



Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper

University of Oxford

Keeping it Local

Can collaborations help save local public interest journalism?

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August 2019

Trinity Term

Sponsor: Australian Broadcasting Corporation

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Acknowledgements

This study has been produced with the support, advice and encouragement of an incredibly generous network of media colleagues, friends and family in Australia, the UK and US.

Thanks firstly to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Donald McDonald Scholarship which provides an opportunity for a senior journalist to spend a term at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford, UK. I am very grateful to be the recipient of this Fellowship in 2019 to research the issues facing local media and the ways various markets are responding to the challenges through collaboration.

Additionally, there are dozens of my ABC colleagues who have been incredibly generous with their time and shared their knowledge from their own local media experience from across various markets and regional, radio, online and news platforms. Their insights have been invaluable.

In Oxford, thank you to RISJ Director Rasmus Kleis Nielsen whose book originally provided a foundation for the academic understanding of the issues confronting local news in the digital age and set me on a pathway to this fellowship.

Thank you too, to RISJ Fellowship Director Meera Selva for bringing together a team of international journalists with whom I've shared the experience of research and discussion during the 2019 Trinity Term, and for producing a Fellowship program that has provided access to a wide array of global media influencers.

While at the Reuters Institute, I have been incredibly fortunate and grateful to work with several members of the research team, including my supervisor and post doctorate researcher Dr Joy Jenkins whose expertise in the area of local news collaborations has extended beyond readings, suggested interviews and advice, to imparting a real appreciation of the search for solutions through collaborations and pointing me in directions I didn't know existed.

I'd also like to acknowledge former RISJ Director David Levy who helped me think of new ways to approach difficult topics within the body of the research.

In the UK, thank you to the team at BBC in Birmingham for the opportunity to examine the work of the Local News Partnerships first-hand, and to the dozens of commercial news partners, editorial leads, journalists and Local Democracy Reporters who agreed to interviews. In the US, thanks to

Stefanie Murray and the team from the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University and to the journalists and media partners in the various collaborations approached for comment.

Most importantly, thank you to an incredible network of friends and family, who've lived the journey from the initial application for the scholarship to taking the giant leap across to Oxford to go into study mode for a few months. Thank you to my husband David Wiltshire for your support and commercial media insights, and to my two children Abbey and Matthew who have ventured out into their own academic studies in 2019. Finally, to my mother and father, who worked hard and sacrificed more than they should have to support our family's education.

Who knew it would eventually include Oxford University?

Keeping it Local

Introduction

Is collaborative journalism part of the solution to saving local public interest news and content?

Local media, long under threat from cutbacks, newsroom closures, centralisation and ownership consolidation, are finding new ways to fight back and a growing number of advocates argue part of the response is not traditional competition but in the trend towards collaboration.

This research paper looks at the responsibilities of, and opportunities for, major media organisations to collaborate with regional and suburban media to break stories, cover local issues and promote democracy and asks how a collaborative model can practically work for journalists.

Despite the angst over dwindling budgets, decline in the number of journalists and the digital transition in local newsrooms – and despite the competitive nature of journalists and producers who've ever fought for a hard-won exclusive – local collaborations are on the rise, with former rivals, legacy media, hyperlocals and new start-ups among those joining forces to deliver stories for their communities.

Collaborations are not a new phenomenon and informal relationships between newsrooms have been part of some markets for decades, but current economic and technological shifts have made the collaboration discussion even more of an imperative.

They may have had the most attention with national and global efforts including the Panama Papers investigation from the Consortium of International Journalists ¹ and in the US, ProPublica's Electionland,² but local news organisations in several countries are experimenting with their own versions of collaboration with enthusiasm.

This paper looks at some examples of these types of collaborations in the UK and US, ranging from some of the largest ongoing collaborative relationships to small short-term projects, from re-investment in beat reporting of councils and data investigations with shared outcomes for the partners, to solutions journalism approaches addressing a community's economic challenges and coverage of an event like the run up to a mayoral election.

¹ Consortium of International Journalists, "*The Panama Papers*". Accessed here May 2019 <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/>

² ProPublica "*Electionland*". Accessed here May 2019 <https://www.propublica.org/electionland-faq/>

So how have collaborations improved coverage at a local level, enabled local outlets to better fulfil their democratic functions and better serve their communities as a result? And are there any lessons for other markets including Australia, given its own unique challenges in local news and the discussion around the future of public interest journalism?

The following report is based on over 35 interviews with journalists, editors and strategic leads of media organisations in the UK and US canvassing their views on how their collaborations work and their thoughts on how they are making a difference in their respective communities. It has also sought out research and comment from academics whose focus is local news.

Specifically, the report includes an examination of the Local News Partnerships in the UK between the BBC, News Media Association and partner media organisations, including their aim to address the democratic deficit and improve local council coverage. The collaboration involves many hundreds of people across multiple organisations. As of May 2019, the scheme has delivered 86,000 local stories over an 18-month period, through a network of approximately 150 Local Democracy Reporters, who have been employed specifically to attend the meetings of local councils and authorities around the UK. It has also conducted investigations and provided regional industry training through a shared data unit. There is some evidence to suggest that stories are being covered that would not have otherwise been brought to light had this collaboration not been in place. The project has had successes and challenges, which will be discussed in further detail.

As local media remain under pressure in Australia with the closure of newsrooms, takeovers, instability and job losses amid calls to strengthen public interest journalism, the paper also considers whether collaboration offers an opportunity for the ABC and news organisations to strengthen local coverage and adapt some of the learnings from the UK and US models for an Australian context.

Although hundreds of local collaborations are operating around the world, this paper has restricted focus to a few examples where media organisations and journalists within those organisations work together to improve coverage of local public affairs. The broader question of sustainability of collaborations and further, more detailed research on impact is worth exploring in the future.

The term local news can be interpreted widely within different markets. For the purpose of this report, Hess and Waller's interpretation that "local journalism can be understood broadly both as practices and a product that relates to a specific geographic area and the events and people connected to it" (Hess and Waller 2017). Suburban and regional press will be included as local media, while community and hyperlocal media will be identified as such in the discussion.

Report Summary

Chapter 1. Why local news matters

This chapter looks at the importance of local news for a community and the risks to public interest journalism.

Local news has been more impacted than other forms of journalism in the wake of the digital transformation of newsrooms in several markets including the UK, US and Australia. Studies in the US have tracked the rise of news deserts and there are examples of gaps in coverage in the UK and Australia. Reference is made to the Cairncross Review in the UK and the Digital Platforms Inquiry in Australia.

The loss of local news will impact on a community to its detriment and when certain stories are no longer covered for example, local councils and courts, it can lead to a democratic deficit, where functions of public authorities are no longer held to account.

Chapter 2. Why collaborate?

Over the last decade, media organisations are finding ways to work together to address issues in coverage in their local markets. More journalists are working together than ever before, particularly in the US.

The collaborative benefits to newsrooms are highlighted include resource sharing of staff, budgets and knowledge to produce more focussed stories around a specific topic or need in local markets. Alternatively, there are challenges in partnering with organisations with different newsroom cultures, and the more staff and number of organisations involved in the collaboration, the more importance for ongoing maintenance to manage the issues.

The advantage for the US is a long-established culture of philanthropy which has provided opportunities for funding for collaborations, however collaborations also exist outside of philanthropic support in the UK and US.

The benefits and challenges of these collaborations provide valuable lessons on the ways various organisations have responded to perceived gaps or issues in their respective markets. It also gives rise to the question – is there potential for replication or adaptation by other markets?

Chapter 3. UK Local News Partnerships - BBC and regional news industry

In the UK, a news collaboration between the BBC and numerous commercial media partners aims to produce public interest journalism for local and regional audiences, sustain local democracy and improve skills in journalism. It has employed approximately 150 Local Democracy Reporters to specifically focus on council reporting and established a unit to produce data investigations, with content shared among the partners. The third tier of the partnership is a News Hub where partners can access BBC content.

Over 86 thousand stories have been produced in 18 months to July 2019, as well as 20 data investigations. Quantitatively, the volume of stories has increased as a result of collaborations and qualitatively there is some anecdotal evidence of stories making a difference by focussing specifically on an issue, or by way of policy change or reversal of decisions.

Included in this section is a discussion on the formation of the partnership, the content produced, examples nominated by some of the Local Democracy Reporters and challenges and future of the program.

Chapter 4. Three collaboration examples from the UK and US

This chapter looks at three collaborative approaches: the UK's Bureau Local, Resolve Philadelphia and Chi.vote in Chicago.

- i. The UK Bureau Local is a collaborative, UK-wide network of journalists which uses data investigations to focus coverage of local issues on several themes, including council expenditure and homelessness.
- ii. Resolve Philadelphia in the US is a collaborative of more than 20 news organisations that focusses its coverage around a specific issue – economic mobility – and solutions reporting around that theme.
- iii. Chi.vote shows how a small targeted collaborative can emerge organically to cover a council election.

Chapter 5. Can the models be applied to other markets, including Australia?

This chapter discusses the learnings of the collaborations previously discussed in the paper and the potential for application to other markets including Australia. Some of these collaborations have already been adapted for other international markets e.g. NZ is running a trial of the UK's Local Democracy Reporter scheme, while the Bureau Local is being adapted in Germany.

It looks at the more recent challenges in local media in Australia within the last 12 months, and concerns raised about coverage of local councils and courts.

The release of a major report by the Australian competition regulator the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) provides key findings on several issues, highlighting the risks to public service journalism including local government and courts. The three recommendations from the ACCC including adequate funding for the public broadcasters, grants for local journalism and tax settings to encourage philanthropic support for journalism.

Pending review of the ACCC report, and funding solutions, some elements of the various collaboration models could be investigated as a potential opportunity for other markets including Australia. The ABC for example may wish to consider further discussion with the Australian media industry around strengthening local news and coverage of councils with the potential of shared data investigations or collaborative projects.

Conclusion

Collaborations can look different depending on the needs and the issues of the individual community. They can operate at various levels from a short-term project to deep structural ongoing relationships and can include established media players through to a hyperlocal level.

Where they exist, local news collaborations are providing communities with additional coverage. There are many benefits around shared resources and focusing on a specific issue.

Local news collaborations are one of the ways to address issues within a specific market. Each news market has its own unique framework and challenges, and collaborations address only part of the solution at the delivery end, and a combination of measures may be needed to stimulate local news.

More research could be done around the many examples of impact of collaborations. Additional research could be done around Facebook and Google's efforts to provide funding to support local news initiatives.

Chapter 1 Why local news matters

In a world where our news is dominated by significant national and international issues, it's easy to overlook the value of local journalism and why it's worth fighting for.

Our daily lives are local, from where we shop, to who collects the rubbish, who fixes the potholes in our local roads, where our children go to school and the local sports team we support (Nielsen 2015). Local news tells the stories of the people who help make their communities a better place, as well as holding authorities, who hold the purse-strings for local services, to account. Local news can be perceived as “terrible” by some as it leans to the parochial, but it is also considered “terribly important” by those who believe that,

“It provides information about local public affairs, it holds local elites at least somewhat accountable, it provides a forum for discussion, and it ties communities together,” (Nielsen 2015).

In order to deliberate on local issues, a local public sphere for which local news media is present is essential. (Hess and Waller 2017: 1-8). Yet local news hasn't always come out the winner in battling for its share of focus in the digital age. The market is flooded with easily accessible digital and social content direct to mobile phone, and local news is in a battle for media users' attention. In effect while “there's more and more media, there is less and less local journalism” (Nielsen 2015). In addition, the revenue models for local news continue to be under significant pressure, with competition from tech and social platforms for the share of advertising dollars.

The presence of a local newsroom can help create and define a community (Radcliffe 2017), “satisfying people's need to know and connecting them with other people and social institutions” (Hess and Waller 2017: 116). Some suggest it goes to the heart of what it means to be a good “neighbour”, such as caring for and understanding the community, reporting on interesting people and groups, and developing solutions (Poindexter 2006). Even as people progressively embrace digital, it appears they still want strong community connection, as found by a 2018 survey of 35,000 people by the Pew Research Center. They have high expectations from their news providers and want them to be a genuine part of the community (Pew 2019).

Local radio and television in some markets too can be a powerful medium for connecting communities. In Australia, a University of Tasmania PhD study of civic engagement and conversations on local radio of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation sought to examine a number of questions including how local radio better contributes to social cohesion and building public trust

and whether public broadcasting radio in the 21st century improves democracy. It found that the importance of “creating a space for intense focus on local issues, with debate framed transparently, not only produces opportunities for citizens to participate more fully in their communities but creates empathy and builds consensus.” At the same time however, “public broadcasting radio now operates at a time of political disengagement, media consolidation and digital fragmentation,” (Nettlefold 2017).

Commentators and academics stress we can’t afford to take local journalism granted and that without a local news presence, democracy itself is at risk (Abernathy 2018 and Hess and Waller 2017).

In Wales, Rachel Howells formerly of the University of Cardiff studied the retreat of news coverage from Port Talbot, a community with just over 37,000 people. Port Talbot became a news black hole, demonstrated by linking the disappearance of local journalists and a local newspaper, and a decline in civic and democratic activities, such as voter turnout, and well-managed public finances. Harte, Howells and Williams cite the Welsh example and indicate the effects on a community following the loss of a local news publication are serious.

“When the Port Talbot Guardian (a local weekly newspaper) closed down in 2009 citizens lost their primary source of day-to-day information about how to navigate civic and community life. But they also lost (what has previously been) a newspaper of record, and a large portion of the town’s collective memory.”

In the UK, it is widely accepted that news media, including local and regional news, are facing a deep and continuing crisis (Harte et al. 2018). The consolidation of titles by large publishers and the resultant loss of jobs has hit local news hard. The 2019 Cairncross Report, based on a review commissioned by the UK Government into a sustainable future for high quality journalism, confirmed collapsing revenue has not just led to cutbacks; it has cut through the local press, driving 321 closures over the last ten years. Of the local publications that still survive, cost-cutting has often meant that reporters have been less able to leave the newsroom to meet local officials or to attend council meetings or court appearances, activities which are essential for democracy reporting³ and

³ “The Cairncross Review, a Sustainable Future for Journalism,” 2019, P 8. Accessed here https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779882/021919_DCMS_Cairncross_Review_.pdf

that online revenues seem unlikely ever fully to support an adequate amount of democracy reporting across the UK.⁴ But the report went further, suggesting declining voter turnout at elections was in play as a result.

“The reduction in public-interest reporting seems to reduce community engagement with local democracy (such as voter turnout) and the accountability of local institutions.”

The risks of local media missing local stories can have devastating consequences. A now often cited case in point is the Grenfell tragedy in London in 2017 in which 71 people died in a council owned building fire (Newman 2018 and Preston 2017).

“The Grenfell story... provided a wake-up call for journalists in the UK. Residents had warned about the cladding months before, but the story had been ignored by a hollowed-out local media and a national one focused on Brexit,” (Newman 2018).

While newspapers have traditionally done the heavy lifting to ensure local communities are kept in the picture (Sambrook 2017), the online version of the print publications present a different model of local news. Professor of Journalism at Cardiff University and former BBC executive Richard Sambrook said local online journalism contains a lot of click bait headlines and content, and as a result, stories from councils fall by the wayside. These council stories can include cuts to budgets and services, planning and crime.

“To drive digital advertising, they (local online journalism) focus on stories that are going to get the most clicks.

“The pill inside the sugar of a local newspaper which was the local council reports and all the rest of it is no longer there because they can’t afford to cover them, and they don’t get the interest. But you know there was a benefit to having those in the mix. We’ve lost that benefit which is what we call the democratic deficit,” (interview, Sambrook 2019).

In the US, the emergence of news deserts in communities devoid of fresh news and information exposes risks creating an environment where “citizens miss important information and public

⁴ Ibid. P 22.

officials are potentially less accountable than they should be” (Radcliffe 2017). A University of Northern Carolina study found 1300 communities have totally lost news coverage, about 1,800 local papers have gone out of business or merged since 2004 while hundreds more scaled back so that they’ve become “ghost newspapers” (Abernathy 2018).

The question on why we should care about the loss of local news outlets is this – news is an ecosystem. Political commentator and satirist John Oliver has discussed the US news industry as a food-chain which would fall apart without local newspapers, with shows like his as well as other media leaning heavily on them, so “even if you only get your news from Facebook, Twitter or Google, those places are often just repackaging the work of newspapers.”⁵

In 2018, a US study set out to document the extent to which communities have access to robust local journalism and determine whether certain types of communities are more at risk than others (Napoli 2018). 16, 000 stories from 100 randomly chosen communities were assessed by a number of measures including whether a story was actually local or produced elsewhere and republished, and whether the story addressed critical information to enable its citizens to be well informed on issues including civic and political life, education, the economy. It found 20 communities had received no local news within a seven-day period.

The pressure on democracy has been highlighted formally in two studies showing reductions in local news are tied to declines in citizen participation. Firstly, a US longitudinal study suggested the political landscape changed with local political news and that citizen engagement is a casualty (Hayes and Lawless 2018). Drawing on a content analysis of more than 10,000 stories in 2010 and 2014, it shows that local newspapers over this period published less, and less substantive, political news.

Additional panel data investigated how the news environment influences citizen engagement. Tracking the same individuals over time and simultaneously measuring changes in media content in their communities reveals that reductions in citizens’ political knowledge and participation follow declines in coverage about congressional elections. Secondly, separate research out of Oxford University focussing on the relationships between US county-level voter turnout and local news production showed decreasing local news production is associated with declining voter turnout, that

⁵ “*Journalism*”, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, HBO. First broadcast August 2016. Accessed here Apr 2019 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq2_wSsDwkQ

the relationship is waning over time and its negative effects on civic health extend beyond existing case studies of individual communities (Simpson 2018).

In July 2019, Australia's competition regulator, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), highlighted concerns about the loss of local news within the findings of its Digital Platforms Inquiry report. While much of the attention on release of the report was around the recommendations on regulation of Facebook and Google, the report also addressed the wider impacts of digital platforms on the supply of news and journalistic content across the country.

The ACCC's research highlighted concerns for the reduced production of particular types of news and journalism, "including local government and local court reporting, which are important for the healthy functioning of the democratic process."⁶

Further, it found that while "there may not be a large audience for such reporting, local court, local government and regional reporting perform an important role in exposing corruption, holding governments, corporations and individuals to account, as well as in the production and dissemination of knowledge."⁷

The ACCC analysed trends in the number and location of Australian local and regional newspapers that cover the news of the country's small towns, city neighbourhoods and suburbs and found that the net total of unique newspaper titles declined by 15 per cent between 2008-09 and 2017-18.⁸ During the ten years surveyed, a net total of 106 newspapers closed, decreasing the total number of Australia's local and regional newspapers by 15 per cent.

These closures, the ACCC said, left 21 local government areas without a single local or regional newspaper, including 16 local government areas in regional Australia. The number of journalists in the industry has also fallen in the decade to 2016, with the ACCC citing census data showing the number of Australians in journalism-related occupations fell by 9 per cent overall.

⁶ Australian Competition & Consumer Commission Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report 2019. Accessed here <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Digital%20platforms%20inquiry%20-%20final%20report.pdf>

⁷ Ibid. p 19.

⁸ Ibid. Appendix F, Local and regional newspaper closures: 2008-09 to 2017-18 pp 560-566.

The potential threats from the changes to news have been raised by a number of commentators and researchers in previous inquiries in Australia over many years. The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance submission to the ACCC inquiry estimated the total number of journalists' positions lost over the past six years as at least 3000.⁹ The Civic Impact of Journalism Project based at Melbourne University previously highlighted that the loss of jobs has led to the loss of "journal of record" functions – the continuous work of covering institutions including local governments – and is suffering most, particularly in rural and regional areas.¹⁰

Kristy Hess, Associate Professor of Communication at Deakin University, said Australia's market needs a better understanding of the news gaps, where news services are still flourishing, and how communities are filling information gaps.

"Obviously the main risks of news deserts is a failure to keep those in positions of power accountable, but also news and information that is reliable and easily accessible that keeps the social fabric of a community strong – that may be everything from births, deaths and marriage notices, to what's on, to controversial council decisions, court hearings and stories that highlight tragedy and triumph. All of this contributes to a healthy news ecology.

"I have serious concerns about the role of social media and its impact on existing local news providers, especially Facebook, because it is not accountable to local communities,"
(interview Hess 2019).

In July 2019, Deakin University announced it will be working with the Country Press Australia to look at the health of regional press, beginning with a wide-ranging study of small regional, newspapers before broadening to include other news media. It highlighted there has been no previous comprehensive Australian research assessing the health of the nation's established country press, with this new study's aim to develop ways to support country media survive in the digital era.¹¹

⁹ MEAA submission to the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission Inquiry Apr 2018, P 4. Accessed here <https://www.meaa.org/download/meaa-submission-to-the-accc-inquiry-into-digital-platforms/>

¹⁰ Public Interest Journalism Foundation submission to the Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, 2017. Accessed here https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Public_Interest_Journalism/PublicInterestJournalism/Submissions

¹¹ "Country Press Survival the focus of newly funded Deakin research", Deakin University Media release, 13 July 2019. Accessed here <https://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/media-releases/articles/country-press-survival-the-focus-of-newly-funded-deakin-research>

Chapter 2 Why Collaborate?

2.1 Overview - what the research is telling us

With the risks to democracy of a reduced local media presence, it's easy to become defeatist about the vast challenges of resources, budgets and commercial viability. Yet some commentators see positive signs (Radcliffe 2017), others say there's a need for a more nuanced discussion and some are looking at how smaller local news markets and publications with less than 50,000 readership facing their own challenges and opportunities, define success and innovation on their own terms (Ali et al. 2018).

Within Europe, for example, some local news organisations have shifted their editorial production and business practices to operate more effectively in the digital environment, with Jenkins and Nielsen quoting the German example of changing newsroom roles and structures with theme-focused coverage, while others in France are implementing paywalls and aiming to grow online registrations and subscriptions (Jenkins and Nielsen, 2018). There is also the discussion around the impact and potential of hyperlocal news in the wake of the withdrawal of commercial journalism from local communities, and their function and opportunities as community led community news organisations (Harte et al. 2017).

Over the last decade, some media organisations have found ways to work together to solve these problems. More journalists are working together than ever before, some with partner news organisations, some with technology companies, others with communities themselves. In 2017, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies identified 57 such partnerships (Kramer 2017). In May 2019, it was estimated by the Center for Cooperative Media which has been tracking collaborations said there are 94 such collaborations they're aware of involving in the US, involving 800 news organisations and 150 individuals.

In some instances, traditional competitors in some markets are acknowledging that for the sake of a story or specific project, it's worth working collaboratively between news and partner organisations. It's acknowledged that in some instances, a story will come about only if the resources and news gathering is shared and that it will have more impact through a shared distribution strategy.

Sarah Stonbely, Research Director at Montclair State University's Center for Cooperative Media has identified six types of collaborations. These can be temporary or ongoing, and can be separate, co-creating or integrated relationships. This covers one off stories and short-term projects/investigations, to high-end fully integrated ongoing partnerships. The collaborations had certain characteristics which were common across the board, in their ability to produce content by making better use of resources, sharing expertise, and improving the reach of reporting (Stonbely 2017).

Collaboration is not a new phenomenon, but the proliferation and study of their impacts, particularly in relation to opportunities for local journalism, is an emerging discussion (Jenkins and Graves 2019).

A 2019 Reuters Institute study looking at three European local collaborations found "collaborative approaches may offer a vehicle for producing high-quality accountability journalism at the local level". Participants interviewed for the Reuters report from these three European collaborations suggested collaborative approaches allowed them to report on topics they would not typically cover and there had been significant impacts on political, social and economic issues partly due to distribution strategies in which content is released simultaneously across platforms. However, it was not without its challenges in coming together from different organisational structures, approaches and skills levels, and those interviewed also expressed uncertainty about the sustainability of their efforts.

Experience in the US and UK shows public service and non-profit news outlets and broadcasters can take a leading role in the local news and collaborations space. In 2019, ProPublica as part of an ongoing focus on local accountability journalism announced the expansion of its Local Reporting Network "introduced to help create vital investigative journalism in communities where such stories would otherwise not be done" to 20 participating newsrooms.¹² National Public Radio (NPR) and member stations use collaborative reporting networks citing that public media can address these gaps and create a more civil, more connected society connecting journalists and sharing expertise and technology among staff.¹³ The involvement of public service broadcaster involvement in

¹² "ProPublica to further expand local reporting network with additional newsrooms", 27 Mar 2019. Accessed here Jun 2019 <https://www.propublica.org/atpropublica/propublica-to-further-expand-local-reporting-network-with-additional-newsrooms>

¹³ "Collaborative journalism: NPR and Member Stations Working Together to Cover America", 19 Jun 2018. Accessed here June 2019 <https://www.npr.org/sections/npr-extra/2018/06/19/621601708/collaborative-journalism-npr-and-member-stations-working-together-to-cover-ameri>

collaborations, including the BBC in the Local News Partnerships in the UK, and WHYY the public service broadcaster involved in the Resolve Philadelphia collaborative demonstrate examples working with commercial partners.

The introduction of collaborations into the news ecosystem provides an opportunity to assess the merits of collaborative approaches, particularly at the local level, where some partnerships are relatively new and experimental. The successes and challenges of these collaborations provide valuable lessons on the ways various organisations have responded to perceived gaps or issues in their respective markets.

It also gives rise to the question – is there potential for replication or adaptation by other markets?

2.2 Collaborations on the rise



Figure 1: Image courtesy of the Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair State University, US

The number of local news collaborations continued to rise particularly in the US in 2019, a trend identified by Stefanie Murray, the Director for the Center for Cooperative Media based at Montclair State University in the US. In May 2019, the Center held its third annual Collaborative Journalism Summit in Philadelphia featuring presentations from dozens of speakers from US and international news collaborations, including representatives from the city’s Resolve Philadelphia collaborative featuring its “Broke in Philly” initiative and the BBC’s News Partnerships in the UK, both of which will be discussed later in this paper.

Murray said the local focus represented a shift from past years where the spotlight had been on high profile international and national investigative collaborations including the Panama Papers, involving the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and Electionland, the ProPublica led coalition of newsrooms that covered problems preventing eligible voters from casting their ballots during the 2018 elections. In 2019, there are more distinctive elements of local collaborations.

“Public and non-profit media have led the way when it comes to news collaborations by far in the United States. They are the heart of local news collaborations in many, many, cities and regions in this country. And so that has also been a big part of the reason why we see more local news collaborations too here,” Murray said.

“This year’s conference had more of a thread of community engagement in collaborative projects, and almost a thread of advocacy, like a social movement behind some of the collaborations which we didn’t quite see or explore in previous years,” (interview Murray 2019).

2.3 Five themes for 2019

Summarising the emerging trends among US collaborations, Murray identified five themes.

<i>Five themes in US Collaborations</i>	
The number of local collaborations has risen substantially	The Center for Cooperative Media identified 94 News collaborations involving 800 organisations and 150 individuals (June 2019). Murray says it’s difficult to keep up tracking data because of the volume of new collaborations being formed.
The number of local newsrooms participating within a collaboration is increasing	Many collaborations have multiple partners. The Broke in Philly collaboration has over 20 partners. The California Reporting project involves over 30 news organisations which collect and analyse police misconduct records.
More people are being hired as collaboration managers	The employment of collaboration managers to keep the projects moving along with oversight of the daily logistics has increased as the numbers within a collaboration also grows, and as the focus moves from the question “Why should we collaborate?” to “How should we collaborate?”
More formally structured collaborations are being put into operation	MOUs and formal agreements between partners are growing, which cover scope, timeline, decision making, distribution, branding, financial issues, or IP/content ownership. Examples provided include New Jersey News Commons, the Detroit Journalism Co-operative, Bay Area Media in California and Granite State News Collaborative.
More projects based on shared data and documents	E.g. Solutions Journalism Network, an organisation advocating evidence-based reporting on the responses to social problems and Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting launching multiple collaboratives.

Figure 2: Five themes in US Collaborations

2.4 Emerging trends in collaborative journalism

The conversations throughout the conference reconfirmed some of what is already known – that collaborations at a local level are being established to serve a specific need in their market, provide focus for an issue or series of stories to add context to local coverage, or engage audiences where there's been an absence of, or recognised need for better coverage and civic engagement.

Murray has summarised the trends for the remainder of 2019.

1. Measuring impact is becoming an issue as organisations work out what measurables demonstrate success.
2. There are likely to be more collaborations in which local news works with community and ethnic media.
3. Better learnings will be shared about best practices into the future.
4. More local news collaborations with renewed focus on equitable partnerships specifically where small, community and ethnic media are sought out as partners and their contributions more equitably valued.

Many of the local collaborations attending this year's conference had received financial support available from various US foundations prepared to invest in these models and fund the initiatives. The Knight Foundation, The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, The Democracy Fund and the Geraldine R Dodge Foundation are among those providing grants to the Center for Cooperative Media and various collaborative projects in the US.

Given the culture of private philanthropy as an active source of funding for public interest journalism and its tax-deductibility status in the US, it is not surprising there are numerous examples of local collaborative initiatives.

In broadening the discussion of collaborative models, and whether they can be adapted in other news environments, it's worth considering that funding opportunities, including philanthropy and tax deductibility, look different across the markets examined. In the United Kingdom, which has a smaller not-for-profit news environment and where media businesses have different eligibility criteria for tax-deductible donations, collaborative efforts have required a different approach, as will be discussed.

Up until recently, philanthropy in Australia has been traditionally “modest” but has just received a significant injection of \$100 million from the new Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism & Ideas,¹⁴ while the country’s competition regulator has recommended changes to tax settings status to encourage philanthropic support. Whether this opens up opportunities for local news funding in the future remains to be seen.

The funding question for initiatives to support local news with or without philanthropic support is an important one, and the next chapters explore how several markets have responded.

¹⁴ Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism & Ideas website. Accessed here <https://jinstitute.org/>

Chapter 3 UK Local News Partnerships – BBC and UK regional news industry

3.1 Overview

In the UK, a national collaboration between the BBC, partners from regional news organisations and several smaller media groups, has attempted to address the democratic deficit with a return to scrutiny of local councils in regional boroughs through to major cities including London, Birmingham and Manchester. The size and scope of the project, which aims to produce public interest journalism for local and regional audiences, sustain local democracy, and improve skills in journalism, could provide learnings for other countries with concerns about local news.

Described in a 2018 Nieman Lab article as “one of the world’s largest collaborative journalism efforts”¹⁵ the project employs approximately 150 local journalists referred to as Local Democracy Reporters and in its first 18 months of operation up to July 2019 produced more than 86,000 stories which were made available to partners¹⁶ via a shared wire service.

Secondly, the partnership agreement also established a shared data unit based in Birmingham which provides content through examination of public datasets which provides content to the BBC, as well as media outlets which have signed up to receive content under the Local News Partnerships scheme. Those outlets include regional newspapers, television and radio stations.

Through the third pillar of the collaboration, the BBC offers content to its partners via a news hub.

The partnership has lessons for other international markets seeking to understand how the partnership operates and addresses the challenges of local coverage, with at least one other market in New Zealand announcing it will trial its own version of the Local Democracy Reporter scheme with eight reporters.¹⁷

¹⁵ George, T. “How the BBC built one of the world’s largest collaborative journalism efforts focused entirely on local news”, Nieman Lab, 31 Oct 2018. Accessed here Apr 2019 <https://www.niemanlab.org/2018/10/how-the-bbc-built-one-of-the-worlds-largest-collaborative-journalism-efforts-focused-entirely-on-local-news/>

¹⁶ List of UK News Partnerships partners <https://www.bbc.com/lnp/partners>

¹⁷ “NZ on Air and RNZ launch new Local Democracy Reporting”, RNZ website, 27 May 2019. Accessed here <https://www.rnz.co.nz/media/134>

3.2 Three elements of the UK News Partnerships are:

BBC Local News Partnerships



1. **Local Democracy Reporter Service** –144 journalists had been employed as Local Democracy Reporters in England, Scotland and Wales by July 2019, with Northern Ireland added to the service in the autumn of 2019 bringing the number to 150. The reporters, also referred to as Local Democracy Reporters, have been employed to report on councils and various local authorities. The journalists attend council and committee meetings, read through reports, and attend a range of meetings from statutory authorities including some hospital boards and fire authorities.
2. **Shared Data Unit** – based at the BBC in Birmingham, the BBC hosts regular intakes of reporters from partner commercial outlets, including Reach PLC, JPIMedia, Newsquest, Iliffe Media, Archant and ITV. The reporters train at the BBC for three months and work together on data journalism investigations with results shared and then tailored to local markets. As at July 2019, 16 journalists from outside the BBC had been trained at the BBC in Birmingham’s Shared Data Unit and 20 story packs had been produced. The Shared Data Unit sends out the data it has analysed alongside the story pack, which serves as a guide to a spreadsheet, as well as a toolkit of parts for the journalist to assemble a story pertinent to their region. The story packs include top lines, information about the methodology, images, quotes from key stakeholders and case studies.
3. **News Hub** – external partner media organisations use the news hub to access relevant regional BBC video content provided by the public broadcaster for use online.

In addition to the news partners employing Local Democracy Reporters, over 100 additional media organisations representing more than 900 news titles (print/online/broadcast) are now local news partners and can access shared content.

The funds for running the service and employing the reporters, come from the BBC with an £8 million per year 10-year commitment for the program, while partners employ and host the reporters as part of contracts with the scheme.

In summary: *“The BBC funds it, the market provides it and then we all use it,” (interview Barraclough 2019).*

3.3 Methodology

The methodology used in this section to review the UK New Partnerships included 25 interviews with representatives of partner organisations, editors and local democracy reporters employed by the scheme to address questions around the strategic and practical requirements in managing the various elements of the program and delivering the content.

Face to face or phone interviews were conducted between April and July 2019 with the strategic and managerial leads at the BBC, Reach PLC, Newsquest, JPI, Iliffe Media, and hyperlocal London publication the Hackney Citizen. Editorial managers and Local Democracy Reporters and former reporters in partner organisations drawn from locations in London, Birmingham, Kent, Oxford, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Cambridgeshire and Luton were also interviewed for this report (Interviews Appendix A). Comment was also sought from journalism academics and the UK National Union of Journalists.

3.4 Bringing together different newsroom cultures

The UK Local News Partnerships were formed in part to respond to the democratic deficit challenges in the local news industry already discussed in this report, though it took several years to bring the partnership to fruition.

Initial conversations were held at a local news summit in 2014 after which a small working group was formed between the BBC and commercial media interests including the larger regional publications represented by the News Media Association.

Head of BBC Local News Partnerships, Matthew Barraclough said the initial group was a self-selecting assembly of interested parties off the back of the conference. As well as the NMA, there were individual publishing companies (Reach, JPI, Newsquest, KM Group), National Association of Press Agencies, The Press Association, Local TV, ITV in Scotland, Bauer Media Radio, NESTA, C4CJ at Cardiff University and other academic researchers - "a broad cross section of UK local media."

Barraclough said at that time of those early discussions there had been some feeling in the broader media industry around the BBC's responsibilities and what could be done by the public broadcaster to help address the issues, even though he said it wasn't its job to "fix" local news.

Barraclough said a range of options were considered, with the BBC interested in sustaining a body of actual journalists on the ground, acknowledging at the same time the industry didn't want to fill the gap with "BBC people", so a wider approach was considered.

"What was starting to happen was any conference you turned up to, or whatever trade journals you read, you were getting articles or panels basically articulating this problem about the business model of local journalism in the UK and how it wasn't working. That sort of marked the turning point where we the BBC started to say, we have some responsibility - what can we do, given the way we're funded, and given the restrictions we operate in," Barraclough said.

"Local newsrooms have halved in ten years which is huge in terms of the impact on the industry. And no amount of clever working practices can compensate for that. You can use tools to work more effectively but if you have half the number of people you can't get out of the office half as much as you used to do and you certainly can't sit through four or five hour long meetings and come back with the stories.

"Google for instance supports journalism a lot, but it does it through tech. And there's only so much you can do through effectively tech structures and processes. In the end if you're missing people, if the problem is caused by there's not enough people to do this, you have to look at people being the solution," (interview Barraclough 2019).

Chair of the News Media Association/BBC Advisory Panel and Editor in Chief for JPI Media Jeremy Clifford said setting up a collaboration of this size took a lot of time and finding a compromise wasn't easy to get to – feeling at times like participating in Brexit negotiations.

The commercial aspects of organisations did not gel with BBC guidelines. This included previously established syndication deals, guaranteeing the partner organisations did not make money from the local council stories, and ensuring there would be no pre-roll advertising on news-sites in accessing BBC news hub content.

Clifford agreed establishing trust and relationship building was essential through the process as different newsroom cultures came together for the first time. He said they spent four or five months trying to set up the ground rules about who could be eligible for the partnership, who could bid for it, what level of skills were needed, how did they define what a qualified journalist was, the level of regulation required as a publishing company, and the level of scrutiny of the content in terms of the second set of eyes from an editor looking at the content to safeguard against mistakes.

“We needed to be convinced that the BBC actually wanted the scheme to be successful because actually at the beginning we were sceptical and didn’t know whether it would just be a two-year project.”

“There was lots of argument, lots of negotiation and lots of disagreements trying to find common ground,” (interview Clifford 2019).

The collaboration discussions broadened to independent digital and print media, and local and regional broadcasters. The Kent Messenger Group (now part of Iliffe Media) in south-east England hosts two Local Democracy Reporters. Prior to the News Partnerships, the Kent area was being well served by a political editor to cover top tier local authorities. Iliffe Media Editorial Director Ian Carter who was on the working group said while Kent wasn’t necessarily impacted by a democratic deficit, he joined the working group to help shape the scheme. He said the collaboration had broken down some perceived barriers that had previously existed between local news organisations and the BBC, and stories being produced now are valuable.

“We are serving readers in a way we would never have in the past. Never ever, ever did we cover every council meeting, and nobody ever did. You wouldn’t sit through them. You’d go to full council meetings you’d go to planning. If you’re asking Kent, it’s helped better serve readers, than address the democratic deficit,” (interview Carter 2019)

The partnership was established around specific agreed activities and eligibility to take part related to editorial standards. Barraclough said it was agnostic on platform, size or business model.

Guidelines were established around the inclusion of partners who were keen to bid to host one of the 150 reporters to cover councils in metropolitan, regional and rural areas, and those who would take part more broadly in the partnership to access content.^{18 19}

Those organisations eventually involved included established regional news organisations (Reach PLC/formerly Trinity Mirror, Newsquest and Johnston Press/now JPI Media) and smaller allocations to KM Media (now Iliffe Media), Archant, the London Evening Standard, a radio station on the Isle of Man and several hyperlocal media outlets in London, Lincolnshire and the Shetland Islands.

Citizen News and Media runs the hyperlocal Hackney Citizen, an established daily online and monthly print news publication covering the inner London borough of Hackney. Originally with just an editor and journalist, the operation from the one room office of the Hackney Citizen could not be more removed from the newsrooms of the larger media entities or the BBC. At the same time as winning a contract to cover the local council of Hackney, it also took on two neighbouring borough councils Islington and Camden and began online sites to surface the content for those areas.

Keith Magnum, Citizen News and Media Limited Director and Editor-in-Chief said council stories were already part of their remit and they worked hard to be included in the partnership though the procurement process was onerous for smaller operators.

“There were certain criteria you had to meet in order to be eligible for the tender. We had to show examples of our investigative scrutiny kind of work and we had absolutely heaps, and because of that because the fit was pretty much perfect,” Magnum said.

“What Ed (the Hackney reporter) does is basically what we were doing prior, but I think the scheme has been helpful for us, because it’s lent us some authority. The fact that it’s funded by the BBC has alerted politicians to take local journalism more seriously I think,” (interview Magnum 2019).

¹⁸ BBC Guidance Note for Local News Partnerships applications. Accessed here Jul 2019
https://www.bbc.com/lnp/guidance_notes_v7.pdf

¹⁹ BBC Criteria for Local News Partnerships. Accessed here Jul 2019
https://www.bbc.com/lnp/bbc_news_news_media_association_partnership_criteria_EE_v3.pdf

3.5 Content produced by the collaboration

Content is produced and shared in several ways under the partnership.

As part of the agreement, the council reporters aim to produce 40 pieces of content each per month – an average of two articles a day. The agreement with the suppliers ensures the reporter meets contractual expectations around productivity and quality, and that everything the reporter produces is made available at the same moment to all partners. Reporters work to a common editorial brief, and content passes through a second set of eyes at the point of production by an editor or second reporter. The agreement indicates that reporters are paid a predetermined minimum salary, and that reporters have minimum two years' experience. While there were senior reporters applying successfully for the roles, the early challenges in some markets was finding suitable applicants for the position, and in some instances less experienced journalists were hired.

It's expected the reporters will cover council meetings, read through the minutes and various reports and file as a matter of record. Hospital boards, fire and police authorities are among other statutory authorities also able to be examined. The reporters file a weekly diary highlighting the meetings they are planning to attend and the stories they are wanting to bring in for the week which can be viewed by the partnership members who can assess whether they need additional coverage to advance a story.

A single Local Democracy Reporter's story can be picked up and used as is by partner organisations in print or online, or several different versions can be created, including BBC radio news copy or on the versions BBC website. In some instances, it has been used as local radio content or for television broadcast.

The NMA's Jeremy Clifford said the volume of content is apparent, both in print and online.

"What we've seen is the reach and impact of those stories has completely justified the investment. Within the first six months 100 front page leads that were generated by local titles. I'm seeing a huge amount of reach online as well," (interview Clifford 2019).

Stories identified by Clifford as having good reach include an example by the Wakefield Local Democracy Reporter, which generated approximately 100, 000 page views and 95, 000 visitors

across the Wakefield Express and YEP websites²⁰ and an online article from one of the Local Democracy Reporters in Leeds which generated over 22,472 page views and 21,000 visitors.²¹

Reach PLC Local Democracy Editor Yakub Qureshi said there are some opportunities to try and look at what proactive journalism can be done alongside that core scrutiny including Freedom of Information requests or revisiting decisions in the context of how they're going to impact on communities.

“There might be a council planning meeting that might give you five or six separate stories to write up, there might be other times when a reporter needs maybe two or three days to speak to people, it may be that our reporters need a week or two to knock on doors or analyse FOI results they receive. That’s going to take more time, but that’s going to result in a more in-depth story,” (interview Qureshi 2019).

3.6 Impact of the UK Local News Partnerships

Local Democracy Reporters (LDRs) or former LDRs interviewed for this paper have cited numerous examples of stories they've uncovered through being present in the council chamber or at meetings, reviewing reports and agendas, using freedom of information requests, or direct follow up reporting from a story. Reporters provided examples which included themes of planning and development, council elections, social issues within communities, and good news stories. The examples below are a small representative sample of the information provided by the reporters.

Additional stories of impact highlighted through internal partnership awards presented to Local Democracy Reporters have included an investigation into police staff in Gloucestershire selling police tyres for personal financial gain, coverage of plans in the three councils around Newcastle north of England to introduce a congestion charge and an investigation in Leicestershire into how £900k of

²⁰ Wakefield Express website, “NHS asks for common sense after woman attends Pinderfields Hospital A&E with a broken fingernail”. Accessed here Jul 2019 <https://www.wakefieldexpress.co.uk/health/nhs-asks-for-common-sense-after-woman-attends-pinderfields-hospital-a-e-with-broken-fingernail-1-9901334>

²¹ Yorkshire Evening Post website, “Calls to reopen Leeds other centre train station”. Accessed here Jul 2019 <https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/traffic-and-travel/calls-to-reopen-leeds-other-city-centre-train-station-1-9682352>

money meant for local communities after new developments have been built had been returned unspent to developers.

Barracough said at the core of impact are the questions, what is the problem they are trying to fix, and have they fixed it? Impact has been difficult to measure partly because there are different types of impact being generated.

“We’ve got great anecdotal evidence about some of the things that have happened as a result of our reporters doing the work so you know people who’ve resigned or policies that have been changed, the government’s been petitioned to change the law and we know that that is because of the work of these reporters. So that’s the kind of impact we like.”

“Getting into the councils, telling the stories, distributing the stories and then we see the stories in print or on a website or we hear them on the radio we think actually that’s a huge impact because those stories weren’t necessarily there.”

Iliffe Media’s Ian Carter said at the moment, measurement is generally quantitative in terms of the number of stories, rather than qualitative. Of the content produced by his local democracy reporters he estimated 10% would be high impact, 50% would be reasonably high profile, and the rest of it would become filler material.

3.7 Local Democracy Reporter story examples

The following examples are a selection of published stories from four of the Local Democracy Reporters interviewed for this report.

i. Cambridgeshire – “Donald’s Law”

Josh Thomas was the Local Democracy Reporter for Cambridgeshire when he began investigating a loophole in law in which serving councillors do not have to be a resident of the constituency in which they serve. The councillor, Donald Adey served on a city and county council, but moved to Fife, Scotland, 400 miles away and skyped in occasionally.

“He (the councillor) wasn’t going to meetings, his colleagues had to pick up all the work he wasn’t doing, I think the more people you spoke to as well were outraged he was taking so much cash for not fulfilling any of his duties, and not being accountable on the phone if you tried to reach him,” (interview Thomas 2019).

Thomas doggedly pursued Councillor Adey for months for an interview, before getting on a train to Fife, confronted him and got an immediate concession in that he stood down from the City Council immediately,^{22 23} and later resigned from the County Council.

The story was picked up by online, press and television news nationally externally to the partnership. The Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge City Council wrote a cross party letter to the Secretary of State for Local Government calling for a change to the law. The BBC’s Matthew Barraclough said the proposed legislative changes are being referred to as “Donald’s Law”.

“Effectively this pressure on National Government is directly as a result of the LDR covering the story with real world impact: resignations, massive coverage bringing an issue to light and eventually the government itself being put under pressure to close a loophole,”
(interview Barraclough 2019).



Figure 3: (above) Cambridge News article by former Local Democracy Reporter Josh Thomas

Figure 4: (right) excerpt of BBC online article following councillor resignation.



²² Thomas, J. “Councillor living in Scotland quits one Cambridge post – but will keep £10k role,” Cambridgeshire Live website 18 Feb 2019. Accessed here <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/councillor-living-scotland-quits-one-15843914>

²³ BBC News 21 March 2019. Accessed here <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-47651642>

ii. Homeless in Hackney

Ed Sheridan is the Local Democracy Reporter for three London councils including Hackney, “a diverse borough and changing rapidly” through new money and tech giant Amazon moving in, while there’s the issue of “making sure people who’ve lived there all their lives aren’t left behind”.

The homelessness challenges faced by council and the community are a feature of one of Sheridan’s stories²⁴ which originated from a one-line mention in a report on mental health issues within temporary accommodation.

Pregnant mum – two given 24 hours by council to move 160 miles away or face eviction from homeless shelter

By Ed Sheridan, Local Democracy Reporter | May 16, 2019



Move On: Jess faces an uncertain future. Photograph: Pexels.

Jess is seven months pregnant and receiving prenatal care at a hospital in Hackney.

Both her children, a little baby and a seven-year-old, were delivered through caesarean section, so she is preparing to have her third the same way.

Town Hall to ‘reluctantly’ go on rehousing homeless families hundreds of miles away

Plan to relocate heavily pregnant mum at heart of Move-On Team revelations understood to have been withdrawn

ED SHERIDAN,
LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Hackney Council has said that it will be “reluctantly” forced to continue relocating homeless families in temporary accommodation hundreds of miles from the borough.

The Town Hall’s cabinet member for housing needs, Cllr Rebecca Remison (Lab, Kings Park) blames the policy on central government not matching local housing allowance, the rates used to calculate housing benefit to tenants

renting from landlords, to local rents.

The announcement comes after heavily-pregnant Jess revealed the 24-hour choice given to her family by the council between ‘intentional homelessness’ and relocation to Staffordshire.

The Citizen understands Jess has had the rehousing offer withdrawn by the Town Hall until October, when she will have recovered from her planned caesarean section. The council says the case is still under appeal.

Jess said of the reported withdrawal: “That was probably what I wanted from

them – I’m grateful for that, that I’m not going to that place. But at this point, with me and my kids, I just want to be settled. My daughter needs her own space, that’s the most important thing to me. When am I going to be settled with my kids?”

“My concern is that I’m still not going to be settled until I have this baby, and I don’t know if it’s going to come up again. I don’t want to think about it. I’m just trying to stay hopeful that something good will happen. I’m going to be having my baby in the next eight weeks now, but I know for now that I’m not going to be

moving miles away”.

Jess, soon to turn 34, had been living with her two children in one room in temporary accommodation since 2017 when the council’s Move-On Team approached her at the end of last year.

According to the council, Move-On officers become involved in residents’ cases if they indicate they would like to explore being moved out of the borough, or if they have spent “a long time” in temporary accommodation.

moving miles away”.

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Continued on page 4

Figures 5 and 6: Hackney Citizen homeless story examples, online 16 May 2019 and print June 2019

“In that report back in 2018 they mentioned The Move On Team, which we understand has been increasingly moving people great distances away from the borough as part of an attempt to get around the housing crisis.

“There wasn’t enough information there for it to be the story, but it certainly sparked something in my head that I’ll have to focus on that at some point.

²⁴ Sheridan, E. Hackney Citizen website 2019, 16 May 2019. Accessed here <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2019/05/16/pregnant-mum-two-hours-council-move-160-miles-away-face-eviction-homeless-shelter/>

“The report hadn’t been the story, but it led to the story. Because (a legal contact) was then able to put me in touch with one of his clients who was able to speak anonymously about her experience, which is essentially though you may have been in discussions about your situation for a couple of months, in the end you’re given 24 hours to decide. Are you going to move to Bradford four hours away or are you going to be considered intentionally homeless? She was 7 months pregnant when she was presented with a similar choice with her two kids living in the one room she was in,” (interview Sheridan 2019).

As at July 2019, Sheridan said the woman’s case was under review, and that the Move On Team is now called the Settled Homes Team.

iii. Examples from Wales

Anthony Lewis is the Local Democracy Reporter for two councils of vastly different sizes and issues, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil the smallest council in Wales. He said originally it was a shock to some of the councillors in Merthyr when he turned up at his first meeting. His stories have developed as he’s built up contacts and began using FOI requests.

“Probably the best one (FOI) I had was in relation to school exclusions in Merthyr which I put it in thinking it might not be brilliant but then it came back with the amount and the types of exclusions that they had and it is quite shocking really like punching and kicking teacher...knives ... and you think well you know some of these are primary schools as well,”²⁵ (interview Lewis 2019).

Local Democracy Reporter Matt Discombe for the Welsh capital Cardiff and the smaller Vale of Glamorgan pointed to stories including the deletion of 10 million emails by Cardiff Council, discovering 140 homeless people had been given one way train tickets out of the city and in Vale, a development proposal for a traveller park which caused concern from residents.²⁶ He said it had been proposed in a Cabinet report, but there’d been no publicity or press releases on it. Discombe

²⁵ Lewis, A. WalesOnline website 20 Sep 2018. Accessed here <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/reasons-pupils-merthyr-tydfil-were-15176683>

²⁶ Discombe, M. WalesOnline website updated 20 Sep 2018. Accessed here <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/23million-gypsy-traveller-site-could-15172991>

said after highlighting that issue, and subsequent residents' protests, the idea was taken off the table (*interview Discombe 2019*).

iv. An unexpected blow up around part-time workers in Kent

The first ever appointed Local Democracy Reporter Caitlin Webb covered Kent County Council for 18 months from January 2018. Webb's stories ranged from town planning to the NHS, and local council elections as well as good news stories about the formation of a migrant children's local football team. She said she has had regular appearances on BBC Radio Kent during her time as a Local Democracy Reporter.

As well as full council meetings Webb's remit has included various planning and minor committee meetings, which occasionally presented surprise stories. Webb was sitting in a "rather dry" personnel committee meeting for Kent County Council in June 2018 when the leader of Council made a comment in relation to staff appraisals, bonuses and part-time workers.²⁷

"They found out part-time staff were not getting these bonuses or getting them far less often than the full-time staff. That wouldn't have been that big of a story.

"But the council leader wanted to explain why this was happening. And the way he explained it, he said part time staff are just focussed on other things. They're not as focussed on their job which he said is understandable, as they have their families to care about. Which not only insulted the part time staff because they're there to work, it also insulted the full-time staff who apparently don't care about their family," (interview Webb 2019).

As the story gained traction, Webb said BBC Kent local radio's mid mornings program questioned the council leader, and amid denials the quotes were made and taken out of context, Webb was able to point to recordings of proceedings. Eventually with unions and the opposition condemning the comments, the council leader apologised, there was a review of the appraisal service and "HR have "gone out of the way to see what they're doing for full time and part time staff."

²⁷ Webb, C., Kent Online website updated 21 Jun 2018. Accessed here <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/part-time-staff-not-focused-on-jobs-184698/>

v. **Content Identifying national trends elevating local stories to national**

At the BBC, the partnerships team based in Birmingham is looking for trends in what's being filed by the local democracy reporters to help build aggregated stories that have national significance. In the lead up to the local council elections in Britain in May 2019, individual local democracy reporters were filing stories of how abuse and intimidation have led councillors to fear for their safety with one forced off the road, while another received death threats. Barraclough said a BBC journalist was then able to identify disparate strands and bring together the individual stories and follow up with interviews and case studies for a broader story on the BBC page.²⁸



Figure 7: BBC headline example of story aggregation

vi. **Partnerships Shared Data Unit**

One of the major tiers is the content facets of the collaboration is the production of data investigations by the Shared Data Unit, based at the BBC in Birmingham. Small groups of commercial partner journalists are trained at the BBC for three months, some of whom have had little experience with spreadsheets and datasets, but by the end have produced a data investigation in collaboration with the BBC.

²⁸ Prest, V. "Local elections 2019: Councillors and candidates 'fear for safety'," BBC News website 30 Apr 2019. Accessed here <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-47964574>

The information is garnered either through the examination of available public data sets, using Freedom of Information laws to source the data, or extracting content from web pages.

Analysis of data has resulted in stories as diverse as road conditions, waste collection, social housing.

This shared data journalism has been used widely across the BBC network e.g. 5LIVE and Radio 4 and generated more 650 local news stories across the UK, some of which have been front page news splashes.



Figure 8: Selection of newspaper front pages relating to data investigations, supplied BBC

BBC Shared Data Unit assistant editor Pete Sherlock said the additional benefit is commercial partners can then bring the skills back to their own newsrooms and train others.

“One of the key things we set out to do was train the next generation of data journalists and improve the standard of data journalism and data literacy in regional newsrooms,” (interview Sherlock 2019).

In relation to Sherlock’s point, Jeremy Clifford said two of JPI’s journalists who had gone through the BBC Shared Data Unit were now rolling out training modules to other staff as part of a data unit in their own stable. Newsquest’s Toby Granville said three of their journalists had now launched a local

data investigations unit within Newsquest and had been able to train, in turn another ten reporters across their news group.

Granville also identified additional benefits which included collaborations outside of the News Partnerships on various projects. He said as a consequence of the collaboration, Newsquest been able to work more closely together on other projects with JPI and Reach, outside of the partnership with the BBC. For example, a series of stories “One North” highlighted the importance of a train service across the north of the country which would “never would have happened had we not got together.”

3.8 Challenges and future of the scheme

With a collaboration of this size there have been teething issues and ongoing challenges. A 2017/18 BBC annual review of the Local News Partnerships pointed to some of these, including reporters’ stories not being shared in a timely fashion, use of reporters’ content by a supplier ahead of its publication to the other partners, insufficient productivity, incorrect attributions and attempts by partners, including the BBC to directly commission a reporter.²⁹ Barraclough said the initial challenges had been largely addressed but as in a partnership as large and complex as this would always require active maintenance.

Barraclough said the most obvious early challenge was communicating the concept to hundreds of people involved at every level of the organisations involved, which involved relaying the concept many times over.

“I think if I had my time over again I’d focussed a lot more on the communications inside the organisations because they needed to get a whole bunch of people on board and to understand the concept first before it works smoothly and I think it’s taken quite a while because we were learning as we went along. There was no template...everything was done from first principles.”

²⁹ BBC Local News Partnerships Annual Review 2017/18. Accessed here http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/reports/pdf/local_news_partnerships_annual_review_2018.pdf

The UK National Union of Journalists acknowledged Local Democracy Reporters are doing a good job but said some of its members had indicated issues such as take up of material produced, pay advancement, and being asked to do work outside the scope of the scheme. The NUJ's national newspaper organiser Laura Davison said it had reservations about what it said was the use of the BBC licence fee to fund the scheme.

“The work they (the reporters) are doing is really important in terms of covering council meetings and I think doing that work is critical from a democratic point of view and from a news point of view. They’re absolutely filling a gap that was there and was getting worse in terms of the reductions we’ve seen in local newsrooms.”

“We have had concerns about the fact that the major publishers who are benefiting from the scheme have been reducing their own staffing. We haven’t seen a moratorium on redundancies,” (interview Davison 2019).

Cardiff University Professor Richard Sambrook also pointed to the “strategic worry” that newspaper groups might be using it as free subsidy to save their own staff costs. He also said while it was good news there were more reporters in council meetings covering what’s happening on the ground, the number of 150 does not cover all councils in the UK.

Toby Granville at Newsquest said the BBC has been strict on making sure that if the publishers had appointed someone internally to the role, they needed to show they’d been backfilled to avoid being involved in any editorial restructuring or cost savings.

“We’ve had to make sure that we provide a contract of somebody who comes in to the business to make sure that we’ve proven that it’s not been used for cost-savings that we are replacing like for like if we’re doing internal promotions into the role,” Granville said.

The NMA’s Jeremy Clifford said the introduction of Local Democracy Reporters is not a solution to the structural challenges the news industry has, whether that be in the UK or elsewhere in the world. He said for many years they have been reducing the number of staff in their newsrooms and for a number of reasons, mainly driven by the economics of the industry and “sadly, that will continue to be the case.”

“Local Democracy Reporters certainly help to provide a degree of public service journalism that has been reducing - and this has been recognised not only by Dame Frances Cairncross

but also by the Department of Culture. However, they are not serving as a direct replacement of staff being lost from our newsrooms - this is something the BBC has been very keen to monitor.

“The future certainly lies in more collaborations, such as the BBC and the Facebook Community News Partnership, where all sorts of funding is provided to ensure the sustainability of good quality local journalism.”

Local Democracy Reporter Nathan Briant covers several councils including Oxfordshire County Council and was previously a council reporter with the Oxford Times and Oxford Mail, before taking on the local democracy role. He said from his perspective Oxford had been covered well previously and it was difficult at the beginning in transitioning from one role to another with a different remit and being panned in by the guidelines. However, he said there is more time now to do some of the stories and part of his general duties have been removed to allow him to focus on councils. He felt there's also a potential for the BBC to take more of the content produced by Local Democracy Reporters and use it more widely into the future.

Some reporters have discussed the challenge of attending meetings if they're held on the same night, or in covering councils which are some distances from each other. Caitlin Webb in Kent said she had a large county and it was often challenging to get to everything as the council meetings were held in many locations. Her observation too is that every office uses their LDR very differently.

“The nuts and bolts of our jobs is to go to the council meetings, report what is said, and if you have spare time then do features and do FOIs. Doing the actual extra research when you have time,” Webb said.

“But some Local Democracy Reporters have fewer meetings, or they just don't go to as many. So they do a lot more going to see residents which is what their contract holder might appreciate more. But this is the discrepancy.”

Alice Richardson who covers the eastern London boroughs of Waltham and Redbridge said she loves what she does and feels it makes a difference, with a “monster spread” of stories in her patch, including sensitive terrorism issues where she's spent time with members of community. She said travelling late at night after meetings could be an issue, as reporters needed to be fairly autonomous

and it could also be isolating if they wanted to be able to bounce ideas off people and check angles. She said sometimes it was hard to work out whether the stories were getting traction in the community, for example if a story was tweeted and only had a small response. Alice said the network of London Local Democracy Reporters had worked together to give each other support.

“Whilst we all cover individual areas of London, we do have cross over in our experiences, we do tend to support each other individually, some of the older reporters will help me out with issues I’ve had or vice-versa,” (interview Richardson 2019).

The issue of readership was discussed with several interviewees in trying to determine the audience for the content. Editor of WalesOnline Paul Rowland said they’ve been working to ensure the council stories coming through have good treatment, “as the content doesn’t help anything unless people are reading it”. He said it is also about accepting that some of this content will have a lower level of readership than we would otherwise customarily think was desirable.

“We also need to understand as digital publishers particularly that just because something isn’t going to be one of our best read stories of the day doesn’t mean we shouldn’t use all our digital storytelling skills to try and maximize the level of interest in that story and really understand what it is about the story that’s going to help people engage with it and understand that it’s important to them.” (interview Rowland 2019).

Max Eckersley, Managing Editor of the Hackney Citizen, said that while the scheme has been hugely positive, particularly for a paper whose focus was already on local democracy, there was room for improvements. He suggested more focus in the record-keeping and feedback provided to partners, an emphasis on quality of stories and not just quantity, the need to expand coverage to services such as police and hospitals, and opportunities to fund LDRs in more boroughs. There was a lot of travel time between the three districts, he said, “and that obviously reduces the time you’re actually writing stories and being at meetings”.

As the collaboration evolves, there have been conversations around whether the program will expand. Northern Ireland coverage is rolling out in 2019 which will finalise the allocation of 150 journalists. The News Media Association would like to see a total of 200 reporters to cover the top-tier authorities which was part of the original agreement if it could demonstrate the value of the service and the additional funding could be sourced.

The commitment to funding the program from the BBC was for 10 years, though suppliers will need to rebid for their contracts in 2020. This could potentially open the doors for new suppliers which may include more hyperlocal media. The Independent Community News Network at Cardiff University in Wales, which was formed in 2018 to provide a voice to hyperlocal news, has had discussions with the BBC around better inclusion of hyperlocals in the next round. Matt Abbott, Communications and Project Officer for ICNN said small media outlets are well placed to take part in the scheme and that they could provide quality coverage.

“Smaller publications can have serious reach, which is not immediately apparent. Deeper connections come from those hyperlocals embedded in the community,” (interview Abbott 2019).

The BBC’s Matthew Barraclough said the question is, how can the program expand without asking more from the BBC license fee payers themselves. He said for the BBC to accept money from another organisation to deliver a project under its own auspices, is a mine field. Hence the BBC has been looking at alternative structures for this project.

“We’re looking at different ways of structuring it, because it would allow us to access more funding. What we’re saying is, our commitment to this is ongoing. So that level of spend of up to £8 Million a year that’s not going anywhere.

But what if that was just the beginning of the funding? What if I could get other organisations to match-fund that,” Barraclough said.

Figure 9 – Table summarising key points from UK Local News Partnerships

<i>UK Local News Partnerships</i>	
Why collaborate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners decided a consistent large-scale approach needed to address the democratic deficit gaps in UK local authorities reporting • 2 tier problem – bodies on the ground + tech solutions, with the collaboration structured accordingly in response • Collaboration allows all partners to share the content through a wire service and local data investigations
Funds required to run collaboration at scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to £8 Million provided annually by the BBC including wages induction training and secondments to Shared Data Unit • BBC in Birmingham provides four staff to manage the partnership, and three for the shared data unit • Existing resources within partners to support editorially
Content produced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86, 000 local stories in 18 months, 20 data investigations • print/online copy, BBC news and radio copy, and occasionally elevates to TV broadcast • Many themes emerging – e.g. planning, spending of public funds, good news stories. FOI requests being used
Editorial oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily oversight of council content = commercial partners • Data investigation = BBC
Trust and partnership maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial challenges bringing newsroom cultures together • Months of negotiations, e.g. initial meetings in 2014. The first data investigation 2017 reporters employed 2018 • Ongoing meetings continue between partners to maintain the collaboration
Impact and reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts include decisions reversed, change of policy • However, impact not easily measured can be subjective • Work to ascertain how well read the majority of stories are and treatment to ensure it connects with community
Selection of challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some reporters find difficulty juggling several councils and getting to all meetings as per the remit • Some criticism on use of BBC funding (e.g. licence fee) and claims of subsidising the industry • While there are additional reporters specifically for councils, some publishers still are facing cuts to workforce
What is the future/sustainability of this program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BBC committed to 10 years of funding • Future funding avenues being explored • The News Media Association would like to see more journalists to cover top tier authorities • Questions on whether courts should be part of the democracy remit

Chapter 4 Three collaboration examples from the UK and US

4.1 Overview

This chapter looks at three collaborations which provide different examples of how they can form in response to a certain perceived need for better local coverage. Firstly, there is an example of collaboration from the UK, the Bureau Local, which uses data to drive investigations, and similarly to the BBC News Partnerships has focussed one of its themes on local government. The second example is from an established collaboration from the US, Resolve Philadelphia, which has 20 partners working to address the specific theme of economic justice, using a solutions journalism approach. The third, Chicago's Chi.vote, is an example which indicates that collaborations can grow quickly and organically through a perceived need in covering a local government election.

4.2 Collaborative example UK – Bureau Local

The Bureau Local is a collaborative, UK-wide network of journalists based in London, which formed within the Bureau for Investigative Journalism. Launched in 2017, and funded chiefly through the Google News Initiative, it aims to support, reinvigorate and innovate local investigative reporting in the UK *“built on the belief that holding power to account is crucial for a just and equitable society... both local and national journalism are integral to that accountability.”*³⁰

Its investigations are generally data-driven, with the information and data then adapted by local journalists in their individual markets to help them figure out how the issue affects their community. The Bureau Local's investigations are published by local and national press partners, and all reports are released on the same day for impact and to spark discussion.

Director of the Bureau Local, Megan Lucero said using data as part of the investigation is the opportunity to provide valuable localised evidence at scale to help communities fight for better lives.

“We would never be able to raise the money to put boots back on the ground and reporters back into the spaces where the newsroom had collapsed. So how do you do that more efficiently? Instead of having every single newspaper all investigating the same crime stats actually you centralise some of that analysis, you centralise some of that data processing,”
Lucero said.

³⁰ Bureau Local website <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/local>

“Fragmentation does not allow for systemic insight. If you are only looking at things individually you may not necessarily recognise that there are systemic patterns to what is happening. There’s recognition that collaboration can bring both greater efficiency, greater shared resource, thinking about it as an infrastructure for the ecosystem,” (interview Lucero 2019).

The Bureau Local pursues multiple projects each year with a project team of a journalist, a tech lead and a community organiser working with a wider ecosystem of journalists and non-journalists.

Lucero said two years after forming, there are now a thousand-members as part of its network and only 200 identify as journalists. The rest are citizens, doctors, teachers, lawyers, designers, coders, and people from all different backgrounds that they say help them “commit acts of journalism”.

Jenkins and Graves have studied the Bureau Local and found that their investigations are typically developed by the central team, which shares data, reporting guides, and other resources – including cash grants – so network members can find local stories.³¹ The German Correctiv.Lokal has adopted the Bureau Local’s model as a network for collaborative local journalism.

The Bureau Local staff tracks and shares the impact of investigations with its network via its newsletter, Slack channel, and blog posts, while “hack days” allow network members to learn about gathering and analysing large data sets.

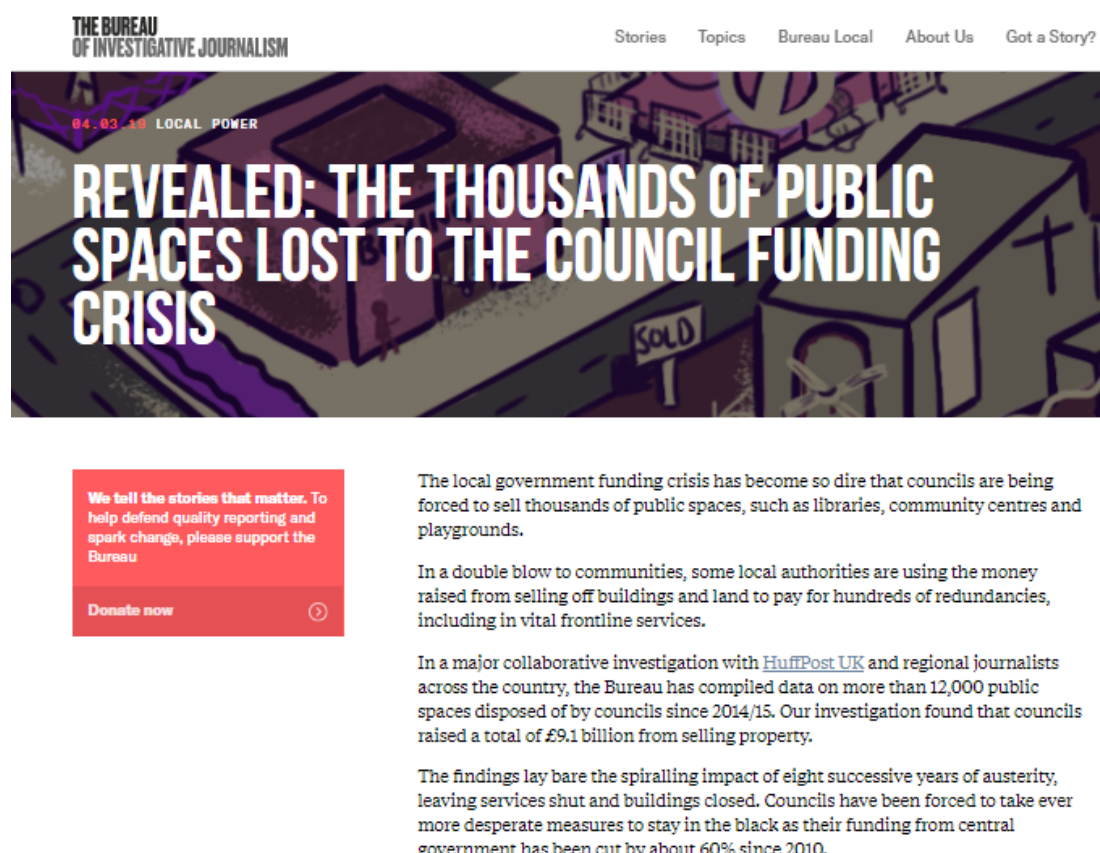
Bureau Local reports have found:

- Some of the smallest councils in England have built up huge debts by buying supermarkets, business parks and offices, tying the future of their public services to the uncertainty of the property market (2018).
- The local government funding crisis has become so dire that councils in England are being forced to sell thousands of public spaces, such as libraries, community centres and playgrounds. In a double blow to communities, some local authorities are using the money raised from selling off buildings and land to pay for hundreds of redundancies, including in vital frontline services (2019).
- An average of 11 homeless people a week have died in the UK within an 18-month period - a total of 800 homeless deaths documented in full for the first time (2019).

³¹ Building the Bureau Local: a user guide. Open source template. Accessed here June 2019
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VVJnVaHK8LuWXnwVcvVEZnkghvLla064vulUrMH-scU/edit>

In respect of Bureau’s ongoing work on local government, Lucero said one of the initial exercises was a proactive look at 360 English Councils budgets which was a logistical challenge as every single council held their data and budgets individually, and it required separate pulling down of all the data sets. This was followed by a round table of independent bodies and community interest groups, followed by a collaborative reporting day including university collaboration.

“We said we have the potential to actually have greater impact by producing in that time period what was about to be cut. Give our communities and mobilise our communities around the opportunity of knowing that information ahead of their budgets being locked rather than doing retrospective reporting.”



The screenshot shows the top of a web page for 'THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM'. The navigation menu includes 'Stories', 'Topics', 'Bureau Local', 'About Us', and 'Got a Story?'. The main headline is 'REVEALED: THE THOUSANDS OF PUBLIC SPACES LOST TO THE COUNCIL FUNDING CRISIS' with a sub-headline '04.03.19 LOCAL POWER'. Below the headline is a red call-to-action box that says 'We tell the stories that matter. To help defend quality reporting and spark change, please support the Bureau. Donate now'. The article text begins with 'The local government funding crisis has become so dire that councils are being forced to sell thousands of public spaces, such as libraries, community centres and playgrounds. In a double blow to communities, some local authorities are using the money raised from selling off buildings and land to pay for hundreds of redundancies, including in vital frontline services. In a major collaborative investigation with [HuffPost UK](#) and regional journalists across the country, the Bureau has compiled data on more than 12,000 public spaces disposed of by councils since 2014/15. Our investigation found that councils raised a total of £9.1 billion from selling property. The findings lay bare the spiralling impact of eight successive years of austerity, leaving services shut and buildings closed. Councils have been forced to take ever more desperate measures to stay in the black as their funding from central government has been cut by about 60% since 2010.'

Figure 10: Bureau Local investigation on the sale of public spaces, libraries, community centres and playgrounds

One of the Bureau Local’s partners which localised the March 2019 Council spending investigation was the hyperlocal news collective, the Bristol Cable. The Cable is a media co-operative with over 2000 members who own a share and have a say in the stories that will be covered. The Bristol Cable publishes a free quarterly magazine and runs a regularly updated website.

Adam Cantwell-Corn, a co-founder and co-ordinator of the Bristol Cable said in most cases where they collaborate with the Bureau Local, the Bureau moots, develops and does the heavy lifting on the data side, and then invites local journalists to be part of the story, with some basic terms and conditions on running the story together and giving the Bureau credit.

“Within the data there was quite a strong Bristol angle and I worked quite closely with the Bureau journalists to do the contextual research and data gathering that was jumping off the initial data work that they’d done... so it might be the context of the library being sold and was there any reaction to it, who were the local voices who would be quoted,” (interview Cantwell-Corn 2019).

Cantwell-Corn said while they may have potentially produced a similar investigation by themselves, they probably wouldn’t have done so due to the time it would have taken to devote to the investigation.

In terms of addressing the democratic deficit, Cardiff University Professor Richard Sambrook, who is also on the Board of Bureau Local said there was an opportunity for the collaboration to exploit data that is now publicly available to newsrooms who may not have the skills or capacity to understand it or analyse it.

“Bureau Local is providing that expertise to allow local newsrooms to understand data about institutional performance or public service performance in a way they wouldn’t otherwise be able to do. So that’s surfacing stories that are of public interest that are out there to be had otherwise go unreported.”

The long-term work of this collaboration, as with many in the local news space, hinges on its business model, as identified by Jenkins and Graves. The Bureau Local operates with the support of grant funding from the Google Digital News Initiative and the Engaged Journalism Accelerator among others. There is then a sustainability question and whether paid memberships are an option. More broadly, Lucero acknowledges there is a conversation beyond the Bureau Local in terms of the market solutions for the local news ecosystem.

“We’re helping stimulate and fill in a lot of gaps because of the market but the market problems are still there,” (interview Lucero 2019).

The Bureau Local’s approach of data led investigations around a theme, using journalists and non-journalists to collaborate is fairly new and worth review into the future.

The next collaboration to be examined is similarly theme led, though around one specific topic, the partners can work separately in many instances on their story before providing to the group, and with the advantage of a co-ordinator to maintain the partnership.

4.3 Collaborative example US - “Resolve” Philadelphia

Summary: 20+ Philadelphia news outlets reporting on economic justice issues and solutions to poverty under a banner of stories labelled “Broke in Philly”.

Broke in Philly is a project produced by the Resolve Reporting Collaborative, an initiative of Resolve Philadelphia which launched in April 2018 aiming to provide “in-depth, nuanced and solutions-oriented reporting on the issues of poverty and the push for economic justice in Philadelphia.”³² The Resolve group of more than 20 news partners aims to produce solutions reporting and community engagement activities that address urgent social challenges. The solutions journalism approach focuses not only on the problems but the responses to social issues as well.

The organisations include large legacy media organisations including the Philadelphia Inquirer, public television/radio and digital news organisation WHY?, Broadcast partner NBC 10/Telemundo, as well as community and ethnic media, four outlets of which provide content other than English, and two universities. It is an ongoing, co-creating collaboration with no fixed end date, where the collaborative news partners talk and meet regularly as well as communicate via Slack, emails and calls.

By June 2019 there had been 365 stories produced under the Broke in Philly Banner. Each news partner works largely on their individual stories around the economic justice theme then share the content via the Broke in Philly website to be used by the other partners. While the content is housed on the website it is linked back to the media outlet’s home page as well as shared on social media branded as “Broke in Philly” content.

Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, Co-executive director of Resolve Philadelphia and editor of the Broke in Philly reporting initiative, said the collaboration has changed the Philadelphia news ecosystem with a critical mass of local media working on what is arguably the central challenge of the city. The economic justice theme was chosen after putting it out to the community for feedback on what they should be focussing on.

³² Broke In Philly website <https://brokeinphilly.org/>

The idea was to find an issue that wasn't already being well covered, could be tackled from many angles and where the collaboration partners could value add with solutions. The group received 400 responses, with about 30 ideas including poverty. Friedman-Rudovsky said with this particular issue, there were many neighbourhood and local perspectives that that outlets and reporters could bring to it, and previously reporting in the market had been generally focussed on the national picture. She said there had been a tendency for people at a local level to say they don't have control over big economic measures that the federal government uses, so that they feel they can't make change.

"This is really the most comprehensive look on a local level of what (are) our solutions to poverty and ways to spur economic mobility at a local level. We try very hard to make sure the reporting that's being done is mainly on what policies, programs and approaches within a city or within this municipality or at most at a state level are actually working," (interview Friedman-Rudovsky 2019).

Stories produced by WHYH for example include several in the series the collaborative undertook called the High Cost of Being Broke focussing on issues ranging from transportation, to dental care. Eugene Sonn, Audio Editor for WHYH says the collaborative is gaining steam in terms of the number of people involved and the quality of the journalism that they're able to put out as a consequence of it.

"The collaboration leads to much better variety in terms of different people looking at the same related subject matter from very different points of view (from) journalism outlets that have better connections in different communities. All those things lead in my opinion to a better variety of stories," (interview Sonn 2019).

Sonn said members of the collaborative develop story ideas both together and individually. Series are coordinated together, and individual assignments within WHYH are posted on Slack for transparency. He said the collaboration manager also connects reporters with ideas she or others have that are not assigned as she knows the strengths of various outlets and can find people well-suited to an idea. To address questions and challenges that come up when developing a story, the group talks at monthly in person meetings and through email and Slack.

4.3.1 Building on previous collaboration “Re-entry”

“Broke in Philly” was not the first major foray into collaborations for many of the partners now involved in the Resolve Reporting Collaborative. Resolve was born out of a previous Philadelphia news collaboration which started in 2016 and ran for almost a year, involving many of the current partners and was a project of the Solutions Journalism Network. That first initiative from the Philadelphia partners was named “The Re-entry Project” and focussed on prisoner re-integration with communities, producing 200 stories.

Sonn said in terms of results for that initiative for his organisation, WHY? achieved focus for this very specific issue.

“It helped the quality of the stories (and) it helped us on unfamiliar turf do reporting better. I think that leads to more productivity. I also feel like having that supportive community of people who are reporting on the same subject matter also leads to you being much more inclined to report more on it. And so, I think it improved our in-house capabilities as well.”

Sonn said that the structure is now set up so that most pieces are published by the entity producing them, and then everyone can replicate it afterwards, avoiding the publishing time headache in coordination with partners. When they’ve done true co-reported stories and tried to roll them out simultaneously the process takes a lot longer and “rarely worth the payoff” to make deadlines meet. Sonn said that of the challenges in setting up the collaboration, the respective internal structures and bureaucracy within different organisations is one which can be “just mystifying” to work around, though strong relationships helped to ultimately deliver the content.

“Everyone’s editorial process is different. You don’t know how many editors it has to go through with each place and then you’re debating we want this to be published on Sunday in the newspaper, what we want is it to be on Friday morning on the radio, or we want to be online at this date and that day.”

“You can do some of those (co-ordinated release date stories) sprinkled through the year, because it takes so much effort to coordinate that whole backend process to come to the finish line at the right time at the same time.”

4.3.2 Broke in Philly's Impact in Philadelphia

As at June 2019 there had yet to be an extensive review of for the Broke In Philly initiative, however Friedman-Rudovsky highlighted examples of impact, including an examination of library branch operating hours showing that those in communities with high poverty rates often close earlier and more often than those in areas with low poverty rates. The public libraries were not just for taking out books but for Internet access for heated spaces in the winter for air-conditioned spaces in the summer. Following that reporting, two months later, staffing levels were improved and library hours were increased.

Friedman-Rudovsky said there were opportunities for this collaboration to help promote a more democratic Philadelphia. In the lead up to the 2019 Philadelphia Council elections, the Resolve initiative approached the council candidates with a series of questions on the poverty theme, including specific steps they would take to expand jobs, public transport and small business incentive. In the run up to the election it was meant to aid voters who wanted to understand better where candidates stood on issues that relate to economic mobility, and the additional value in the long run is to be able to go back and ask if those promises were upheld.

The outcomes point to better engagement of under-served audiences. Friedman-Rudovsky suggests that when there is a better flow of news and information particularly to communities that have not been priorities for mainstream media historically, that feeds inherently to more civic and democratic engagement i.e., the more people know, the more they're eager to get involved.

“This is where solutions journalism comes in because part of the premise is, and there's been some research to back this up, it inspires people to action, inspires people to want to be more involved in making change and making their own lives better and the lives of those around them better because you're not just depressing people and waiting and waiting on them. So, I think the solutions component is key there,” (interview Friedman-Rudovsky 2019).

4.3.3 Summary of key points

Figure 11: Key points identified by Resolve Philadelphia in forming and maintaining its collaborative

<i>Resolve Philadelphia – Summary of key points</i>	
Funding	Dedicated outside funding has been necessary to run a collaboration of this size. The shared fund is accessed by partners e.g. for a freelancer or a community event. Main funding from the Knight Foundation and Lenfest Institute for Journalism.
Structure	Ownership by reporting partners is key - they are the decision makers. An independent project editor was employed to keep the project moving, to facilitate discussions/meetings, and to ensure all parties are engaged equally.
Editorial focus	Topic matters. The Resolve initiative identified an over-riding theme of economic disparity which fit the criteria of being timely, pertinent, clearly defined, mitigate competitiveness added value with collaboration allows for community engagement. The initiative does not just report on an issue, but engages newsrooms in identifying solutions, which helped bring everyone together.
The role of trust	Collaboration requires trust. Trust comes from long-term relationship building. People had to learn to trust each other and the co-ordinator of the project.
Equity versus equality	The question asked within the collaboration - How do we as a group respect each other's contribution, irrespective of size of organisation? The media partners range in size. Resolve partners recognise the power dynamics and flexibility to ensure each partner is valued for their individual strengths.

4.4 Collaborative example US – Chi.vote

Ten Chicago news and community organisations collaborate to provide a comprehensive voting guide to support understanding of the candidates in the 2019 local elections.

The Chi.vote collaborative from Chicago demonstrated collaborations can also take place in a short amount of time around a specific event. In 2019, the Chicago municipal election threw up a challenge to several news organisations and community groups wanting to help voters gain a better understanding of who they were actually voting for. Apart from the Chicago Reporter, the organisations included the Better Government Association, research and advocacy organisation Reform for Illinois, a neighbourhood news group Block Club Chicago, and Univision Chicago catering for the Spanish language audience.^{33 34}

Chicago Reporter editor-in-chief Fernando Diaz said for the people of Chicago, it was an historic election with more than 200 candidates running for mayor, all 50 seats on the city council, city treasurer and clerk. The Chicago Reporter felt there were too many races to meaningfully cover, yet they wanted to produce a comprehensive voting guide to give voters information on every ward, every race, with a 10-week turnaround before the poll.

The Chi.vote collective was formed from an original group of five small media and civic organisations which joined together to address a perceived need for voter information. Five others joined shortly after.

The newsrooms had different strengths and skills and the idea was to ensure the collaboration didn't duplicate efforts, as the same time as amplifying each members' work without overwhelming the user.

According to Diaz and Chicago Reporter's digital reporter Asraa Mustufa, the flash collaboration produced several benefits, but also threw up challenges.

On the positive side, collaborating allowed the news outlets to work out the best way of simplifying complex content for audience. Some content was produced specifically for the Chi.vote site, and

³³ "These Chicago News Orgs worked together to create a collaborative voting guide", Solution Set, 2 May 2019. Accessed here <https://www.lenfestinstitute.org/solution-set/2019/05/02/these-chicago-news-orgs-worked-together-to-create-a-collaborative-voting-guide/>

³⁴ "How 10 Newsrooms Built a Chicago Voter Guide, Together", 31 Jul 2019. Accessed here <https://source.opennews.org/articles/chi-vote-guide/>

new voters were offered a ward lookup tool with frequently asked questions, while already engaged voters could access detailed info on each candidate, articles, stances organized by issue. The partners then separately produced content on their own sites and linked to it on the guide; it was what Diaz described as a “hub and spoke” mode. By voting day in February 2019, Chi.vote had been visited by more than 50,000 unique visitors (equivalent to about 10% of people who turned out in the general election). The content was fully available in English and Spanish, allowing the team to reach a broader audience.

In terms of budget, Chi.vote showed with a project of this size, and good will, it can be done cheaply. Working with existing resources, the cost was also low – the Django-based CMS was created in house with existing staff to easily and quickly upload articles. It cost \$30 US to register Chi.vote domain, and mostly took staff time, with longer hours factored in. Additionally, the project did not require an independent person to oversee the collaboration, with partners working directly with each other.

Size can matter in terms of a collaborations with smaller newsrooms. Diaz said the additionally effort required to commit to a collaboration for a smaller entity means other stories may not get covered. Irrespective of equity and equality, the more bodies to put behind a collaboration can help. Diaz said if it’s a small organisation with five journalists or a smaller one with two taking part, there needs to be acknowledgement of what can be offered within the limits of the resources.

The question now for those collaboration is whether this short-term project could lead to longer-term opportunities. The learnings identified by the Chi.vote collaborative was the opportunity to test both its ability to for the Chicago Reporter to effectively partner and what could be collaboratively accomplish.

“The analogy I was using is it's like dating and getting married. A lot of the folks in Philadelphia (at the collaborations conference) and the way that they were talking about their collaborations are those are long term marriages with a marriage counsellor built in. Whereas what we were trying to do is basically say let's date for right now for this one party and then see like if we like each other at the end,” (interview Diaz 2019).

Chapter 5 Can the models be applied to other markets, including Australia?

The models of collaborative journalism being used in the UK and US have been already adapted by some local media markets.

Resolve Philadelphia has highlighted similar collaborations in the US including Pittsburgh and Charlotte, while in the UK the Bureau Local's model, which is made available as an open sourced template, has been adapted for a German market through Correctiv.Lokal. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the UK News Partnerships model will be trialled in a \$1 Million pilot scheme in New Zealand through an alliance of publishers, RNZ and NZ On Air, with eight local democracy reporters. The BBC said the News Partnerships model is being explored by other parts of Europe and watched by North America.

The question on whether any of the collaborative approaches can be adapted by local media in Australia is challenging. While there have been a number of shared investigations between various news organisations nationally and may well be instances where local media having worked together on specific projects, the opportunity for more formalised ongoing local collaborations remain open for exploration.

What underlines the need is the urgent public and policy discussions around the future of public interest journalism at the local level in Australia (Hess and Waller forthcoming 2019) with an unstable 12 months in the Australian media landscape, following job losses and ownership changes. On the one hand there is anecdotal evidence that regional news sites in some communities are gaining digital traction and the country's largest publisher in Australia News Corp has initiated digital offerings in five regional markets.³⁵ Yet part of the uncertainty has followed the acquisition of the Fairfax media group by broadcaster Nine entertainment, which then promptly on sold the stable of more than 160 regional papers including the Newcastle Herald, the Illawarra Mercury and the Canberra Times to former real estate CEO Antony Catalano.³⁶

³⁵ Blackiston, H. "Looking Local, how News Corp is targeting regional areas with digital-only mastheads," Mumbrella, 27 Jun 2019. Accessed here <https://mumbrella.com.au/looking-local-how-news-corp-is-targeting-regional-areas-with-digital-only-mastheads-586164>

³⁶ Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019 section on Australia. Accessed here Jul 2019 <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/australia-2019/>

More newsroom losses came In June 2019 when regional broadcaster WIN shed staff from four of its television stations citing changing content consumption habits and increased competition from digital content providers that do not face the same regulatory conditions that challenge tradition media, leading to a reduction in demand for local news bulletins.³⁷

Also in June 2019, a Public Interest Journalism Initiative study gave further context to the coverage of local councils, finding 61 per cent of media managers employed by local governments had noticed a decline in coverage of their local government area over the last five years, with almost a third describing this decline as “significant”. The ultimate impact of the decline are media that are likely to “become more partisan, selective, or manipulated and regional communities that are more fractured, vulnerable, isolated and poorly informed. Both have serious implications for the democratic health of the nation.”³⁸

The Digital Platforms Inquiry Report by Australia’s competition regulator, the ACCC, found the availability of a wide range of high-quality news and journalism provides significant benefits to Australian society and is important for the healthy functioning of democracy. Yet news and journalism “risk under-provision for a number of reasons, including the general inability of commercial news media businesses to capture the broader social benefits of journalism”.³⁹ The ACCC considers that,

“local court reporting and local government reporting represent the most immediately concerning topics where under-provision is likely to be an issue.”⁴⁰

The ACCC acknowledged local news has historically represented a significant part of Australia’s media landscape, particularly in regional and suburban areas. It found local newspapers, regional broadcasters and services provided by the ABC play an important role in providing news in these areas, as does SBS (Special Broadcasting Service), and commercial news media businesses⁴¹ and

³⁷ ABC News website, “Win News to cut four TV newsrooms in Orange, Wagga Wagga, Albury and Bundaberg,” Accessed here Jun 2019 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-20/win-news-job-cuts-in-regional-nsw-and-queensland/11226820>

³⁸ Public Interest Journalism Initiative Media Release 16 Jun 2019. Accessed here <https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/piji-regional-media-report-news-release-160619.pdf>

³⁹ ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report p 280. Accessed here <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Digital%20platforms%20inquiry%20-%20final%20report.pdf>

⁴⁰ Ibid. p 320

⁴¹ Ibid. p 289

while digital platforms have made a positive contribution to plurality of journalism, these typically cover issues of international and national significance, while “the online provision of news involves poor incentives for producing journalism for smaller audiences, such as coverage of local issues.”⁴²

The ACCC’s three recommendations in this area are: adequate funding for the public broadcasters, grants for local journalism and tax settings to encourage philanthropic support for journalism. In contrast to tax measures, it said grants are likely to be “more effective, efficient, flexible and transparent in achieving the objective of supporting the production of the types of public interest journalism at risk of under-provision.”⁴³ While there currently is a \$50 Million Government grants program to help regional and small publishers adapt to the technology challenges in the evolving media environment, it was recommended a new program replace this to support the production of original local and regional journalism, including that related to local government and local courts.⁴⁴ The ACCC said also it considers the situation justifies a degree of Government intervention and targeted Government assistance may be necessary to support forms of public interest journalism that are at risk of under-provision.

Should the recommendations of the report be adopted by Government there may be additional opportunities for initiatives strengthening the local market, including those funded by philanthropy. Already the entry of new philanthropic support in Australia - the \$100 million investment offered by Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism & Ideas to champion, foster, and fund journalism initiatives and improve public discourse - has announced its first grants in July 2019. Among the recipients were a variety of projects put forward by the national media including the ABC, Guardian and The Australian Financial Review, as well as a community broadcaster and “The Terrier” run by a solo journalist in Warrnambool in southwest Victoria.⁴⁵

In the ABC’s submission to the ACCC it identified its role as a multi-platform source of Australian conversations, culture and stories— valued and trusted as the national public broadcaster since 1932 while evolving its content and services to meet changing audience behaviours and community needs. It pointed to the ABC’s Charter, which guides the Corporation and tasks the ABC with the

⁴² Ibid. p 306

⁴³ Ibid. p 332

⁴⁴ Ibid. p 334

⁴⁵ Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism & Ideas grants July 2019. Accessed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrlBObep0jE&feature=youtu.be>

functions, including providing innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard as part of the Australian broadcasting system consisting of national, commercial and community sectors.⁴⁶

Despite ongoing budgetary challenges, the ABC maintains 56 local stations across the country. The ABC in 2017 announced a restructure to invigorate digital and video output in regional areas through a local news initiative, while experimenting with ways of deepening its coverage of regional Australia with community commissioning the result being the allocation of 80 positions in local newsrooms.⁴⁷

In so far as strengthening the democracy at a local level, Associate Professor of Communication Deakin University, Kristy Hess suggested the ABC could do more to take a lead role in addressing the deficit in local areas. Hess said one of the biggest challenges is ensuring that small towns and cities outside of major regional centres have a quality information provider that serves the area directly, not just at a tokenistic level. She said local newspapers have been the most reliable source for this in the past and while this is still the case, in many areas they are struggling with the digital environment and traditional sources of advertising.

Hess said the ABC “needs to look at the democratic functions and its potential to play a leading role in the conversation around strengthening local news in Australia, especially in areas where there are news gaps.”

“Media diversity is essential to a healthy democracy and this is at risk across regional Australia.

“As for the ABC, it serves the nation well in terms of reporting niche agricultural issues and highlighting major regional issues, but at the same time, its regional journalists rarely, regularly attend court hearings or council meetings unless it is a particularly newsworthy issue.

⁴⁶ ABC submission to the ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry. Accessed here <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Australian%20Broadcasting%20Corporation%20%28April%202018%29.pdf>

⁴⁷ Goodall, J. “Voices of the Land”, Inside Story, 5 September 2018. Accessed here <https://insidestory.org.au/voices-of-the-land/>

"The ABC needs to provide a much greater role in serving smaller towns and cities where information services are lacking," (interview Hess 2019).

The point on the ABC's attendance of council and court hearings may be countered by the geographic and time pressures to commit to physically attending every meeting and the resources available to regional and local news and broadcast teams facing daily content deadlines. While councils can be a strong source of local content and local and regional broadcasters are committed to the communities they serve, the number of, and distances between, councils within ABC regions make regular attendance difficult, and there is often the need to prioritise delivery of news and program commitments within the resources available. Streaming of council meetings is an option in some council areas, but it still requires a commitment to actively listen across these.

Pending a review of the findings from the ACCC, and ability to source funding, the ABC could potentially consider its approach on its local council reporting and the role it could play to help strengthen the local media industry to reduce news gaps and improve democracy, while sharing its knowledge, resources and training abilities to encourage media diversity. The ABC Charter may not specifically mention local news, but it does highlight the broadcaster's aim to provide innovative and comprehensive services of a high standard. As the ABC is well placed to deliver innovative ideas, and with the breadth of services across the country, it is a player in the local media space, and Council reporting fits within this.

If the ABC were open to working with commercial entities at a local level it may wish to consider the potential of shared data investigations or collaborative reporting approaches to address the democratic functions of communities at risk of losing coverage, including reinvigoration of council reporting, enabling partnerships with commercial media organisations in particular smaller ones which have scale to do deliver content into the ecosystem. Pending a source of funding, this could be an adaptation of the UK News Partnerships offering collaborative council reporting in certain markets where the need exists, potentially a trial in key areas with the content is available for all partners, and/or data investigations and training that strengthen the skills of regional journalists.

The three other collaborations mentioned in this paper - partnering with individual journalists and community on data investigations as per the Bureau Local's example, the concentrated themed approach offered by Resolve Philadelphia and smaller projects around local elections as in the case

of Chi.vote all have learnings for how they formed and managed their collaborations and the type of content produced.

Open for discussion are solutions that will have a real impact on the provision of local public interest journalism. An Australian collaborative effort may not look like the other models highlighted earlier in the paper, but the learnings could be incorporated into the discussion.

Conclusion

This paper asked whether collaborative journalism is part of the solution to saving local public interest news and content.

Previous research has shown promoting local journalism is important to maintaining grass roots accountability, civic and political engagement, local discussion and engaging communities.

Through examination of existing research and several practical applications of collaborative local journalism in the UK and US, this paper concludes collaborations can provide opportunities for media organisations to break stories, better cover local issues and promote civic engagement. These collaborations may look different depending on the needs and the issues of the individual community. Ranging from one off projects, to multi-layered formalised long-term partnerships, they include established media players through to hyperlocals or members of the community.

There is a demonstrated increase in the volume and type of content being delivered and a growing number of examples of impact of stories brought to light as a result of these collaborations. This is of benefit particularly to local public interest journalism including council reporting to provide a layer of oversight to areas where coverage is weak or absent.

Some elements within the models for collaboration, including the UK Local News Partnerships, Bureau Local, or Resolve Philadelphia, may be adaptable for local news markets looking for ongoing relationships in turn to stimulate their own stronger local coverage. These initiatives come with distinct advantages around generation of stories for the community and addressing gaps in coverage, and challenges particularly in establishing, funding and maintaining the collaboration and ensuring relationships and communication exist across all levels of partnership.

In the UK, the local news collaboration between the BBC and numerous commercial media partners has looked to address the issue of democratic deficit by an investment in human resource and technological solutions, with a many layered partnership model including sharing local reporters to scrutinise councils and a data unit to share investigations and strengthen the skills of local journalists. There are many strengths to this model, including addressing public interest journalism challenges at scale, and providing content across all partners, as well as training which has the potential for deeper long-term impacts in terms of the skills provided, that are yet to be recognised.

Also in the UK, the Bureau Local's collaboration focussing on its data investigations has provided an opportunity for local journalists to apply data and questions to their own areas, e.g. scrutinising local government asset sales and tailoring findings to individual news markets. In the US there are numerous examples of local content produced through collaboration. The Resolve Philadelphia initiative involving over 20 partner organisations has focussed its reporting on economic mobility for its citizens, and produced content highlighting the causes of economic insecurity and potential solutions within its community. Chi.vote demonstrated a short sharp response on a project e.g. a council election can be effective.

Noting that there are examples provided by collaborations where stories have been produced, qualitative impact is widely seen as difficult to measure. In the case of the UK News Partnerships, reporters only started being employed at the beginning of 2018 and more work could be done to understand the impact of their work, with a wider selection of stories from the 150 reporters to gain a fuller analysis of the content generated.

There can be internal and external challenges in setting up partnerships with organisations with different newsroom cultures, and the more organisational layers of staffing involved in the collaboration, the more importance is there in communication of the project at all layers of operation, as well as a support network to continue to manage and support its development.

Financing these larger collaborations is a significant part of the discussion –the UK News Partnerships draws £8M funding from the BBC's budget annually. Many US collaborations benefit from philanthropic grants of funds and foundations. The UK's Bureau Local received most of its establishment funding from the Google News Initiative.

It would be worthwhile for future studies to analyse the impact of the Google News Initiative projects and Facebook's News Initiative which funds for example 80 UK trainee journalists in the UK.

There are many more local collaborations, however this paper has restricted focus to a few examples where media organisations and journalists within those organisations work together. As noted in the introduction, the broader question of sustainability of collaborations and further, more detailed research on impact is worth exploring in the future.

Separately, there could also be further study exploring collaboratives from the perspective of how communities can engage with news organisations to empower and strengthen local news.

The challenges in adapting these models is every local market is unique in terms of the types of organisations involved, the regulations that govern it, the funding structure, and the overall the health of the media ecosystem, though these issues are not necessarily insurmountable. Some elements of the various collaboration models could be investigated as a potential opportunity for other markets including Australia. A new Australia model of public service local journalism could require stimulus from external sources such as grants or philanthropy.

The ABC for example may wish to consider discussion with other members of the Australian media industry around the gaps in public interest local news with the potential of shared data investigations or collaborative approaches to address the democratic functions of communities at risk, potentially with a trial of a version of the UK News Partnerships with number of local democracy reporters in local areas where there's a need to strengthen coverage.

The big problem remains for news markets where's there's an issue of plurality and where news deserts are emerging or have already emerged. Collaborations are not the only answer to the deeper challenges in the local news industry, but there is hope in what they offer. One thing broadly in common among those interviewed for this report on local collaborations – the desire to do more for the local markets they serve.

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Appendix A: Interviews

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>
Matt Abbott	Communications and Project Officer, Academic Centre for Community Journalism and Independent Community News Network, Cardiff, Wales
Matthew Barraclough	Head of Local News Partnerships BBC, UK
Nathan Briant	Local Democracy Reporter, Oxfordshire County Council
Adam Cantwell-Corn	Co-founder/co-ordinator The Bristol Cable, UK (phone interview)
Ian Carter	Editorial Director, Iliffe Media, Medway UK
Jeremy Clifford	Chair of the News Media Association/BBC Advisory Panel and Editor in Chief JPI Media, UK
Laura Davison	National newspaper organiser, National Union of Journalists, London, UK
Fernando Diaz	Editor in Chief and publisher, Chicago Reporter, US (video call interview)
Matt Discombe	Local Democracy Reporter, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, Wales, UK
Euan Duncan	Local Democracy Reporter Luton and Bedfordshire, UK
Max Eckersley	Managing Editor, Hackney Citizen, London, UK
Jean Friedman-Rudovsky	Collaborations Manager Resolve Initiative Philadelphia, US (video call interview)
Jason Gibbins	Assistant Editor, BBC Local News Partnerships, Birmingham, UK
Toby Granville	Editorial Director, Newsquest, Bournemouth, UK
Samantha Harman	Editor, Oxford Times and Oxford Mail, UK
Kristy Hess	Associate Professor of Communication Deakin University, Australia (phone interview)
Edward Iliffe	Iliffe Media Owner/Director, UK (phone interview)

Anthony Lewis	Local Democracy Reporter Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, UK
Megan Lucero	Director, Bureau Local, London, UK
Keith Magnum	Citizen News and Media Limited Director and Editor-in-Chief, UK
Andy Martin	Former Editor, Bournemouth Echo, UK
Stefanie Murray	Director, Center for Cooperative Media Montclair University US (video call interview)
Asraa Mustufa	Digital editor, Chicago Reporter, US (video call interview)
Victoria Prest	BBC Journalist, Local Democracy Reporter Service, Birmingham, UK
Yakub Qureshi	Reach PLC Local Democracy Editor, UK (phone interview)
Alice Richardson	Local Democracy Reporter Waltham Forest and Redbridge, London, UK
Paul Rowland	Editor, WalesOnline, Cardiff, UK
Pete Sherlock	Assistant Editor, BBC Shared Data Unit, Birmingham, UK
Sarah Stonebely	Research Director, Center for Cooperative Media Montclair University, US
Josh Thomas	Former Local Democracy Reporter Cambridgeshire, UK (phone interview)
Richard Sambrook	Cardiff University, Professor of Journalism UK (phone interview)
Ed Sheridan	Local Democracy Reporter, Hackney, Camden and Islington – London, UK
Eugene Sonn	Audio Editor WHYY, Philadelphia, US
Caitlin Webb	Local Democracy Reporter, Kent, UK
Joshua Wright	Local Democracy Reporter, Bournemouth and Poole, UK (phone interview)