

We stand for:

- 1 All local media should commit themselves to public service values of fairness and balance, reflecting the diversity of Oxfordshire communities.
- 2 Local media should employ enough journalists to ensure high quality local services and staffing levels should be protected.
- 3 BBC and ITV should undertake to protect and expand local programming and services.
- 4 The BBC should continue to be funded by the licence fee as a commitment to public service and quality.
- 5 Local media organisations should participate in a local forum to explain how they meet their obligations, and to listen to public views.

I am interested in the Oxfordshire Local News Campaign. Please send me details of how I can take part. (Please detach and send to.....)

Name

Organisation

Address

.....

Telephone

e-mail

Local news: the crucial reality show



Oxfordshire Local News Campaign

Speaking up for your right to know...

Why we need a local news campaign

We rely on local media to be our eyes and ears in Oxfordshire. Our ability to know what is going on depends on comprehensive, accurate, informative and unbiased reporting.

In Oxfordshire, while the number of media outlets has expanded, the number of journalists has not. Journalists today spend more time on computers and telephones, and less time face to face to with communities. They have less time to search out stories. News is increasingly pre-selected according to what will grab headlines. There is a risk that sections of our communities and minority issues will be neglected.

Decisions on budgets and staffing levels may be taken far from Oxfordshire, in the boardrooms of the BBC, ITV or newspaper chains. For example, The Oxford Mail and Times group is part of the Gannett global empire, based in Virginia, USA.

The Oxfordshire Local News Campaign aims to build a consensus around what we want from our local media, stimulate public debate and lobby for high quality services. Our intention is not to attack local media; they would welcome more resources for news. If you agree with our aims, please give your support.

BBC - local programmes short of funds

The BBC promises public service broadcasting that delivers:

- ◆ information, education and entertainment,
- ◆ comprehensive, authoritative and impartial news,
- ◆ fair and informed debate,
- ◆ balance, accuracy and impartiality,
- ◆ cultural and regional diversity, and
- ◆ to reflect local and national lives and concerns.

Government proposals for a new BBC Charter from 2007 will be published in 2005. The licence fee will probably survive for now, but Ofcom, the broadcasting regulator, wants the licence frozen in real terms and reviewed after five years. The BBC has announced 2,900 job cuts, 400 in its factual and learning department. All departments, including news, are expected to save 15% costs. The impact on regional commitments is not yet clear, but local radio and regional TV expanded on a shoestring and cannot survive cutbacks.

ITV - regional news may become optional

In England, 'regional' ITV is now one big company. The Ofcom review of public service broadcasting says that ITV should only provide regional news in a digital age "if financially sustainable". Ofcom would allow other local programming to be halved to just 90 minutes a week and culture secretary, Tessa Jowell, looks set to agree. ITV is closing newsrooms to gather services in large centres. Central News at Abingdon survives for now, but may come under pressure. Other commercial services cannot fill the gap. Neither Channel 6 nor Fox FM has enough staff for a comprehensive news service.

Local newspapers become more selective

Local newspapers are the traditional backbone of local journalism, covering local issues, councils and courts, acting as a local forum for news and comment, and filtering nationally significant news upwards. That role is being damaged as newspapers are more selective about what they report, and specialist reporters have less time to dig out hidden stories.