

JPI Media loses Local Democracy Reporter contract in Edinburgh

JPI Media has lost the contract to employ the Local Democracy Reporter (LDR) at The Edinburgh Evening News. The contract has been allocated in the recent “reshuffle” to Reach plc who run the Edinburgh Live website.

Reach, (formerly Trinity Mirror), also own The Daily Record, The Daily Express and The Daily Mirror, and around 20 other Scottish titles.

This new arrangement makes Reach the largest partner in the BBC Local News Partnership scheme, now employing 75 of the 165 LDRs in the UK. The BBC expanded the number of LDRs by 15 in a recent expansion.

Reach currently employs four LDR editors and an overall Democracy Editor to support the reporters and their coverage, as well as investing in further training from external partners. In 2021 three additional new roles will be recruited to help support the LDRs in London, Scotland and the South East.



Until last summer about 90% of the host newsrooms were from

the UK's three biggest news groups: Reach, Newsquest and JPI Media. Now, some of the LDRs will be hosted or employed by smaller news titles such as The Caerphilly Observer in Wales, one of The Edinburgh Reporter's Independent Community News Network (ICNN) colleagues.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. It is a bit like a franchise and different companies have different approaches, but all use common editorial standards and all publish into the same system.

The LDR's position in a council area is funded by the BBC as part of its Charter commitment, but the journalist is employed by regional news organisations or partners. The LDR is expected to report original stories about local authorities and other public bodies. The "brief is to report on the decision-making process, what decisions are made in the public's name and how they are arrived at, what evidence is presented to the council."

The journalist files stories to a central system, and the content is downloaded via an online portal, accessed with a log-in code supplied to all qualifying news organisations. The news organisations can also access some footage from the BBC local news programmes.

LDRs work as freelancers, to their own brief covering the stories of greatest public interest, and the BBC states that they should not undertake commissions for the partner employing them. The BBC stipulates that LDRs should be credited as "First Name, Last Name, Local Democracy Reporter".

The qualifying news organisations in Edinburgh include ourselves, North Edinburgh Community News, Midlothian View, Edinburgh Live and The Edinburgh Evening News – and all of us

access the stories at the same time. It is a most useful way of covering council business if we are unable to do this ourselves, although it is an editorial decision whether to use the stories in their original form or indeed at all.

LDRs are not supposed to report on national politics, but there is an exception for election campaigns and constituency work of MPs that specifically relates to relevant local audiences. This “may be covered so long as it does not detract from the core purpose of the LDRs”.

A [review undertaken by Dame Frances Cairncross](#), was tasked by the Prime Minister in 2018 to examine ways of providing high-quality journalism in a sustainable way. Many titles have struggled with falling advertising revenues and as well as suggesting that a Journalism Fund is set up, Dame Frances recommended that the LDRS should be expanded.

She also proposed that the BBC “should do more to help local publishers and think further about how its news provision can act as a complement to commercial news.”

David Higginson, Chief Audience Officer for Reach, led the bid for the publisher and said: “We are delighted with the faith the Local News Partnership has shown in Reach’s applications to run local democracy reporter contracts, not least because it’s been an even more rigorous application process this year. We take this responsibility very seriously, to not only promote the health of local news but also to nurture some of the brightest new journalistic talent across the UK.

“During our time with the scheme over the past three years we’ve worked hard to produce stories which provide great content, not only for us but also for our other publishing partners. We believe whole-heartedly in the long-term importance of this scheme, which is why we have invested in additional infrastructure and senior journalists to support it.”

Currently, Joseph Anderson is the Local Democracy Reporter covering The City of Edinburgh Council area. There is another LDR, Marie Sharp, who covers the East and Midlothian Council areas. Both are set to become employees of Reach from 1 July. In the last week Mr Anderson has filed stories about an elm tree at Holyrood Palace which is to be felled, women's safety and active travel, the slavery review in Edinburgh, the council's plans to use £5 million of council funds to revamp the public toilets in the city, and the need for sentries on the border between England and Scotland after independence, as well as fears for loss of language in the border region.