



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Yiannis Thoedorou  
Riverside House  
2A Southwark Bridge Road  
London SE1 9HA.

6<sup>th</sup> November 2008

Dear Mrs. Thoedorou,

**Consultation Response: Service Broadcasting Review - Phase 2: preparing for the digital future**

I am deeply concerned about ITV's proposed changes to local public service broadcasting, particularly to current affairs and local news reporting, which in my view would be to the detriment of the communities which they seek to serve.

I should first of all make clear that I do not, at this stage, necessarily believe that any existing provider or franchise holder should have an automatic divine right to be the lead "local" news and current programming provider if they appear to have no desire or ambition to seriously take on such a role.

However the current proposals would effectively leave the BBC to operate local news services in the absence of any credible competitor. Ofcom must recognise that there is a need to protect a credible alternative to the BBC in the vitally important arena of local news and current affairs.

Local news programmes are crucial for maintaining a healthy, well informed democracy – currently maintained by PSB obligations in franchise agreements. In a world where few have the time to read a newspaper or keep up to date with local happenings, local news bulletins offer an invaluable source of information to communities up and down the country, keeping them informed and thus ensuring that they can adequately hold their elected representatives to account.

Moreover, the geographical areas which supposedly constitute 'regions' are in no way cohesive collations of local identity and community interest, but instead are centrally imposed government 'zones'. For example the 'South East' is so large that news about Oxford, Canterbury, Brighton and Reading are no more relevant nor significant to my constituents in south Hampshire than if they were to be receiving national news coverage with stories about Bolton, Sunderland, Bangor or Glasgow.

If current plans proceed the public will receive a reduced offering of news which is personally relevant to them. This will ultimately lead to reduced viewing figures and the complete demise of local television.

Whilst I understand that today's multitude of channels coupled with a significant growth in internet advertising has driven down the revenues on which ITV's public service programming was based, and reduced the value of the Channel 3 licences altogether, I am also confident that practical

**Please reply to: Sandra Gidley MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 020 7219 5986 Fax: 020 7219 2324 e mail [Gidleys@parliament.uk](mailto:Gidleys@parliament.uk)**

measures could be taken to save ITV's current local news bulletins. For instance, have tax breaks for such programming been considered?

May I also ask what concrete commitments can be enshrined and upheld in any future contract to prevent any possible watering-down of local news content without a proper public consultation or further reference to Ofcom for approval?

I look forward to your reply and hope that the points raised here will be taken into account.

Yours sincerely,



**Sandra Gidley MP**

Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Public Health

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