Written submission from Rhiannon Davies, founder of The Scottish Beacon and Greater Govanhill, 25 November 2026

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1. Executive summary

Scotland has a growing and innovative independent local and community media sector, delivering public interest journalism and vital community information services in communities that are increasingly underserved by traditional media. Yet many of these organisations operate in precarious financial circumstances, and some face an immediate threat to their survival.

This submission draws on my experience of establishing Greater Govanhill, an award-winning community media organisation in the Southside of Glasgow; co-founding The Community Newsroom; establishing The Scottish Beacon, a collaborative network of around 25 independent local news publishers across Scotland; and co-founding Greater Community Media, which supports the development of community-centred journalism. It is also informed by my Churchill Fellowship research into community-centred journalism and my experience as a member of the Scottish Government's Public Interest Journalism Working Group.

Through this work, we have developed considerable practical experience of the role local journalism can play in strengthening communities, widening democratic participation, countering misinformation, improving representation and building trust.

At a time of increasing political polarisation, social fragmentation and the growing influence of big tech companies over how people access information, trusted local journalism is an essential part of Scotland's social and democratic infrastructure. It builds social cohesion and helps establish a shared understanding of local issues, nurtures pride in place and creates a sense of connection and belonging. These are foundations upon which many of Scotland's wider public policy ambitions depend.

The situation facing the sector is urgent. Newsrooms are closing, journalism jobs are being lost and communities risk losing trusted sources of local information. The relationships, knowledge and trust built up by local journalists over many years are difficult to rebuild once lost. In their absence, misinformation, disinformation and divisive narratives have greater scope to take hold.

Relatively modest investment could make a significant difference to the sustainability and reporting capacity of independent publishers. That’s why we are calling for three immediate interventions:

- **Establish a Scottish Local News Fund, with an initial annual investment of £600,000.**

- **Direct a meaningful proportion of public sector advertising expenditure towards independent local and community media.**
- **Establish funded journalism placements accessible to smaller independent publishers.**

There is also an opportunity for the Scottish Government to act as a catalyst for wider philanthropic investment in community journalism, building on emerging conversations among Scottish funders and drawing on successful international funding models.

2. Our work and evidence of impact

The Scottish Beacon

The Scottish Beacon is a collaborative network of around 25 independent local and community news publishers across Scotland, established in August 2023. We received the Georgina Henry Award for Digital Innovation at the British Journalism Awards that same year.

Our members include established independent local newspapers, community magazines, digital news publishers and volunteer-led publications, serving communities from urban neighbourhoods to rural and island areas. They are all different in the model, format and output, but they are all rooted in care for the communities they serve.

Our Partners

The Scottish Beacon was established in recognition of the fact that many independent local publishers were working in isolation, facing similar challenges with limited opportunities to share resources, knowledge or journalism.

Through the network, we share and amplify journalism produced by our members, facilitate collaborative reporting projects, provide opportunities for training and peer support, and advocate for the sector at a national level.
Our collaborative reporting has included work on community spaces, food banks, renewable energy, land use and the implications of national policy decisions for communities. This enables smaller publishers to contribute to national conversations while bringing perspectives from communities that are often underrepresented in Scotland's media. We work on the belief that when something happens in one community, it is a local story, but when similar issues emerge across multiple communities, it becomes a national story.

By working collaboratively, independent publishers can achieve a scale and breadth of coverage that would be difficult to achieve individually, while retaining their editorial independence and relationships with their own communities. The network also provides existing infrastructure through which investment, training, shared resources and collaborative journalism projects could be delivered across Scotland.

Case study: The Power Shift collaborative journalism project

Our *Power Shift* project, which won a Tenacious Journalism Award, brought together 10 independent local publishers to explore Scotland’s renewable energy transition.

We wanted to move beyond the polarised and often sensationalist coverage of renewable energy, which can be dominated by Central Belt perspectives, and explore the nuances and complexities of the transition through journalism rooted in the communities most directly affected. In an area particularly susceptible to misinformation and disinformation, our aim was to improve public understanding and facilitate more informed conversations.

The project culminated in a dedicated print magazine, distributed through Scotland’s climate hubs and local publishers, and a public discussion event. We also partnered with The Herald on a week-long special, bringing stories from Scotland’s communities to a national audience.

Building on this work, we have since established the Scottish Environmental Journalism Network, bringing together journalists, researchers and others working on environmental issues to share knowledge, develop connections and improve the quality of environmental journalism in Scotland.

Greater Govanhill

Greater Govanhill was established in 2020 as a community interest company, in response to the predominantly negative representation of Govanhill in the mainstream media and a lack of journalism that reflected the experiences and information needs of its diverse population.

We produce a free community magazine, alongside digital journalism, newsletters, a community radio show, podcasts, training programmes, exhibitions, community conversations and events. Our approach combines solutions-focused journalism with meaningful community participation, seeking to involve people who have traditionally been underrepresented in the media.

Greater Govanhill's approach has received national and international recognition, garnering 11 awards in six years. Our print magazine is distributed free of charge through local businesses, community organisations and public spaces, ensuring that access to local journalism is not dependent on people's ability to pay. Around a third of respondents to our reader survey reported household incomes below £15,000.

Evidence of impact

One reader survey found that:

- **78%** feel better informed about their community.
- **70%** feel their community has more of a voice.
- **68%** feel more connected to Govanhill.
- **60%** discuss local issues more often.
- **48%** have increased their participation in community life.

One reader told us:

> “As someone new to the area, I have found it hard to connect to people, and the magazine has been one of the ways I’ve felt that barrier being reduced.”

Another said:

> “As someone who has often felt quite isolated, the magazine makes me feel more connected to my neighbours and neighbourhood.”

These findings illustrate the relevance of community journalism to wider challenges around isolation, social cohesion, democratic participation and community empowerment.

Challenging negative narratives and strengthening social cohesion

Govanhill has historically been subject to significant negative media coverage, often focusing on crime, deprivation and tensions between communities.

As part of our impact research, we analysed more than 1,700 headlines featuring Govanhill across 11 publications. Between 2015 and 2019, 30% of words in headlines were classified as positive. Between 2020 and 2024, this increased to 49%. While frequently occurring words in the earlier period included ‘police’, ‘attack’ and ‘arrested’, the later period saw words such as ‘community’, ‘multicultural’ and ‘project’ appearing prominently.

We cannot attribute this change solely to Greater Govanhill, but it provides an indication of how the wider media narrative around the neighbourhood has evolved since the organisation was established. In September this year, Govanhill was named ‘Coolest neighbourhood in the UK’ by Time Out magazine.

In a neighbourhood as culturally and linguistically diverse as Govanhill, local journalism can play an important role in helping people understand the experiences of neighbours from different backgrounds, challenging stereotypes and creating a shared sense of place.

Democratic participation

Since 2024, Greater Govanhill has undertaken Citizens' Agenda projects across three elections, asking residents what issues they want candidates to address and using their responses to inform our election coverage.

Ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament election, we gathered more than 200 contributions through community conversations, surveys and targeted engagement with groups whose voices are often missing from election coverage.

These contributions informed a series of questions put to candidates, alongside accessible voter information and reporting on the issues identified by residents. We also produced accessible explainers on the electoral system and voting process.

This approach helps ensure that election coverage reflects the priorities of communities and creates opportunities for people who might not otherwise participate in democratic processes to engage with elected representatives. Many people have told us they either voted for the first time, or were able to vote with confidence because they felt they better understood the beliefs of candidates.

Participatory journalism and public policy

Our *Telling Different Stories* project worked with women affected by gambling harms over a two-year period, supporting participants to develop journalism about their experiences and the wider issues they wanted to highlight. The project resulted in a special magazine, *Hidden Lives*, and contributed to the development of the six-part *Her Upper Hand* podcast.

Participants subsequently contributed to policy discussions, public events and media coverage, drawing on their experiences to raise issues including the impact of gambling harms on families and children and the need for greater awareness within health services. This demonstrates how participatory journalism can enable people with lived experience to contribute to wider public understanding and policy discussions. One participant said:

“I have to say, it’s changed me as a person. It’s made me confront a lot of my old demons, it’s made me realise that it wasn’t my shame. The shame stopped me speaking about it and seeking support for myself to heal from it. It’s in the past now and I’m moving forward.”

Developing skills and widening representation

Greater Govanhill has provided training and paid opportunities to people who have traditionally faced barriers to entering journalism.

Through our Young Voices Media Skills Training programme, participants from under-represented backgrounds have progressed into further education, journalism, filmmaking and media employment as a direct result of our work.

Our *Sound of Refugee Voices* project, delivered with Radio Buena Vida, supported people with experience of the asylum system to share their experiences through radio in their own languages. Participants went on to do more podcast work, appear on Radio 4 and win an award for their work.

These projects demonstrate the potential for community media to develop talent, widen representation and create pathways into the wider media industry. Our accompanying impact report, *Helping Govanhill reclaim the narrative: The impact of community-centred media in the Southside of Glasgow, 2020–2026* (Annex B), provides a more detailed account of this work.

The Community Newsroom



In 2022, together with investigative journalism organisation The Ferret, we established **The Community Newsroom**, a shared, public-facing newsroom in a shopfront in the Southside of Glasgow.

The space enables journalists to work alongside and within the communities they serve. Local residents can come in to share stories, raise concerns, access training, attend events or simply have a conversation. It has become an important part of how we build relationships, develop our journalism and understand the information needs of our community.

The Community Newsroom brings together the complementary approaches of Greater Govanhill and The Ferret, creating opportunities to connect community-centred journalism with investigative and accountability reporting.

The space also hosts exhibitions, workshops, community conversations, training programmes and informal gatherings, providing opportunities for people from different backgrounds to meet and develop relationships.

The Community Newsroom offers an innovative model for how journalism can become more accessible, accountable and embedded within communities. It also demonstrates the potential for community media to contribute to preventative approaches to isolation and loneliness, help people access information and services, and strengthen local social infrastructure.

Greater Community Media

In 2023, I undertook a six-week research trip to the United States and Canada as part of a Churchill Fellowship, exploring emerging models of community-centred journalism, their impact and the policy and funding environments that enable them to thrive. I spoke with more than 50 practitioners, including publishers, journalists, funders, academics and policy advocates. I published a Manifesto for Greater Community Media with my findings.

This led to the establishment of Greater Community Media, recognising a gap in the support available to organisations seeking to develop community-centred approaches to journalism and to people looking to establish new community media initiatives.

Greater Community Media is a non-profit that works to strengthen the ecosystem of community media ecosystem. We provide training, coaching, and capacity building support, building the knowledge, confidence and skills of people leading community media organisations.

There is considerable potential for new community media organisations to emerge across Scotland, particularly in areas where local news provision has declined. However, people seeking to establish these initiatives need access to specialist support, training, sustainable funding models and the experience of others working in the sector.

Our 2026 research report, *Funding the Future of Local News*, explores international approaches to supporting local journalism, including public funding, philanthropic investment and collaborative funding models. The report accompanies this submission as Annex A. There is significant global best practice that we recommend drawing from for a Scottish local news fund.

3. The current landscape and financial challenges

Independent local journalism in Scotland

The decline of traditional local news provision is well documented. Consolidation of newspaper ownership, reductions in staffing and the closure of local newsrooms have changed the relationship between many publications and the communities they serve.

Alongside this decline, a diverse independent local and community media sector has developed. Some organisations have been established for decades, while

others have emerged in response to gaps in local news provision.

These organisations undertake a wide range of work, including:

- Reporting on local authorities, public services, planning decisions and other matters of democratic importance.
- Investigating issues affecting communities at a hyperlocal level that may otherwise receive little attention.
- Providing practical information about local services, opportunities and support.
- Reporting on local businesses, community organisations, culture and heritage.
- Creating opportunities for people to participate in journalism and develop media skills.
- Bringing local perspectives into national discussions and policy debates.
- Platforming voices that are typically not heard in the media.

In developing interventions to support local journalism, it is important to recognise the differences between locally rooted independent publishers and large media groups operating across multiple geographical areas. While both employ journalists undertaking valuable public interest reporting, their ownership structures, financial models and organisational priorities can differ considerably.

Investment in independent community media can help retain employment, expertise and economic value within the communities being served.
Independent publishers are deeply embedded in the communities they serve. Their journalists live locally, understand the context in which stories arise and have relationships with people and organisations that can take years to develop.

There is considerable variation across the sector in terms of organisational structure, staffing, turnover, geographical coverage and income models. Some publishers employ teams of journalists, while others rely on one individual, part-time staff or volunteers. This diversity is a strength, but it also means that support mechanisms designed around larger commercial news organisations are not always accessible or appropriate for independent publishers.

Barriers to financial sustainability

Advertising revenues have increasingly shifted towards global technology platforms, while many local businesses are themselves operating in difficult economic circumstances.

Membership and subscription models can provide valuable income, but their potential varies considerably depending on the communities served. In areas experiencing high levels of poverty, there are limits to how much income can be generated from readers without creating barriers to accessing journalism.

Grant funding has enabled innovation within the independent community media sector. However, much of this funding is restricted to specific projects, with limited support available for the core costs of maintaining a newsroom. There are currently

no specific funds for community media in this country.

Organisations can find themselves in a position where they are able to secure funding to deliver new initiatives but struggle to fund the ongoing journalism, staff, premises and organisational infrastructure upon which those initiatives depend. Short-term funding cycles also make it difficult to retain experienced staff, plan ahead and develop sustainable income streams.

Scotland has an established infrastructure of specialist business support, training and funding for social enterprises. Greater Govanhill has benefited from this support, including through Firstport. However, independent local publishers operate under a range of organisational structures, including sole traders, private companies, charities, community interest companies and projects hosted by community development trusts. There is no equivalent package of specialist support accessible to the community media sector as a whole.

Many people establishing local publications bring considerable journalistic expertise or knowledge of their communities but have limited experience of running a business. Targeted support in areas such as revenue development, advertising sales, reader membership, financial planning and organisational development could significantly strengthen the sustainability of the sector.
Much of the public value generated by local journalism cannot readily be monetised. The communities with the greatest need for accessible, independent local information may also be those in which it is most difficult to sustain journalism through advertising, subscriptions or membership income. Public and philanthropic investment can help address this imbalance, ensuring that the quality of local news provision is not determined by the relative wealth of the community it serves.

Evidence from Scottish Beacon members

Surveys of Scottish Beacon members in 2025 and November 2026 highlight the precarious financial position of independent local publishers and the need for longer-term investment.

Our most recent survey conducted in November 2026, received eight responses:

- **100%** identified financial sustainability as one of their biggest challenges.
- **100%** identified multi-year funding as a priority.
- **100%** of those answering the question about financial sustainability expressed some degree of concern about their position over the next 12 months.
- **43%** of those answering that question were either uncertain about their financial sustainability or at risk of significantly reducing their activities.
- **50%** identified advertising income as a major challenge.
- **50%** identified unrestricted core funding as a priority.
- **38%** identified accessing grant funding as a major challenge.
- **38%** identified volunteer capacity as a major challenge.
- **75%** currently receive no paid advertising from public bodies.
- **88%** would be interested in hosting a funded journalist or trainee, or would

consider doing so depending on the arrangements.

Our 2025 survey, which received ten responses, highlighted the considerable variation in the scale of independent local publishers, with annual turnover ranging from a few thousand pounds to around £190,000. This demonstrates how relatively modest amounts of public investment could provide a lifeline for smaller publications, while enabling more established organisations to strengthen their reporting capacity.

When asked what annual unrestricted funding of £10,000–£30,000 could enable, publishers identified opportunities to employ a paid journalist, commission freelance reporting, extend geographical coverage, invest in original journalism, develop new audiences and diversify their income streams.

There is also a significant risk associated with the sector's reliance on the goodwill of a relatively small number of individuals. Many independent publications depend heavily on founders, editors and volunteers who have sustained them for years with limited financial reward. Without investment in staffing, organisational capacity and succession planning, publications risk disappearing when these individuals retire, experience burnout or are no longer able to continue. The loss of their knowledge, relationships and standing within their communities would be difficult to recover.

These responses are indicative of challenges within the sector rather than a comprehensive sector-wide survey. However, they demonstrate both the financial vulnerability of existing publishers and the potential for relatively modest investment to increase the quantity and quality of local journalism available to communities across Scotland.

There remains a need for a more comprehensive understanding of independent local news provision across Scotland, including where gaps exist and where existing organisations could expand their reporting capacity. However, further research should take place alongside practical intervention.
Organisations facing immediate financial difficulties cannot afford to wait for another lengthy process of mapping and consultation.

The consequences of inaction

When a local newsroom closes, the consequences extend beyond the loss of journalism jobs. Communities lose an established source of information, a means of holding decision-makers to account and a platform through which local experiences, achievements and concerns can be shared.

The rapid development of generative AI presents further challenges for local journalism, both through its potential to disrupt publishers' income and routes to audiences, and through the increasing ease with which misleading or fabricated information can be produced and disseminated. This makes the role of identifiable, accountable journalists with first-hand knowledge of their communities increasingly important.

Without consistent local reporting, decisions about public spending, planning, housing, education and other essential services risk receiving less scrutiny. People

also lose a means of finding out what is happening around them, accessing opportunities and support, and developing a deeper understanding of the place in which they live.

Local journalism can nurture pride in place and foster a sense of connection and belonging. Seeing your own experiences reflected in the media, learning about the lives of your neighbours and having opportunities to shape the narrative of your community can help build the confidence and relationships that enable people to participate more fully in society. Even seemingly everyday local reporting, from coverage of school events and community activities to local sport and obituaries, can help people develop a greater understanding of their neighbours, recognise shared interests across social and political divides, and strengthen their sense of belonging.

These foundations underpin much of what the Scottish Government is seeking to achieve through its work on community empowerment, community wealth building, tackling inequalities, social cohesion, health and wellbeing, and democratic participation. The success of many public and third sector interventions depends on people knowing what support is available, trusting the information they receive and feeling able to participate. Community media can contribute to preventative approaches by reducing isolation, helping people access services and identifying unmet needs.

Investment in community media should also be considered in the context of preventative public spending and public service reform. By helping people access support before problems escalate, reducing social isolation, identifying gaps in service provision and improving communication between communities and public bodies, community media can complement the work of existing public services. There is scope for further research into the economic value of these preventative interventions.

As local news provision declines, people's understanding of the world around them is increasingly shaped by national and international media, social media platforms and informal online networks. The issues that dominate these spaces can feel far removed from people's everyday experiences, while commercial incentives can favour content that generates outrage, conflict and division.

A small number of global technology companies increasingly control both the distribution of information and the advertising revenues that previously helped sustain local journalism. In the absence of trusted local information, rumours and misinformation can spread rapidly, particularly around contentious issues such as migration, housing, crime and the provision of public services.
Locally rooted publications are well placed to investigate these claims, provide context, explore complexities and facilitate more informed conversations. At a time of increasing political polarisation, there is considerable value in having trusted sources of information that help establish a shared sense of reality, grounded in the places where people live.

During my Churchill Fellowship, I discovered how the United States, where the decline of local journalism and the effects of political polarisation have been

particularly acute, is increasingly recognising investment in local news as part of the response to these challenges. I encountered a growing understanding among funders, policymakers and community leaders of the importance of locally rooted journalism in rebuilding trust, strengthening social cohesion, countering misinformation and helping people establish a shared understanding of the world around them.

While I was there, a coalition of philanthropic funders launched Press Forward, with an initial commitment of US$500 million over five years to strengthen local journalism. The scale of this investment reflects a growing recognition of local journalism as a public good and of the limitations of relying on commercial models alone to meet communities' information needs. Scotland has an opportunity to learn from these developments and intervene before the erosion of its local news infrastructure and the consequences of social and political fragmentation become more severe.

Independent local and community media should be recognised as an important part of Scotland's social, democratic and economic infrastructure. Allowing it to disappear risks undermining progress across a much wider range of public policy priorities. The cost of sustaining existing local news provision is relatively modest compared with the difficulty of rebuilding it once lost and the potential social costs of inaction.

4. Recommendations

Given the contribution of independent local and community media to a wide range of Scottish Government priorities, we would encourage a cross-government approach to supporting the sector, bringing together relevant departments, public bodies and independent funders. This could help unlock wider sources of investment while ensuring that editorial independence remains fundamental to any funding arrangements.

Recommendation 1: Establish a Scottish Local News Fund

The Scottish Beacon is calling for the establishment of a Scottish Local News Fund, with an initial annual investment of £600,000 – in line with the funding recommendation made by the Scottish Public Interest Journalism Initiative (SPIJI).

The UK Government's commitment of up to £12 million through its Local News Fund represents an important recognition of the need for public investment in local journalism. However, Scottish publishers were excluded from applying directly for funding during its first year, leaving them without access to equivalent support at a time of significant financial pressure.

Learning from established funding models

Alongside the UK Local News Fund and Welsh Government support for independent journalism, there are significant international precedents for public investment in the sector.

Scotland also has an opportunity to learn from the design and delivery of the UK Local News Fund. Funding programmes with short delivery timescales can make it difficult for smaller publishers to invest in staff, develop sustainable revenue streams and build organisational capacity at a manageable pace. Investment should be informed by the needs identified by publishers themselves, with an emphasis on long-term sustainability rather than predetermined technological solutions.

Greater Community Media's report, *Funding the Future of Local News* (Annex A), commissioned by the Public Interest News Foundation and published in March 2026, examines ten international journalism funds that have collectively mobilised more than £560 million to support the regeneration of local news since 2019.

These include the independently administered Dutch Journalism Fund, an arms-length government body which receives approximately €28 million in annual state funding to support journalism innovation and ecosystem development in the Netherlands; the Media Forward Fund, which has raised €12 million through a combination of philanthropy, German state funding and impact investment since 2024; and the New Mexico Local News Fund, which mobilises $1.1 million annually, including state funding.

These models offer valuable lessons for Scotland, particularly around combining catalytic funding with capacity building, developing sustainable revenue streams, attracting additional investment and safeguarding editorial independence.

A consistent finding from my Churchill Fellowship was the importance of long-term, core funding in enabling community-centred journalism to develop. Building relationships, earning trust and reaching communities that have historically been poorly served by the media takes time. Short-term, restricted project funding can divert organisations away from their core purpose, while multi-year investment enables them to retain staff, develop sustainable income streams and respond to the changing needs of their communities.

Designing a Scottish Local News Fund

To illustrate the scale of investment, just £600,000 distributed across 30 independent publishers would provide £20,000 per organisation annually, before allowing for administration costs. For many organisations, this could be transformative, enabling them to employ a part-time journalist, retain experienced staff, expand their reporting capacity or ensure the survival of an important local publication.

We recommend a Scottish Local News Fund draws on global best practices in funding journalism and the recommendations of our report *Funding the Future of Local News*. The fund should:

Structure and governance

- Establish an independent, arm's length pooled fund, combining Scottish Government funding with philanthropic funding, and administered independently. This creates a firewall between government funding and

journalism, brings in more capital, and enables the fund to be run by sector experts.
- Be hosted by an established organisation with expertise in grant administration, operating at arm's length from government and with robust safeguards for editorial independence.
- Establish transparent, non-partisan eligibility criteria, with funding decisions independent of publishers' editorial positions or coverage of government policy.
- Embed the sector into the fund through representation, listening and responding to its needs as the fund learns how it can best support a thriving local news sector in Scotland.

Funding model

- Provide two forms of funding:
    - Catalytic grants that provide runway for news organisations to become more sustainable
    - Stability funding for community-centred news organisations meeting critical local community information needs
- Provide flexible funding that can contribute to core journalism and organisational costs.
- Provide opportunities for multi-year funding, enabling organisations to retain staff and plan ahead.
- Use proportionate application, monitoring and reporting requirements.

Support alongside funding

- Provide all grantees responsive, flexible expert coaching alongside funding, to build the business capability of newsroom leaders.
- Combine financial investment with capacity building and support to develop sustainable revenue streams.
- Support the whole field's capacity to innovate by backing infrastructure organisations that provide capacity building, run peer networks, share knowledge and offer support services.
- Support collaboration and shared infrastructure, enabling smaller publishers to access specialist expertise and resources that would otherwise be beyond their means.

Reach and equity

- Be accessible to independent publishers of different sizes, organisational structures and publishing formats.
- Recognise the particular challenges of serving rural, island and economically disadvantaged communities.
- Support existing organisations alongside the development of new provision in underserved areas.

Public value

- Recognise the wider public value of journalism, including its contribution to community participation, representation and social cohesion, alongside conventional measures of audience reach.

Building on existing recommendations

In 2021, I was a member of the Scottish Government's Public Interest Journalism Working Group, which produced the report *Scotland's News: Towards a Sustainable Future for Public Interest Journalism*. The report recognised the need for investment to support the sustainability of public interest journalism in Scotland. Five years later, many of the challenges identified remain unresolved, and there is an urgent need to move towards direct investment in the sector.

In July 2026, The Scottish Beacon published an open letter calling for the Scottish Government to ensure Scotland was not left behind in the development of support for local journalism. The letter attracted more than 125 signatories from across journalism, academia, community organisations and the wider third sector. The subsequent parliamentary motion S7M-00778, lodged by Katherine Sangster MSP, received cross-party support.

We have written to the Cabinet Secretary on seeking engagement on these proposals. In a response received on 9 October 2026, the Scottish Government indicated that it had no plans to establish an equivalent Scottish Local News Fund. We have reiterated our request for a meeting to explore what could be achieved through public investment and partnership with independent funders.

Catalysing wider philanthropic investment

On 24 November 2026, Greater Community Media brought together representatives of six major Scottish funders at The Community Newsroom in Glasgow to explore the potential for a pooled fund for community journalism in Scotland.

Discussions highlighted how investment in community media could support wider funding priorities, including social cohesion, tackling isolation, community empowerment, countering misinformation, providing opportunities for young people and improving access to services.

Our ambition is to develop a Scottish Local News Fund, combining an annual commitment of
£600,000 from the Scottish Government and seeking an equivalent contribution from philanthropic sources, potentially unlocking £3.6 million of investment over an initial three-year period.

Drawing on our research into international funding models, we envisage a fund that combines direct investment in publishers with capacity building, business development and peer support. It would support both the development of sustainable revenue streams and the continued provision of public interest journalism where

commercial income alone cannot meet the costs of delivery.

Greater Community Media would welcome the opportunity to convene a working group bringing together the Scottish Government, philanthropic funders and sector representatives to co-design such a fund. An initial commitment from the Scottish Government could provide the catalyst for this wider investment.

Recommendation 2: Direct more public sector advertising towards independent local media

Public sector advertising represents a significant opportunity to support the sustainability of independent local journalism while improving the effectiveness of public information campaigns.

Independent local publishers have established relationships with their communities and can reach audiences that may be underserved by other communication channels, including people experiencing digital exclusion and those facing language barriers. However, our November 2026 survey of Scottish Beacon members found that 75% of respondents currently receive no paid advertising from public bodies.

Existing public expenditure

According to data accessed via a Freedom of Information request, in 2023/24, the Scottish Government spent £5.05 million on marketing campaigns, including approximately £3.42 million on advertising placements. Directing a small proportion of this existing expenditure towards independent local media could provide a valuable source of income for publishers while helping public bodies communicate more effectively with Scotland's communities.

This would also support community wealth building by retaining more public expenditure within local economies, without necessarily requiring additional public spending.

Learning from international examples

New York City introduced a policy in 2019 requiring city agencies to direct at least 50% of their print and digital advertising budgets towards community and ethnic media. According to the Center for Community Media's Advertising Boost Initiative: Five-Year Impact Report (May 2025), the policy directed more than $72 million into community media between 2020 and 2024, helping public information reach communities across 39 languages. You can learn more about this approach from Rebuild Local News. Other jurisdictions have now pursued similar approaches. There is growing international recognition of the role governments can play in sustaining local journalism through existing expenditure and other policy mechanisms.

Opportunities for Scotland

We would recommend that the Scottish Government:

- Establishes a target for the proportion of public sector advertising

directed towards independent local and community media.
- Reviews procurement arrangements to identify and remove barriers facing smaller publishers.
- Explores mechanisms through which independent publishers can collectively participate in national public information campaigns.
- Ensures transparency in advertising allocation and introduces appropriate safeguards for editorial independence.
- Undertakes an audit of existing public sector advertising expenditure, including how much is currently directed towards Scottish-owned and independent local media.
- Explores a pilot programme involving a national public information campaign delivered through a network of independent local publishers.

The Scottish Beacon could help facilitate engagement between independent publishers, public bodies and advertising agencies, drawing on the experience of the Advertising Boost Initiative.

Recommendation 3: Establish funded journalism placements accessible to independent local publishers

The decline in local journalism jobs has reduced opportunities for people to enter the profession, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds and communities underrepresented in the media.

Independent local and community publishers can provide valuable training environments, offering experience across reporting, community engagement, multimedia production, editing and audience development. However, many lack the financial resources to offer paid placements or employ additional journalists.

Our November 2026 survey found that 88% of responding Scottish Beacon members would be interested in hosting a funded journalist or trainee, or would consider doing so depending on the arrangements.

Greater Govanhill has already benefited from hosting young people through paid employment placement programmes delivered by Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. There is an opportunity to build on existing employability infrastructure and develop partnerships with universities, colleges and training providers to create more accessible pathways into journalism, including for young people who have not followed traditional academic routes into the profession.

A funded journalism placement programme could also contribute to addressing the challenges identified by the Milburn review, creating accessible pathways into skilled employment for young people who might otherwise face barriers to entering the media industry. Independent community publishers are particularly well placed to offer opportunities within the communities where young people already live, including outside Scotland's major cities.

Learning from the Canadian experience

Canada's Local Journalism Initiative, established in 2019, provides public funding for news organisations to employ or commission journalists serving underserved communities. In 2024, the Canadian Government announced a further CAD 58.8 million over three years, bringing its total investment to CAD 128.8 million since the programme's launch. At that point, the initiative was supporting more than 400 journalism positions annually.

The programme is administered through independent not-for-profit organisations to safeguard press freedom and editorial independence. It also includes dedicated support for journalists from underrepresented backgrounds, incorporating training, mentoring and professional development.

Opportunities for Scotland

We would recommend a funded journalism placement programme that:

- Is accessible to smaller independent publishers across different media formats.
- Supports both early-career journalists and experienced journalists.
- Provides appropriately paid employment, alongside funding for supervision, mentoring and training.
- Prioritises opportunities for people from backgrounds underrepresented in journalism.
- Recognises the particular challenges of recruitment and retention in rural, island and underserved communities.
- Enables smaller publishers to collaborate on placements and share training resources.

Through The Scottish Beacon, there is already a network through which shared training, mentoring and peer support could be facilitated.

Such a programme could strengthen local reporting capacity, create pathways into the profession, improve representation within Scotland's media and help retain journalistic talent within communities.

5. Public service broadcasting and BBC Charter renewal

We recognise the value of the BBC's journalism in Scotland and are concerned about the implications of recent cuts for the number of journalists working in Scotland and the breadth of coverage they can provide.

However, much of the work undertaken by independent community media operates at a geographical level that public service broadcasters are rarely able to reach. From individual urban neighbourhoods such as Govanhill to small rural, Highland and island communities, Scottish Beacon members provide a depth and consistency of local coverage that national or regional broadcasters cannot realistically replicate.

The BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service is a welcome intervention, and some independent publishers benefit from employing local democracy reporters or accessing the journalism produced through the scheme. However, many of these

positions are held by larger commercial publishers, including Newsquest and Reach plc, and the benefits do not always reach smaller independent outlets. There is also considerably more to local public interest journalism than reporting on the workings of local authorities.

The prospect of further reductions in Scotland's journalism workforce makes it all the more important that independent local news provision is supported.

The current BBC Charter Review presents an important opportunity to rethink the BBC's relationship with independent local journalism and establish a more collaborative approach. By investing in existing local news providers, the BBC could extend its reach into underserved communities, strengthen local reporting capacity and support journalism jobs across Scotland.

We welcome the Public Interest News Foundation's (PINF) proposal, developed in the context of Charter renewal, for a Local News Commissioning Fund of at least £8 million annually across the UK. This would build on the Local Democracy Reporting Service by commissioning original public interest journalism through three strands:

- Community-led commissions informed by local listening exercises and communities' information needs.
- Journalist-led commissions supporting original reporting and investigations.
- Collaborative commissions enabling groups of publishers to undertake larger journalism projects.

The proposal also recommends ring-fencing 30% of the fund for news deserts, with publishers retaining copyright and journalism appearing on both their own and BBC platforms. We would encourage the Committee to consider this proposal as part of its engagement with the BBC Charter renewal process.

6. Conclusion

Scotland has an independent local and community media sector that has demonstrated considerable innovation and public value, often with very limited resources. Its work contributes to many of the wider social, democratic and economic ambitions of the Scottish Government, yet the organisations delivering it face significant uncertainty about their future.

A Scottish Local News Fund, alongside more equitable access to public advertising and funded journalism placements, would represent a practical and proportionate response. Scotland also has an opportunity to attract wider philanthropic investment, learn from successful international funding models and develop stronger partnerships between public service broadcasters and independent local publishers.

We would encourage the Committee to recommend that the Scottish Government commits to developing a Scottish Local News Fund in partnership with philanthropic funders and sector representatives, alongside action on public sector advertising and funded journalism placements. We would welcome a clear timetable for progressing these measures.

Much of the groundwork has already been done. There are established organisations, collaborative networks, considerable expertise and previous recommendations upon which the Scottish Government can build. The immediate priority must be to ensure that the organisations currently providing this journalism are still here to contribute to its future.

References

Annex A: Funding the Future of Local News

Greater Community Media. Research into international approaches to funding local journalism, including public investment, philanthropic funding and collaborative funding mechanisms.

https://www.greatercommunitymedia.com/funding-the-future

Annex B: Helping Govanhill reclaim the narrative

Greater Govanhill CIC. *The impact of community-centred media in the Southside of Glasgow, 2020–2026.*

Annex C: A Manifesto for Greater Community Media

https://www.greatercommunitymedia.com/manifesto

Annex D: Open Letter – Scotland Should Not Be Left Behind on Local News

https://www.scottishbeacon.com/regions/open-letter-scotland-should-not-left-behind-on-local-news/