

## NMA response to [Ofcom's proposed Plan of Work, 2026/2027](#)

### Introduction

The News Media Association (“NMA”) is the voice of UK national, regional, and local news media in all their print and digital forms – a £4 billion sector read by more than 46.4 million adults every month. Our members publish around 900 news media titles, ranging from well-known national and international brands to independent local papers of record, including The Guardian, Financial Times, The Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mirror, to the Manchester Evening News, Kent Messenger, and the Monmouthshire Beacon.

Question	Your response
<b>Question 1:</b> Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Work Plan for 2026/27?	Yes – see below.

### BBC

1. It is welcome that Ofcom has specified that its Plan of Work for 2026/2027 contains monitoring the BBC's impact on competition. Such a requirement, at face value, is crucial to stop commercial organisations from being crowded out by the BBC due to factors such as, but not limited to, the footprint of the corporation, its name recognition, and its privileged funding arrangements. However, without reform, we do not view this as sufficient to prevent the BBC from continuing to adversely impact the commercial local news market.

**1.1** A key example is the BBC's [plans](#) in 2022 to reshape and increase its local news service across England as an example. The BBC Nations news chief [said](#) that this expansion would not harm existing local newsrooms and that the pressures which local newsrooms experience are solely due to the change in how consumers receive their news, i.e., shifting to online. This was echoed in the BBC's 2022 [Materiality Assessment](#) (“MA”) on the proposed changes, with Ofcom not viewing the change to have “*a significant adverse impact on fair and effective competition*” despite the clear indication of the expanded BBC service having a detrimental impact on commercial publishers' page views. However, Ofcom's 2024 [Review of local media in the UK](#) acknowledges that “*increased BBC online local news forms part of the headwinds facing local publishers*” and that “*if the BBC provided more localised online content, people might choose it over alternative online sources*”, which might “*require further consideration by the BBC and Ofcom*”. The Government's December 2025 [Green Paper](#) on the Charter Renewal echoes these points.

**1.2** Other factors exist, too; we do not dispute this point. For example, Google's monopoly on the search and search advertising landscape has contributed. The growth of ‘zero-click’ searches is also impacting the entire sector as click-through rates from SERPs decline – publishers expect traffic from search engines to decline by more than 40% over the next three years, according to [Reuters](#). Declining print sales have also contributed, and the impact of social media is acknowledged. However, the influence of the BBC is one factor

that Ofcom has some control over, and it is now starting to dawn on the regulator that the BBC's growing footprint has impacted commercial newsrooms.

- 1.3** We view that Ofcom's position on preventing adverse effects on commercial markets has been too reactive, and that it has allowed incremental mission creep to occur without proper scrutiny. Whilst reform of the regulatory framework is not in scope of this consultation (we will reserve comments for the [consultation](#) on the Government's Green Paper on the Charter Review), Ofcom's monitoring of the local media market needs to take into account the impact of the incremental changes that the BBC has undertaken, which have drawn audiences away from commercial providers. Such incremental changes include measures to increase prominence for local news on the BBC News app and website, [rolled](#) out during the 12 months to July 2025, the introduction of a local news heading ("News from ...") on the BBC News app landing page in Summer 2023, the addition of a 'Follow' button on local topic pages – all increasing prominence of the BBC's local news output on its website and app with no regards for the existing local news market.
- 1.4** Greater monitoring of the BBC, and analysis of its service changes, in 2026/2027 are therefore required to understand how these changes have impacted the local media sector. Ofcom does have the power to initiate a BBC competition review ("BCR") if "*evidence emerges of harm to competition*". However, as it stands, we do not have confidence in the use of BCRs due to the ambiguity around what constitutes the "*public value*", the metric by which a service from the BBC can continue despite market impacts. Without a definition or principles, it could be argued that any activity undertaken by the BBC would have public value, given its ease of access and universality.
- 1.5** Whilst reform to Ofcom's role as a regulator is reviewed as part of the Charter Renewal process, we urge the regulator to undertake a more proactive stance with news publishers and undertake greater engagement with the NMA and members, who are impacted by the BBC's expansion into their markets, to hear concerns and share insights. Such a stance is merited given that Ofcom has admitted that the corporation may form "*part of the headwinds facing local publishers*".
- 1.6** To note, we urge the BBC to explore partnerships with local newsrooms, through expanding initiatives like the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme ("LDRS"), when looking at changes to local news coverage. Cooperating with the commercial sector equips newsrooms across the UK with the resources to head off market challenges and strengthens media plurality. We note that Ofcom's proposed Plan of Work for 2026/2027 does not look at media plurality within this vein.

## **Economic Growth**

- 2.** In May 2024, the Department for Business and Trade [extended](#) the Growth Duty to Ofcom. The regulator now must have consideration for the drivers of economic growth. Ensuring healthy competition within relevant markets, such as the media, is now specifically required of Ofcom.

**2.1** As it stands, question marks around Ofcom’s adherence to the Growth Duty are raised whilst it continues to allow the BBC’s local news offering to grow unchecked and without more detailed monitoring. The regulator must outline how it will ensure healthy competition within the local media market in this context and what measures it is prepared to undertake to deliver on this outcome.

### **Online safety**

**3.** It is also welcome that Ofcom will publish its register of categorised services and consult on additional duties. The Online Safety Act 2023’s (“**OSA**”) duties for Category 1 service providers will help protect news publisher content, journalistic content, and content of democratic importance (sections 17, 18, and 19) and counter misinformation online. Such measures come at a crucial time, given the various online threats the UK faces and how major social media platforms (which are likely to be deemed categorised services) are utilised by bad actors to, for example, undermine social cohesion. Ensuring that categorised services must carry such news publisher content, journalistic content, and content of democratic importance is a key counterweight to such content, especially when combined with measures that platforms must take to ensure hateful content is removed.

**3.1** It is also important for democratic debate that Recognised News Publisher (“**RNP**”) content is safeguarded. In doing so, categorised online services must reflect the diversity of thought and plurality of views found offline throughout the UK. It would also be a worrying development if categorised services were to remove news publisher content, journalistic content, and content of democratic importance because it was disagreeable to platform owners, for example.

**3.2** To ensure that the Online Safety regime operates efficiently and protects content of democratic importance, we urge the regulator to adopt the following in the year 2026/2027:

- a)** Final policy statements are consulted upon and published promptly, with clear expectations for Category 1 service providers on their duties relating to news publisher content, journalistic content, and content of democratic importance.
- b)** Transparency notices issued by Ofcom must contain clear obligations on how categorised services interact with RNP content in their annual transparency reports, so that the latter have granular clarity – this will ensure adherence to the regime.
- c)** Ofcom must also ensure standardised metrics are used by Category 1 service providers in their transparency reports. This will enable more efficient external scrutiny.
- d)** Chapter 7, Paragraph 158 outlines that Ofcom must produce and publish a report assessing the impact of the availability and treatment of news publisher content and journalistic content on

Category 1 services. Ofcom must engage in a meaningful manner with recognised news publishers to understand their experiences of how their content is treated on Category 1

services, how complaints are dealt with, and it must not refrain from naming specific platforms, nor must it hold back on producing a provisional notice of contravention if it suspects noncompliance with such duties.

- e) Ofcom must also be rigorous in its enforcement of the regime and not hesitate to act should Category 1 service providers fail to comply with their new duties.
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**News Media Association**

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