

Helping us to help you – a petition to sign here

Save Local Independent News: write to your MP today

Local independent news providers like The Edinburgh Reporter are, according to recent research published by the Reuters Institute and the University of Oxford, the most trusted source of news in the media landscape.

The report said: “In most countries, local newspapers and their websites remain the top source of news about a particular town or region, reaching four in ten (44%) weekly.”

However, over 95 per cent of these news providers have received zero support from the UK Government since the start of the lockdown.

It would help local news organisations a great deal if you would sign the [petition](#) which Independent Community News Network has begun here. It is a one step process to [write to your MP](#) on our behalf. We would really appreciate it.

£35m has been allocated to the ‘newspaper industry’ in order to save lives by providing essential information to the public, and support the press, this money is not reaching the local independent news sector.

Although The Scottish Government has promised a share of their £3 million advertising budget may be spent with the Scottish members of Independent Community News Network, there is no confirmation as yet. Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser lodged an

amendment to the Coronavirus legislation which may make it impossible for the government to fulfil its promise. His amendment means that the larger news organisations with offices will get rates relief.

In the chamber at Holyrood on 20 May 2020, Murdo Fraser said: "Local newspapers are important to us. As MSPs, we rely on them to publish details of our surgeries, to take our press releases and to print photographs of us at local galleries, agricultural shows, school visits and all the other things we do. We rely on them, and they now rely on us to give them the support that they need to continue.

"Last week, the Scottish Government announced a package of advertising for newspapers. It is welcome, but it will not go far enough to support local papers when it is spread thinly across every title in Scotland. As long as the current conditions pertain, with an extended lockdown, there will be the potential for a very serious impact on local newspapers."

In response Mike Russell said: "Unfortunately, we do not have unlimited sums available to us. We have already spent more than we have had in consequentials, and it is very difficult to see how we can add to that sum. There is a package of money, and the question is how is it spent. We certainly want to listen to people about how it is spent, but it appeared that there was an agreement that it should be spent on advertising. If it is to be spent on rates relief, that will do a number of things. It will benefit larger organisations rather than smaller organisations. In England, for example, the rates relief package is a total of £1,500 per newspaper, and it applies only to local newspapers. Larger and more national organisations would do better out of the proposed scheme than local newspapers would. Some local newspapers will receive a payment because they are registered for the small business bonus, so there are issues there, too."

Murdo Fraser then asked the direct question needed for

clarity: “I want to understand the cabinet secretary correctly. Is he suggesting that if my amendment 84 is agreed to, the Scottish Government will renege on its promise to newspapers to place the advertising package with them?”

And the Cabinet Secretary Mr Russell replied that there is a practical difficulty in adding another £4 of £5 million to the existing sum of £3.5 million. He said that if members voted for the Conservative amendment on rates relief (which was eventually passed): “The proposed scheme will favour larger, national newspapers and it will diminish the support that is available to local newspapers. That is not what we want. I entirely share the view that we should be supporting newspapers and putting money into doing that. The question is how we put the money in and what we actually get for that money.”

At the time of publishing this article we still await further information on the Scottish Government advertising campaign.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Please do sign the [petition](#).

The other thing you might consider, if you are in a position to do so, is to support us with a subscription to have our monthly newspaper delivered to your home or office. Sign up [here](#).

Or you could donate to us the price of a cup of coffee – we need a lot to keep us going. Click on the KOFI button below.

Thank you for reading. We love producing The Edinburgh Reporter online and in print. We just need a little help to continue doing so.