-to-get-back-to-the-office/
[42] https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/nationals/reach-ai-guten/
[43] https://digiday.com/media/for-reach-plc-google-discover-has-offset-search-driven-traffic-declines/
[44] https://bylinetimes.com/2023/08/07/local-mega-publisher-national-world-sees-staff-pushed-to-brink-amid-cuts-and-right-wing-shift-while-journalists-could-be-replaced-by-chatgpt/

positions on Linkedin at the time of writing this report. The AI generates first drafts of routine stories, which are then fact-checked and edited by staff, freeing up other reporters to do on-the-ground reporting, according to the company.

Publisher	Revenue	Journalists	Titles	Newsrooms
Newsquest	£150.28m	661	200	~50[45]
Iconic Media (previously National World)	£96m	642	127	unknown
Reach plc	£538.6m	1294	101	15
Indie News Publishers (Average)	£62,877[46] (combined ~£20m)	Approx. 665	300-400	unknown

Local Democracy Reporting Service

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a scheme that sees around 165 reporters, financed by the BBC, employed at newsrooms distributed strategically around the country in a bid to maximise coverage of local government. The contracts, usually lasting two and a half years, were re-awarded in 2025. The LDRS represents one of the largest interventions where quasi-public funding is used to sustain public interest journalism in the UK. Beyond supporting the employment of journalists, the scheme represents an effort to make the BBC an ally of the commercial and independent local news sector in the UK - something which has been a contentious topic of debate over the past years[47]. In this report, we introduce a novel and original mapping analysis of the LDRS scheme, looking at its distribution across space and ownership.

We gathered publicly available data from the BBC[48] on the new contracts and used this to produce a set of original maps, which illustrate the geography of the scheme for the 2025–2027 contract period. This is the first time these contract areas have been mapped. The contract areas are not neatly divided into local authority districts as they span multiple levels of administrative geography. For example, Contract "E09" covers Suffolk County Council and Suffolk second-tier councils. To create a visual map for each LDRS contract, we identified the local authority districts underneath each higher-level unit, then "stitched" together the boundaries of these local authorities. For example, to plot contract "E09" we mapped Suffolk County Council and Suffolk second-tiers to their constituting units (Babergh, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk and West Suffolk), then pieced these together into a single, continuous outline representing the Suffolk contract area.

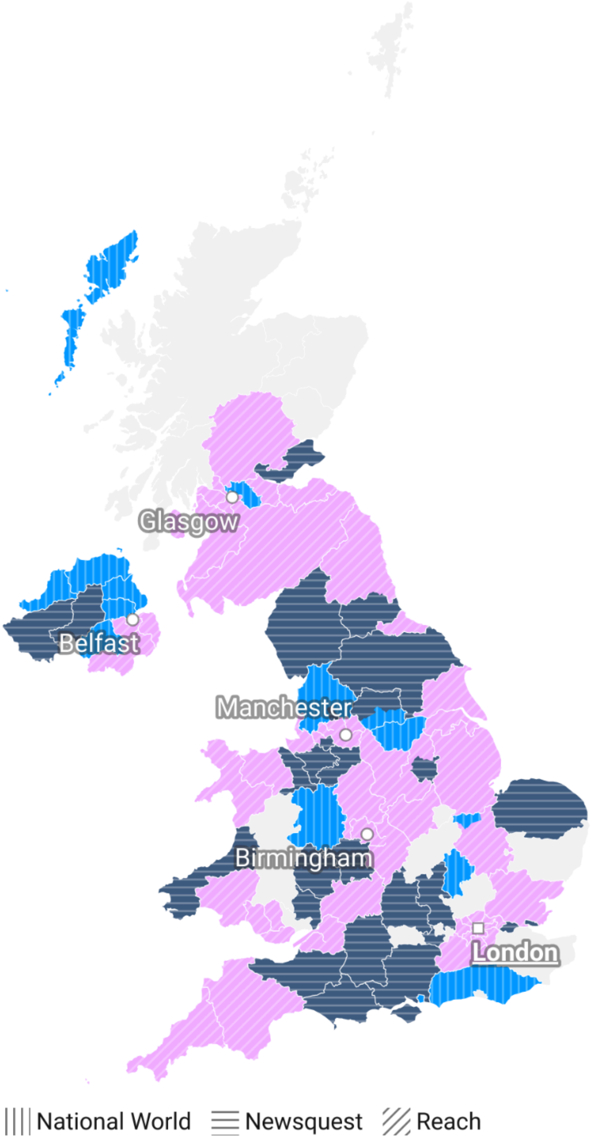
The first map on the next page (click here to access the interactive version) introduces the contract boundaries themselves, showing which of the major publishers have been awarded the contracts, if any.

The second map (interactive here) shows the number of LDRS reporters assigned to each contract patch, with higher concentrations around London, the Midlands and northern England, and sparser allocations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

[45] https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/regional-newspapers/newsquest-36-ai-assisted-reporters-non-canon-news-disintermediation/
[46] https://www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/research/pinf-index/pinf-index-2025
[47] https://newsmediauk.org/blog/2023/12/05/senior-local-editors-call-on-neighbour-from-hell-bbc-to-rein-in-local-expansion-plans/
[48] https://www.bbc.co.uk/lnp/documents/reporter-contract-distribution-2025-v2.pdf

Awarded Publishers of LDRS Contracts (2025-2027)

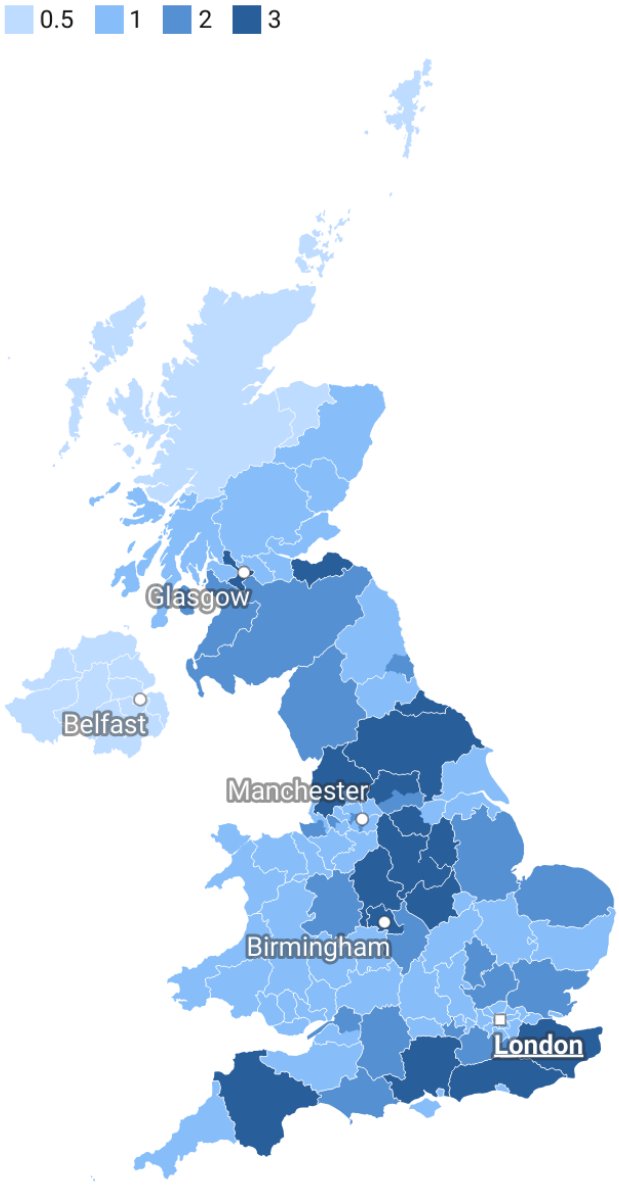
Contract boundaries reflect true high-level boundaries of contract areas, calculated through spatial aggregation.



The areas in grey have also been awarded contracts, however for graphical clarity we omitted this. In the interactive, you can hover over to see information about company and number of LDRS for each district.

Map: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: BBC + ONS • Created with Datawrapper

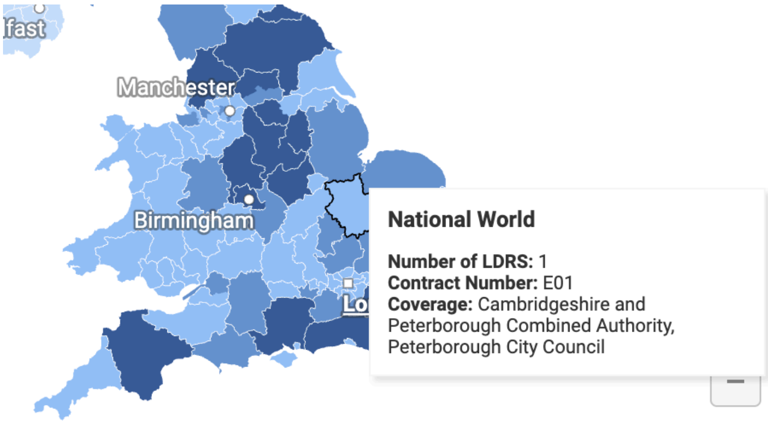
Number of LDRS by Contract Patch (2025-2027)

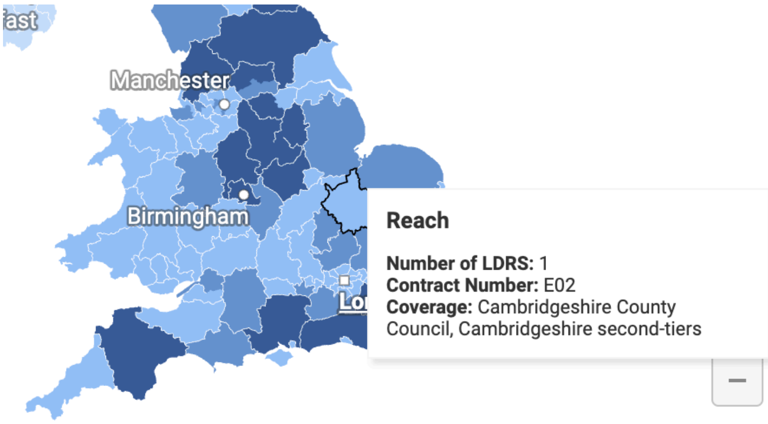


In the interactive, you can hover over to see information about company and number of LDRS for each district.

Map: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: BBC + ONS • Created with Datawrapper

One caveat of these two maps above is that our approach does not resolve or eliminate overlapping contract areas. Instead, our approach treats every contract as a completely independent entity. If two different contracts overlap, we end up with stacked polygons for those areas (see example on the right).





The next map (following page; interactive here) disaggregates contract components (e.g., Greater London Authority, West Midlands Combined Authority) to the level of local authority districts, showing which publisher or publishers hold a contract in that district. This highlights clear territorial patterns of ownership, with Reach dominating much of southern and central England, Newsquest prominent in the North and in Wales, and Iconic Media holding contracts across parts of Scotland and the North East.

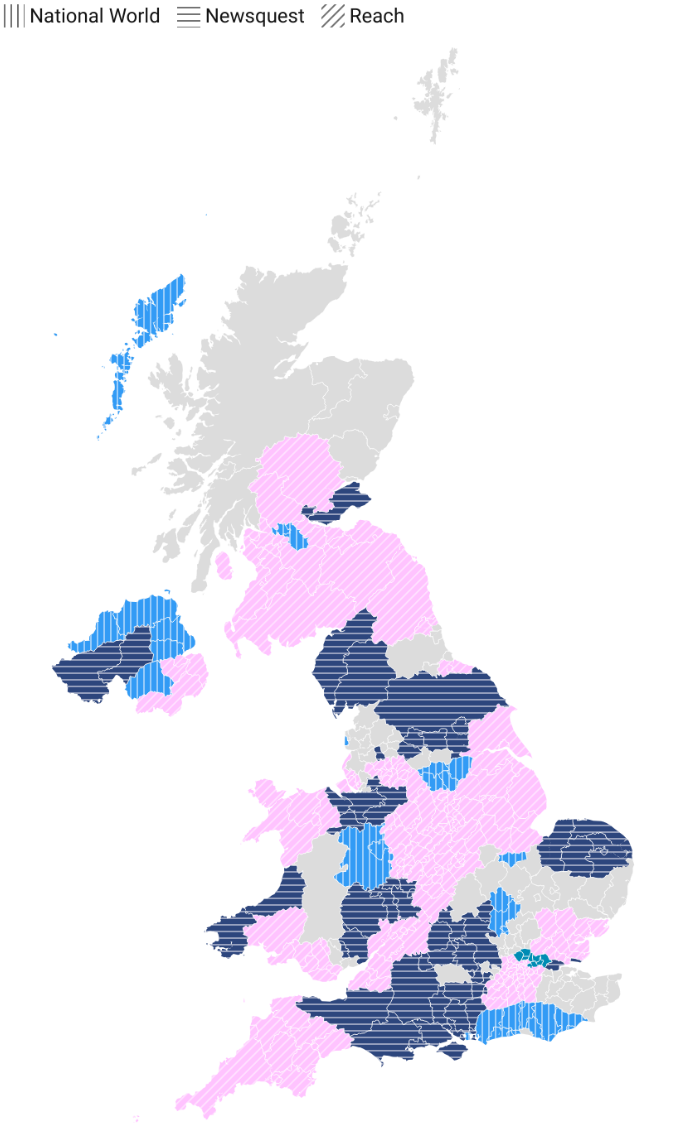
Taken together, these maps reveal a highly consolidated system, in which a small number of publishers hold extensive control of Local Democracy Reporters and the scheme's geographic reach.

The LDRS scheme has received criticism for awarding the majority of contracts to large publishers, with deleterious effects on the independent news sector[49]. The fourth and final map (below-right; interactive here) finds that across **61% of Local Authority Districts where a Local Democracy Reporter is based at one of the big three publishers, these districts are characterised by plural ownership** (meaning that there are other companies supplying local news in the district). While we acknowledge contract zones often span wider than single districts, the data appears to show a missed opportunity to award smaller, locally embedded independent publishers with a local democracy reporter.

[49] https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/107661/pdf/

LDRS across Local Authority Districts (2025-2027)

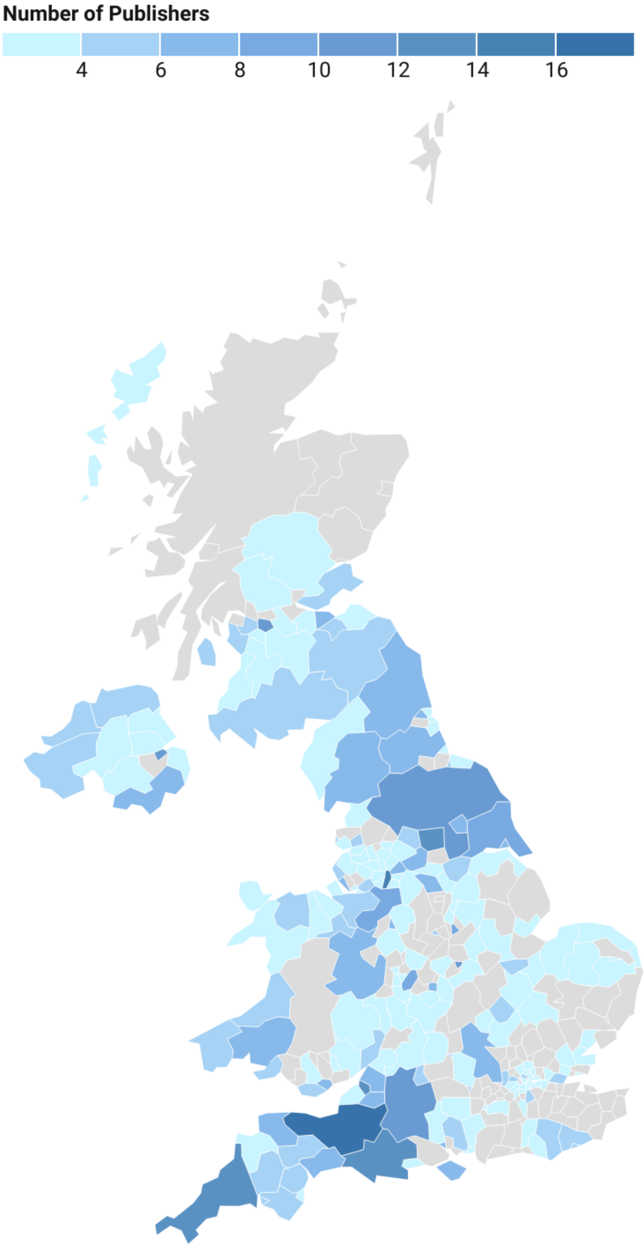
Who holds the LDRS contract in your Local Authority District? We performed spatial disaggregation to find out.



Because we broke down contracts into districts, this map should not be used to derive a total count of LDRS reporters. For example, the same one LDR reporter may be covering a county council spanning multiple local authorities. Hover over districts in our interactive to learn more about each district.

Map: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: BBC + ONS • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

The Local Authority Districts with diverse ownership where LDRS contracts went to Reach plc, Newsquest, and Media Concierge



Map: Public Interest News Foundation • Source: BBC + PINF • Map data: © ONS Geography • Created with Datawrapper

Conclusion

The research conducted in this report suggests that local news in the UK is at a crossroads. The capacity for renewal exists — evident in the ingenuity of independent start-ups and the persistence of community media — but without coordinated support, such as the framework developed by the Local News Commission, the risk for continued, even increased, inequality in local news provision across districts, regions, and socio-economic groups persists.

Sustaining a healthy local news ecology will require policy, funding, and regulatory frameworks that pay particular attention to those districts and regions which are worse-off in terms of news provision. In this report, we took a first step in trying to understand the structural differences between local news availability and geography, but more research is needed to understand why the observed inequalities exist. We took a first step in this direction by intersecting our database with deprivation and sociodemographic data. Yet our analyses show that these variables only partly explain differences in local news provision. Numerous unobserved factors remain untested. For example, to what extent do local attitudes towards local news explain these patterns?

We encourage future research into the prevalence of public interest news *coverage* across providers in a variety of regions and media ownership types. So far there is little quantitative research investigating the impact of supply-side factors on local news content. These factors may include having a local newsroom, or owning multiple titles through which content resharing can be pursued, newsroom capacity or composition. On the other end of the spectrum, we also have limited analyses of the relationship between sociodemographic data, local news consumption, and social outcomes. This research is important because it supports arguments of the relevance and role of local journalism, both in terms of social cohesion and democratic participation.

We also take this opportunity to reflect on the mapping project that powers this report. The importance of such independent monitoring has become even more apparent following Iconic Media's recent decision to withdraw its 200+ titles from the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC). The company justified this move by arguing that ABC's traditional focus on print circulation "no longer provides a comprehensive or accurate measure of a modern media brand's reach"[50]. While the argument for multi-platform audience measurement has merit, this withdrawal eliminates a crucial source of independently verified circulation data for one of the UK's largest regional publishers. This development significantly undermines what we consider the second-best local news directory in the UK and highlights a broader transparency challenge facing the sector. As traditional audit mechanisms erode, independent research projects become increasingly vital for tracking the health and distribution of local news provision across the country.

Finally, we note that we have received a wealth of constructive criticism and words of encouragement over the years. We are thankful to everyone who took the time to engage with our project and help us improve it. Although capturing the local news sector at scale is a difficult task, we believe a resource like this is essential for any stakeholder working to provide, understand, and strengthen local news provision in the UK.

[50] https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2025/news/national-world-to-rebrand-as-iconic-media-as-denmark-explains-abc-move/

Appendix

Interactive Charts

Chapter 2

1. Histogram of districts by number of outlets: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/5agoN/
2. Outlets per 100,000, map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/xveVw/?v=3
3. London Boroughs, outlets per 100,000, map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/Xma8p/
4. Number of outlets in LAD, map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/iuTGm/?v=2
5. Region by media type, barchart: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/pgo4c/?v=2
6. Local news deserts, drylands, and oases, map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/TyFVF/?v=2

Chapter 3

7. Launches and Closures, by media type: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/CGmNs/
8. Districts with outlet closures: deprivation rank by number of outlets, coloured by rural-urban classification: https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/XnXxd/4/
9. Districts with outlet launches: deprivation rank by number of outlets, coloured by rural-urban classification: https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/VHsl0/7/
10. Districts with outlet closures: deprivation rank by number of outlets, coloured by region: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/6Th2L/?v=7

Chapter 4

11. Outlets per 100,000, by Multiple Deprivation: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/LYNiP/
12. Outlets per 100,000, by Barriers to Housing and Services: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/OHOqL/
13. Outlets per 100,000, by Crime Deprivation: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/YlgLi/?v=2
14. Outlets per 100,000 by Living Deprivation: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/U7flJ/?v=2
15. Outlets per 100,000, by rural-urban classification (UK-wide): https://www.datawrapper.de/_/H4k87/?v=4
16. Outlets per 100,000, by district median age (England): https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/rVXGR/1/
17. Outlets per 100,000, by ethnicity–White: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/fOidL/?v=2

Chapter 5

18. Districts under sole ownership (monopolies), map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/OyeBt/?v=3
19. Districts by rural-urban classification, monopolies against national average: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/Yyfne/
20. Number of journalists at Reach, Newsquest, and Iconic Media (ex National World): https://www.datawrapper.de/_/UHx7J/
21. LDRS awarded contracts (2025-27) by awarded publisher, map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/qdi0n/?v=2
22. LDRS awarded contracts (2025-27) by number of reporters, map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/alZbz/?v=2
23. LDRS contracts by awarded publisher, local authorities, map: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/LMEPk/?v=3
24. LDRS contracts awarded to Reach, Newsquest, and Iconic Media in districts with plural ownership of news outlets: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/7kQct/

Methodology

Our data seeks to be reflective of the size and structure of the local news sector in the UK as of October 2025. For this reason, we carried out the necessary research to update our database from the last instance we released a report (April 2024) to mid-October 2025.

To be included on the Local News Map[51], an outlet must fulfil a set of criteria (see 'Definitions', appended). These criteria were established in our 2023 report and adopted in the 2024 report. No alterations have been made in this edition. Since April 2024, we have received numerous requests for

[51] https://www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/map

outlet additions to the database from smaller independent publishers which we had previously missed. For each request, we investigated whether the outlet fulfilled our criteria, namely the regular, sustained provision of local journalism to a geographically identifiable community of subregional scale. Due to the volume of volunteer-led information received, there is a numerical inconsistency between the difference in number of outlets between last year and this year (n = 71) and the net difference of closures and launches, meaning that if we had not fulfilled user requests the number of outlets in the database would be much lower. Yet *despite* these additions the number of news deserts has remained largely unchanged, although which districts are news deserts has somewhat altered.

Updating the database

The work of maintaining the dataset powering the map is time-consuming and complicated. It consists of looking up each outlet in the local news landscape to verify that it is still operative and is still owned by the same publisher. This means manually checking over one thousand outlets. On top of these searches, we need to add the research required to discover any newly launched outlets. And finally, we have to check whether Local Authority Districts have evolved over time and, if so, which outlets need updating.

The challenges associated with researching the local media landscape extend beyond the sheer volume of information available. One issue is the lack of easily retrievable and interpretable data regarding changes in the operational status of local media outlets. For instance, mergers among multiple outlets to form a regional publication, a trend in recent years, often occur without significant attention from industry observers. Moreover, publishers themselves may present or report such changes inconsistently, further complicating efforts to track them. Furthermore, many media outlets cease operations without notifying the industry press or officially declaring closure on their websites or social media accounts. These factors contribute to the complexity and scale of the research process.

We have since built a pipeline of automations to help us gather and process publicly available data from industry reports, governmental data. More information about our database can be found here: https://osf.io/zsxdg_v1/

The departure of National World (now Iconic Media) from circulation auditor ABC is a signal of the ever-increasing importance of efforts such as the PINF database and map to have transparent data on the industry size and composition.

We continue to welcome suggestions for improvements and collaborations on mapping the UK's local news.

Data

We have made the data behind this report openly available at the following Google Sheet: PINF - Local News Database December 2025 .

Statistical Analyses

External resources used in this report include:

- Rural-Urban Classification, integrated for the UK, mySociety: https://github.com/mysociety/uk_ruc/blob/main/data/packages/uk_ruc/la_ruc.csv
- English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2025

- Median Age, Census 2021: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/2583census2021medianage
- Ethnicity, Census 2021: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021
- Annual reports submitted by Reach plc, Newsquest, and National World, available through Companies House.

All analyses were carried out using the statistical programming language R (version 4.4.1). We used simple linear models to calculate the statistical relationship between outlets per 100,000 and sociodemographic measures. The code written to conduct these analyses is available upon request.

Definitions

Local news outlet

There is no statutory definition of a local news outlet. In developing a definition for the local news map, PINF was guided by an advisory group that included media mapping experts from both Australia's Public Interest Journalism Initiative and the US State of Local News project, among others. To be included in the local news map, outlets must:

- Generally be **legally incorporated** (i.e. a registered company, charity or society). Exceptions will be made for sole traders or voluntary unincorporated organisations where the researchers have manually verified the existence of a news outlet.
- Have a **principal purpose of the provision of local news**; and,
- Be **recently updated** (having published an article within the past month).

In 2024, we also included a cut-off threshold for outlets serving multiple districts, setting an upper-limit on our definition of 'local'. We have set that threshold at four districts, an approximate median value of the number of districts covered by the titles serving multiple districts (approx. one hundred outlets). Thus outlets that cover four or fewer districts are still included in the map, whereas those that cover five or more are now excluded as non-local. With greater resources, we could produce a separate regional news map - or add another layer of data to the visualisation. Some 47 outlets in our master database ended up being excluded from the map as too broad. We welcome comments and ideas on how to determine the local or regional divide.

PINF's definition of an independent outlet is whether that outlet has a turnover below £2m, a benchmark we have used for the last five years of our Index of Independent News Publishing.

News deserts

Feedback on the 2023 report has led us to define two types of news deserts: absolute and relative.

An **absolute news desert** is a local authority district (LAD) that is covered by zero local news outlets, noting our criterion for local, above.

A **relative news desert** is a LAD that lacks a dedicated local news outlet, that is, an outlet that solely serves that LAD or a smaller area within it, but is at least covered by another local news outlet, again noting our criterion for local, above.

Coverage area

Each outlet has been linked to its claimed coverage area in the form of one or several Local Authority Districts, by means of checking the outlet's title and information on the outlet's website.

Monopoly district

A monopoly district is a LAD in which all outlets covering that district are owned by the same company.

Acknowledgements

PINF would like to acknowledge Simona Bisiani's work to continue improving the local news database, and for the analysis for this report. Thanks for work on previous editions of the database, map and report are due to John Evans, Coral Milburn-Curtis, Max Roche, the JRSST Charitable Trust and Common Knowledge, as well as members of the 2023 advisory group. In 2024, the UK Government provided part-funding for improvements made to data collection and the map visualisation.

Thank you to all those who have informed us about changes to the data.

About us

The Public Interest News Foundation is the only UK charity with a vision to regenerate local news. We believe that everyone in the UK should benefit from public interest news that speaks to them, for them and with them.

Local news knits communities together, fights disinformation and improves governance. Local democracy requires informed citizens, effective debate, a shared understanding of facts and of community.

A burgeoning sector of locally owned public interest news providers is emerging to meet this challenge. PINF's mission is to unlock funds to support local news, create the foundations for news outlets to thrive, and spotlight innovative approaches to local journalism that show the way ahead.

Learn more and sign up for our newsletter at **publicinterestnews.org.uk**.