

# NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

## **Interim Evaluation Report for Carnegie UK Trust**

by Talk About Local  
February 2014



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# 1. INTRODUCTION TO NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

## 1.1 The objective

'The Carnegie UK Trust (CUKT) believes that media organisations, civil society and citizens all have a role to play in delivering the better news media that we need. Through our recent work on Better Journalism, the Trust has identified the need to explore how to support more accessible, pluralistic and diverse local news for citizens and communities.'

Neighbourhood News<sup>1</sup> is an experimental intervention in local media by the Carnegie UK Trust (CUKT) to explore these issues. The intervention mechanism is the provision of funding to five local news projects and an external evaluation to assess the impact of this funding and identify recommendations for policymakers, practitioners and funders.

The five local news projects participating in Neighbourhood News, and the geographic area they serve, are listed below:

PROJECT	GEOGRAPHIC AREA
Brixton Blog in Lambeth, South London	Brixton is a vibrant, densely populated, highly culturally, socially and economically diverse area of 65,000 people in South London
Cybermoor in Alston, Cumbria	Alston is an isolated small market town of 1,200 people high in the Cumbrian hills of North West England
Digital Sentinel, Wester Hailes	Wester Hailes is an area of 13,500 homes in South West Edinburgh in Scotland predominantly composed of high-density social housing built in the early 1970s
Port Talbot Magnet	Port Talbot is a small industrial town of 37,000 people in South Wales, dominated by a large steel works
Your Harlow	Harlow is a medium-sized 'new town' of over 80,000 people on the borders of Essex and Hertfordshire in South East England

## 1.2 The competition

The five projects listed above, which are known by CUKT as 'Carnegie Partners', were selected by the Trust with the support of an External Advisory Group following an open application process. The Group members had a very wide range of backgrounds in print, radio and web journalism and community publishing. A full list of members is provided in the Annex.

The Neighbourhood News application process ran from January to March 2013. Some 77 applications were received by CUKT, who provided a shortlist of 20 applications to the Advisory Group. The Group met in early May 2013 and selected the five winning projects. Winners were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

### Primary criteria

- Fulfils an evidenced, unmet need – particularly a democratic or community need (public benefit)
- Adaptability and enhancement of news
- Affordable for the duration of the funding period (12 months)
- Capacity to share learning of interest to other projects and to funders
- Adherence to high ethical and editorial standards
- Has an impact and a feasible plan for legacy beyond the funding period

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/changing-lives/neighbourhood-news>

### *Balancing criteria*

- Geographical spread of the UK and Ireland
- Platform type
- Length of time organisation has been established
- Target audience

## **2. EVALUATION METHOD**

CUKT commissioned Talk About Local (TAL), experts on local media, to evaluate the Carnegie Partners' progress and reflect on learnings from Neighbourhood News. This evaluation aims to share partners' progress with an audience of policymakers, practitioners and funders; assess the nature of the output from the partners and its impact on the democratic deficit; and identify criteria for success of such projects. CUKT also allowed Talk About Local to provide limited expert support to partners that needed it, but not going so far as to compromise evaluation.

This interim report by TAL covers early progress and learnings. Although at an early stage, the Carnegie Partners are already providing learning about such interventions and the wider media landscape in which they sit.

No two communities are alike, posing challenges for evaluating and comparing the impact of community media projects. This is particularly so when projects have a strong digital element, as methods of studying such projects are in their infancy. TAL is a member of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Creative Citizens project<sup>2</sup>, the world's biggest research programme into hyperlocal media. Working with CUKT and another member of that project, Dave Harte of Birmingham City University, TAL drew up an evaluation framework to support the evaluation of Neighbourhood News. A copy of this framework is provided in the Annex.

The partners are running differently-sized projects and we are particularly keen to avoid simple comparison of metrics that one might use with commercial projects. We note that the Knight Foundation has had similar challenges in assessing non-profit news<sup>3</sup>. TAL's experience of working with volunteer-run local media is that they aren't primarily motivated by audience size as they don't suffer commercial pressures. The framework aims to capture community impact and engagement in a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions.

This is an interim report that focuses on the start-up process and partners' experiences to date. It draws on data provided by the partners using the evaluation framework; discussions with the partners; and an analysis of partners' output online and in print. Towards the end of the project, we shall conduct focus groups in the five communities and gather further data. In the report, we quote partners directly where possible.

## **3. EVALUATING THE LOCAL MEDIA CONTEXT**

The Carnegie Partners' work and CUKT's intervention needs to be seen in the context of other market interventions in local media. There are deep and wide-ranging public interventions in the UK local media market that are rarely considered in the round. Public sector and charitable interventions in the local media market total are worth over £250 million per annum. This includes:

- BBC local radio – £220 million per annum
- Mandatory advertising in local papers – £45-50 million per annum

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.creativecitizens.co.uk/creativecitizens>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.knightfoundation.org/media/uploads/media\\_pdfs/KF\\_NonprofitNewsReport\\_LoRes\\_1.pdf](http://www.knightfoundation.org/media/uploads/media_pdfs/KF_NonprofitNewsReport_LoRes_1.pdf)

- Local TV infrastructure subsidy – £25 million
- Local TV programming buy-back subsidy – up to £5 million per annum from 2014/15
- Community Channel – £1.1-1.5 million per annum
- Community Radio Fund – £0.75 million per annum
- Nesta and the Technology Strategy Board Destination Local Demonstrators programme – £2.4 million (divided across four projects)
- Media Trust Local – 360

In addition, The Reuters Institute estimated that the zero-rating of VAT on newspapers is worth an estimated £600 million per annum, based on 2008 prices<sup>4</sup>. Clearly, a significant proportion of this benefit is derived by local newspapers. See the annex for more detail.

These interventions support existing media forms of print, radio and television, largely produced by large businesses. There are some exceptions: the Community Radio Fund<sup>5</sup> which uses funds provided by the UK Government administered by Ofcom to support small community radio projects; the Community Channel<sup>6</sup> for which the Media Trust raises over £1 million annually to run a national TV channel with community content; and NESTA's Destination Local<sup>7</sup> programme which has made grants to partners innovating with technology in local internet news projects. However, these exceptions are worth less than 1% of the annual intervention in the local media market by government.

Despite its significant investment in this space, there is no government overview of interventions in local media and the production of public goods as a result of state intervention, taken in the round. With respect to local media, the focus of the UK Government Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) has been almost exclusively on local TV. In contrast, the recent DCMS consultation paper on plurality and media ownership only made passing reference to the internet<sup>8</sup>.



4 <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/communications/Mediaplurality/ucCOMMS180613ev2.pdf>

5 <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/radio/community-radio-fund/>

6 <http://www.communitychannel.org/>

7 <http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/destination-local>

8 [http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/225790/Media\\_Plurality\\_Consultation\\_2013.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225790/Media_Plurality_Consultation_2013.pdf)

There is currently no media-neutral publicly-funded support scheme for grass roots local media – it has to compete with incumbents who receive significant state support. In particular, there hasn't been a scheme supporting grassroots web-based projects with small amounts of funding. In this context, Neighbourhood News is distinctive at two levels: the funding provided is small, well suited to grassroots community projects. The awards assessment process was media-neutral, although with the exception of Port Talbot Magnet, the funded partners are web driven.

## 4. OVERVIEW OF THE CARNEGIE PARTNERS

### 4.1 Location

CUKT awarded funding to five partners in different parts of the United Kingdom. In TAL's judgement, there is good geographic and social diversity in this selection.

### 4.2 Project type

The five Neighbourhood News projects show good diversity, with a majority emphasising training of people to contribute to media. The proposals of each project are described in broad terms in the table below, although as would be expected, there has been some variation on the ground:

PROJECT	AIM
Brixton Blog	Train students and new contributors to contribute to an existing blog and print publication
Cybermoor	Overhaul an existing community website and train community reporters to contribute to it and improve local scrutiny and accountability
Digital Sentinel	Resurrect in digital form a local community news sheet 'The Sentinel' that had been shut down for some years. Train local people to contribute to and run the site to build community cohesion and improve the image of the area
Port Talbot Magnet	Seed fund a print edition of the website of the local news co-op, the Port Talbot Magnet. Aim is to reach people who aren't online across a wider area than urban Port Talbot and produce advertising revenue leading to a self-sustaining business model
Your Harlow	Create a brand new news website, with substantial video content for Harlow to improve local civic affairs coverage. Project will build on the success of neighbouring Your Thurrock website and will aim to run as a sustainable entity

### 4.3 Partner organisations

The Carnegie Partners all have some sort of corporate vehicle that is the holding body for their project. Port Talbot Magnet and Cybermoor are distinctive in having a co-operative structure. Brixton Blog is run by:

*'...a not-for-profit Ltd company, Brixton Media Ltd, but we are going through the process of becoming a Community Interest Company.'*

The lead partner in the Digital Sentinel project in Wester Hailes is Whale Arts, a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. Your Harlow is owned by Hyperlocal News Limited, a private limited company that also owns its sister site, Your Thurrock.

## KEY FINDING

The existence of a legal vehicle for each Neighbourhood News Partner is a little unusual for grassroots community media in the UK in our experience. It was not a requirement of the competition, but may reflect an overall organised local approach that contributed to successful bids.

### 4.4 The people - partner teams

The Carnegie Partners in general have a small core team who put a lot of time into the project themselves, making it very much 'theirs' to take decisions and run with, in varying degrees of consultation with a wider group. Partners have a much larger network of contributors who either feed in stories or contribute in some other way. Precisely how this is arranged varies from the fluid, informal approach in Brixton, to a formal co-operative in Port Talbot (around 20 members) and Cybermoor. Your Harlow is run largely by one man, but with 11 regular contributors.

None of the teams are 100% full time – they all have other income-earning responsibilities that take up significant proportions of their working week – either freelancing in the media, a day job, another site to run, a portfolio of volunteering, parenting etc. This led to some capacity issues detailed below during the time-demanding start-up phase that this report is analysing.

Neighbourhood News has created or contributed to full and part-time employment opportunities. In Port Talbot, 11 freelancers have been employed – three advertising reps, one designer and seven journalists. Your Harlow has a similar range:

*'We have a part-time reporter who works two days a week. We also have used a number of freelance reporters and one video journalist. Plus banner designer.'*

In Brixton, Neighbourhood News funding contributes to the editor's wages one day per week. On the Digital Sentinel in Edinburgh, Neighbourhood News paid part-time salaries of a staff member and freelancer.

Your Harlow reported in January 2014 that one of their part-time reporters had been offered a full-time position elsewhere. They have lost a good reporter, but both Your Harlow and the reporter agree that:

*'...the six months experience of YH was key in securing full-time employment.'*

Your Harlow is now recruiting a new reporter.

It's a success for a journalist when working on a community website leads to a more secure job, but it creates a problem of success for the community site that TAL has seen many times across the country. With good management and planning succession to cover, the loss of a team member will not necessarily cause significant disruption and a broadly-based team can absorb the impact more easily. In some cases, however, when local news sites lose key contributors this can significantly restrict their output for a period, or even lead to closure.

#### **4.5 Volunteers**

Motivating and inspiring volunteer input from their community is at the heart of the Neighbourhood News projects. As a proxy, we asked partners to record the value of paid-for labour they used and the approximate amount of volunteer input they attracted in hours. Brixton Blog reports £1,400 payment for labour, leveraging 112 volunteer hours (£1,557 at national average hourly wage). Port Talbot spent £2,790 with '200 hours plus' of volunteer hours (£2,780). Digital Sentinel spent £2,389.50, leveraging 280 hours (£3,892) and Your Harlow reported 10 post-grad students working with the team unpaid.

Although these figures are approximate, we are satisfied that the Neighbourhood News projects have so far been able to double the cash spent on wages by leveraging in at least the same value of volunteer time. The partners are essentially in a 'build phase' of their projects and spending during the past six months is therefore likely to have been higher than it will be at later stages. If the partners' projects are sustainable, we would expect the amount of volunteer time levered in to increase over time.

We observe that the Carnegie Partners are passionate about their projects, for their communities. In most cases, they appear to TAL to be putting in a substantial personal effort outside what one would expect in a conventional workplace and in addition to their day jobs, family and other commitments. The partners' activity and that of their volunteer teams is motivated by altruism or philanthropy. For those journalists and social media practitioners donating professional skills to the Neighbourhood News projects, there is a straightforward analogy with, say lawyers doing pro bono work. Others involved in the projects see their local media project as a form of community work – something that is important in building social capital and attracts a similar commitment to traditional community activity, such as church, chapel, mosque, youth clubs, sports teams etc.

Digital technologies have transformed so many areas of society – commerce, communication, relationships and democracy – and the Carnegie Partners' work demonstrates how digital is changing community work. There is a challenge for grantors, philanthropists and policymakers to update their view of community work in a digital age to embrace grassroots online projects, then support and fund them on an equal footing with analogue ones.

#### **4.6 Skills**

There is a good diversity of skills and resources in the partner teams. The Carnegie Partners all have good quality journalism skills at their core – whether formal training or experience in storytelling and expression. Most of the partners have at least one person on the team with some formal journalism training. Cybermoor has strong journalism representation in its governance structure with CN Group, a publishing group predominantly in Carlisle/Lakes area who own the local newspaper, and the local University journalism department represented on its steering board. Digital Sentinel brought in a specialist multimedia trainer with journalism training, Brixton Blog's core team comprises two journalists. The partner teams mainly live and/or work in the areas they are covering.

Even although most outputs are digital, partner teams are not overly technical, often engaging a third party to provide internet or print and design skills. Tech skills are often, but not always, brought in on an informal, loose basis from someone in the community. To date, partners have had sufficient skills to update their news websites with content and tweak the sites when running, but would call on outside help for major work. With CUKT's agreement, TAL did provide limited advice and support to projects, including to Digital Sentinel on their technology choices.



Shortage of sales skills in particular were recurrent issues for Port Talbot and Brixton. This is detailed below.

#### KEY FINDING

Neighbourhood News has created employment for modern, portfolio-based media workers and stimulated community engagement in volunteer media production. Projects with management experienced in hiring or working as media freelancers are more likely to employ freelancers when needed.

#### KEY FINDING

To date, Neighbourhood News projects have at least doubled the value of wages paid by attracting volunteer time.

#### KEY FINDING

Carnegie Partners tend to have strong informal or formal journalism at their core, with other skills such as technology or sales added or acquired as necessary.

## 5. GETTING STARTED

This is an interim report looking at the first half of a project funding period and we wanted to pay particular attention to some of the specific issues the Carnegie Partners have experienced in getting their projects started. CUKT's intention is that this will help inform policymakers, funders or practitioners who might wish to support similar projects.

Although these are new projects, only one started from a position of no existing base. Four of the projects built upon existing community media assets in their area. Your Harlow, although a completely new site, built on the success of the neighbouring Your Thurrock project. The print edition of the Port Talbot Magnet built on the web product, Brixton built on the existing Blog and Bugle paper and Cybermoor has an existing community website. It is Digital Sentinel that came closest to starting from a new base, seeking to build community confidence and voice by resurrecting the printed 'Sentinel' that closed in 2008. The project built upon Whale Arts' existing community work in Wester Hailes.

#### KEY FINDING

The Advisory Group that selected winning Neighbourhood News projects sought to balance new and existing projects. However, even the new projects were able to demonstrate experience in community publishing and on the ground connections. This ability to demonstrate capability and roots in the community minimises risk for funders.

### 5.1 Mobilising physical assets

Leverage of existing assets is important to all the Neighbourhood News projects. Most report leveraging existing computers and internet connections, servers, cameras, microphones, office space and equipment etc. For example, Digital Sentinel, although not based on a previous news project, was able to find resources:

*'Free venue use from WHALE Arts, Wester Hailes Library and Wester Hailes Health Agency. The use of some resources from previous digital projects. Venue Hire equivalent to 16 x two-hour sessions at £15 per hour = £480. Equipment rough cost = £1,400. Office Costs at WHALE Arts, 10 days at £50 a day = £500. Total resources leveraged are around £2,400.'*

Port Talbot Magnet:

*'...used our own computers and equipment provided to us by Cardiff School of Journalism.'*

Brixton Blog did spend £1,000 on a computer and software, but also levered the wider IT assets of Brixton Media to the value of £1,500 a month.

#### **KEY FINDING**

For a set of mostly digital projects, the Carnegie Partners report little spending on IT hardware. This is to be expected as each partner had some prior experience in digital projects, which would require basic assets such as laptops, cameras etc. In TAL's view, the basic equipment required to run projects such as these is readily available in the local community infrastructure. This allows investment in labour to exploit existing assets and most importantly, to reach out to the community. Funders that prefer capital investment should seek a way of releasing resources for labour instead.

#### **5.2 Mobilising human assets**

Finding time in the core team in the first few months and bringing in the right new skills to deliver the projects have been the biggest challenges faced by the partners. None of the projects are run by full-time teams – each has a strong volunteer component or, as explained above, the core team is part-time, juggling other commitments. As a result, resources were not always easy to bring on stream.

In Brixton, one of the core team members had committed to work abroad in August so having made a basic start, the project was put on hold until his return to London. The one-man team behind Your Harlow managed to mobilise and start his project entirely on time and has since gone on to attract a broad set of contributors:

*'Ten post-grad journalism students have worked for us since July 1 (launch date). Plus number of contributor articles from orgs.'*

However, at Cybermoor, in Alston, the project encountered long-running capacity issues that prevented the team there getting underway within several months of being notified of winning the competition. The notional start date of June 2013 coincided with university vacation for one project partner, Cybermoor didn't begin training contributors until October 2013 and the website had not yet been relaunched in January 2014. It is due to launch in April 2014.

Three of the partners had significant, but slightly different, training elements to their project. The core team at Brixton Blog set out to train new contributors from the local community, Digital

Sentinel planned to work with the local community to create a new site and Cybermoor was to bring in trainers to train local people as community reporters to contribute to a refreshed site set up by Cybermoor.

Partners at Digital Sentinel took a deliberately long and gradual run-up to launching their site to enable them to work quietly and carefully with local people in Wester Hailes. The core team comprised two people from Whale Arts, a community art project with a long track record in the local area. Theirs was an approach rooted in community development. Whale Arts organised workshops and taster sessions both to embed basic skills and consult and explain to a wider audience what the Digital Sentinel would be. They deliberately took some time before launching a news website, rather than just setting up a site and explaining it afterwards. This led to publication of video clips and interviews with local people over several months from project start in June, through to website launch on October 7<sup>9</sup>.

The Whale Arts team wanted to ensure that there was sufficient confidence and buy-in from the community, reflecting their experience that the community had fairly brittle social capital and was somewhat cynical of attempts at regeneration.

*'We have run four sets of training workshops for Digital Sentinel reporters as well as additional support session from the Media Trust around media ethics and sustainable community journalism. As part of training, the Digital Sentinel team have covered a number of events on behalf of other organisations. We have attended the AHRC Connected Communities conference at Herriot Watt, captured resident opinion on the Fountainbridge redevelopments, amplified the Wester Hailes fun run and covered the move of the Wester Hailes Health Agency to the new Healthy Living Centre<sup>10</sup>.*

At least two of the partners had a specific difficulty recruiting staff or volunteers with advertising sales skills. At Port Talbot, this led to a challenging period for the project which was producing a print edition with a 20,000 distribution, funded in part by advertising. Their first choice of ad salesperson had to withdraw for personal reasons. The Magnet's management team interviewed a range of candidates. The selected candidate did not deliver meaningful sales and left the project. The Magnet then faced a sudden cash shortfall for their first edition that had to be met from limited reserves.

The impact was not exclusively a cash one. Resolving a difficult personnel and financial situation drained precious management time and energy just as the first print edition was being put together. It delayed the second print edition and caused the management team to take a sabbatical to recoup their energies. In their own words:

*'I think our biggest learning has been about having stronger mitigation in our business plans for risks, such as losing the services of an advertising rep and also firming up in advance more knowledge about the local advertising potential.*

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9 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Zsbn\\_3q2zw&feature=player\\_embedded&list=FLXyYEESBtDmJqYc\\_bXicS9g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Zsbn_3q2zw&feature=player_embedded&list=FLXyYEESBtDmJqYc_bXicS9g)

10 <http://jennifermjones.net/2013/09/05/project-digitalsentinel-towards-the-launch/>

*We also would stress the need to ensure we have people available and finance to ‘buy’ capacity to do essential jobs – such as maintaining our online presence at the same time as we are working on the print edition – so as not to overstretch the volunteers. At some stages in the production cycle, the core team were putting in 20 to 30 hours a week in addition to our day jobs and other responsibilities.*

*Finally, another learning point is that we need to work on broadening our base of volunteers – particularly in Port Talbot itself – to allow us to deal with the sort of crises we occurred this summer when we lost the advertising rep at short notice, and all the other requests that were being made of us. We were stretched.’*

The Port Talbot Magnet has since been able to bring back their original ad salesperson and is now selling advertising again – having sold only £700 for the first edition, they are on course to sell £4,000 for the second. The Christmas edition of the newspaper had 30 adverts in it. The core team commented that it was very hard to find local talent in Port Talbot to sell media in a way that was economical for the co-op.

In discussion with The Magnet, we asked if they had considered a softer launch for their print edition to reduce risk with a smaller, easier-to-manage distribution from fixed collection points. However, we agreed with their judgement that the risk of their approach was manageable until they unexpectedly lost a critical team member.

Early in its project, Brixton Blog reported problems finding people who could consistently sell advertising either on pure commission or as a volunteer activity. They did benefit from individual sales contributions by volunteers, but consistency was hard to find. However, at the end of the evaluation reporting period in November they reported:

*‘...massive increase in ad sales online and in print.’*

This is a problem TAL observes commonly in our wider work with community news websites across the UK. People who set up local news websites recognise that they don’t have the skills to sell advertising, but find it very hard to recruit someone who will do so on terms that work for a community site. Given the intensely commercial nature of sales and the small amounts it is possible to earn on commission, it perhaps isn’t surprising that it is hard to find people who are prepared to do it as volunteers or part-timers. But two Neighbourhood News projects here managed to do so in the end.

The Cybermoor model is more delegated than others – they are buying in commercial web services from another part of the Lake District to redevelop the website and community reporter training from People’s Voice Media. Training for the Community Reporters responsible for delivering news content for the project took place in late October and early November. Cybermoor received over 40 expressions of interest for the two Community Reporter positions, in large part due to the CN Group donating adverts in their local newspapers. The website redesign has been complicated by the number of local stakeholders who use the existing site to deliver local services such as calendars and bookings. It appears that this has stretched the limited capacity of the core team.

Cybermoor report:

*‘The main reasons for the delay in launching our new community website have been two-fold – timing [above, and] because we decided the time was right to do a complete redesign of the community website, rather than implement changes to the existing site. Also, we were asked by our local Regeneration Partnership to accommodate information for visitors into the redesign, so the website part of the project has become much more significant. In spite of this, we believe that the long-term benefits of our approach will pay off and we are really excited about the future.’*

The Carnegie Partners have had differing experiences at starting up. In our view, an important part of the project has been the tolerance and understanding CUKT has shown as a funder as partners have gone through the pains of starting up. TAL as evaluator was tasked by CUKT not to put pressure on people to get going. This has been appreciated by the partners.

#### **KEY FINDING**

Neighbourhood News has so far demonstrated two different launch models for new community news projects across several different communities:

1. Intensive preparation of the community prior to launching a new web presence.
2. Launching a new site and then using that and an existing partner site to slowly build contributors and raise awareness of the new site in the community.

#### **KEY FINDING**

Having resources at ‘the point of action’ is critical. In Cybermoor, resources have been focused on reporter training and on website redesign, but if sufficient central resources are not deployed to pull assets and resources together and make progress with diffuse local stakeholders then this can cause significant delays.

#### **KEY FINDING**

Launching a printed local news product with a large distribution alongside a web project is demanding for even experienced volunteer teams and requires careful risk management. But this must be managed without falling into risk aversion, which would prevent anything happening and extinguish all chance of community benefit.

#### **KEY FINDING**

Funders benefit from respecting the real-life pressures faced by volunteers or part-timers engaged in running community media projects rather than chasing administrative deadlines.

## 6. IMPACT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

One of the key aims of Neighbourhood News is to improve democratic accountability. We asked partners to nominate examples where they had covered issues in the local democratic sphere or had some sort of campaigning content.

A number of examples, expressed in the Carnegie Partners' own words, are highlighted below:

### The Digital Sentinel in Wester Hailes:

*'Brief post appeared last week regarding lights being out in a local subway. Lights were repaired and this was also reported – although we cannot necessarily connect these two incidents! Reporting on the Community Council meeting regarding a new bus stop outside new Healthy Living Centre. Profile raising, but no outcome as yet. These are issues that would not be picked up by other media, so we are confident that we are giving space to issues that would not otherwise have a media profile.'*



We liked the Sentinel's Twitter (@whdigital sentinel) chat with local police (@pentlandspolice) and fire services (@scotfie\_edin) on November 27, covering a full range of issues from knife crime and alcohol abuse to noisy neighbours and being seen on the beat.

### Port Talbot Magnet:

*'We have carried material on local campaigns such as the Morfa Beach access and Afan Lido campaign which both resulted in victories for campaigners . . . we have covered sliproad closures, library closure threats, council cuts, education course changes and student dissatisfaction and other issues. No other news outlet is covering the issues and giving voice to the campaigners, but we realise our lack of capacity sometimes means our coverage is not keeping up with developments.'*



In the Magnet, we liked front page reporting of a meeting to discuss a library closure with detailed figures on running costs, visitor numbers quotes from councillors and the public.

## Your Harlow:

*'Still early days, but our sister paper has been at forefront of calling police to account re: solve rates for crime in Thurrock. Last week, we discovered that only 6% were detected for a borough of 160,000 people. We are planning to do the same in Harlow. Attended full council, cabinet, planning, residents groups, anti-expansion, Neighbourhood Watch meetings in Harlow. A real honeymoon period at the moment as people say they haven't seen a journalist for a long time.'*



We liked from Your Harlow a local disagreement on unemployment figures quoting the sitting Conservative MP and the Labour Candidate by Mark Sweeney: <http://www.yourharlow.com/2014/01/25/halfon-and-stride-clash-on-unemployment-figures>

## Brixton Blog

*'[we covered] Lots of council meetings, licensing stories, police community engagement forums, by-election hustings. About to launch a fund for the 'slavery' victims. Local council meetings. We organised a meeting about benefits cuts with residents and council, police governance body etc. could always do more. We need more resources. I'd love to cover EVERY meeting!'*



It is clear from both the nominated examples and our own inspection of the hard copy and online news content produced by the Carnegie Partners that they are producing content of great relevance to the local civic and democratic scene and stimulating engagement. This results directly from the support of the Neighbourhood News project. The partners provide information about opportunities for local people to engage with local political processes by informing them of what is going on, and provide editorial commentary on local civic issues.

It appears that this content is often original and in some cases, locally innovative. Towards the end of the Neighbourhood News project life, we shall conduct focus groups in the partner communities to further test our assessment of the democratic function fulfilled by the partners.

It is important to recognise however, that any local news product that only covered serious civic issues wouldn't engage a wide audience. The partners have therefore been covering a wide range of issues that help them to engage with their audience. In Harlow, for instance, Your Harlow is covering 'When Eusebio/Benfica came to Harlow with a 1968 picture'<sup>11</sup>. Also, Harlow is a 1950s/60s New Town and Your Harlow is about to start:

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.yourharlow.com/2014/01/05/when-eusebio-came-to-harlow/>

*'...a film project called 'Why I moved here', where we interview the people that came in the 50s and 60s and then jump to the new wave (10% of Harlow pop now East European) and do the same. We would then like to return to the people in 10 years etc.'*

While funders are interested in supporting public good news, it is important to note that lighter news and information also has a role in delivering the benefits of improved local news provision. In communities where there is effectively no media, a new media source can create bonding and, to some extent, bridging social capital by sharing common experiences and understanding in a community audience. The upcoming Harlow film could demonstrate this. We shall seek to test this in focus groups to inform our final report.

## **7. OUTPUT DATA AND AUDIENCE SIZE**

The impact of a local news project in the community will to some extent be influenced by the volume of output and audience size and reach.

At the start of the evaluation period, we asked specifically that the Neighbourhood News projects had statistics packages/plugins; and that these packages worked (one of the partners' sites had previously had broken stats). One feature we have observed about local web media across the UK is how little they are pre-occupied with absolute audience size compared to traditional commercial media. This is a feature of not being driven by investors or commercial advertisers to show increasing traffic, but also of a 'self-sustaining' audience. By that we mean an audience in size or nature that the people who put the most effort into the site are sufficiently happy with to make them continue contributing. Or alternatively, that the audience is the set of people that the site contributors want to reach to bring about change – for instance, the local council or people who live in a specific area. The contributors detect this via online comments, or offline in the pub, at the school gates or at community meetings.

The interplay between print and web viewing is interesting. Port Talbot Magnet used CUKT money to pump prime a print edition to 20,000 homes to reach people in the community who weren't online. The winter edition contained 20 stories and carries advertising from a wide range of local businesses. The print distribution has kick started their Facebook presence:

*'We have a group, Port Talbot News, which had roughly 1,600 members at the end of September and now has 1,787. Most of our engagement and effort on social media goes into this group. We also have a Facebook page, Port Talbot Magnet News, where we also post our stories. However, since launching the print edition in late September our average daily timeline visits have remained at 1/day, with a maximum of six on one day in September. Before launching the print edition, our average for August was 3/day – this must be because we are putting all our resources into the print edition, and so the website posting and social media outputs have suffered.'*

*However, since the publication (and more rapid distribution) of the second full edition, combined with more active social media*



*engagement, our Port Talbot News Facebook stats showed the level of engagement increase to 154 people (+569%) and weekly total reach jump up to 1,603 (+304%).*

We are deliberately not making a comparison between the different Neighbourhood News projects on audience size. Each project is in its own setting and has to be judged in the context of that community. Audiences tend to grow in an ‘ess-curve’ pattern and some of the partner sites are at the bottom of their curve in their first few months. For established news sites, there are clearly challenges in determining the additionality of the CUKT funding on visitor numbers. Your Harlow is a completely new site.

The Port Talbot Magnet is the only Carnegie Partner producing printed outputs as part of their Neighbourhood News projects. At the time of this report, they had produced three print editions, each with a print run of 41,000, distributed to 20,000 households.

An analysis of the Carnegie Partners’ online output is provided in the table below:

	Visits	Views	Twitter followers	Facebook likes	Email list members	Period
Brixton Blog	1,680	3,000	2944	3,067	1,618	Web daily
Digital Sentinel	570	1671	130	105	45	November aggregate
Port Talbot Magnet	7,415	12,825	1053	1787 group members		July-Dec aggregate
Your Harlow	46,974	76,078	535	89		July-Nov aggregate

TAL is satisfied that the news websites are demonstrating a good audience for their type, based upon our experience of such sites across the UK. No audience statistics for the Cybermoor project showing the influence of the CUKT spend are available at the present time.

Port Talbot Magnet, producing a print edition, arranged a survey in the local shopping centre carried out by Cardiff School of Journalism. The survey provides strong evidence of a perception of news gap amongst the local population, and an equally strong community welcome for the new publication.

The differing approaches and target communities of the Carnegie Partners lead to widely varying volumes of output.

Your Harlow at peak in November 2013 published 50 stories in a week. This, they report, also drives traffic to their site. Overall from July to November, Harlow published 850 stories, 90 videos and 1,500 tweets. This is a strong rate of publishing for a one-man site with a volunteer team of contributors. It does reflect, though, the potential of a ‘start the site, then bring in an audience’ approach in a good-sized town. This is a strong pace, especially the November peak, but not atypical for a strongly news driven site in a town of this size while the site is going through a growth spell.

The Your Harlow model resembles a modern take on a traditional editor/contributor format. One person is clearly in the lead and is able to motivate, organise and drive content. But with largely

volunteer contributors, requires sensitive management. The challenge for any site with this structure, though, will be transition when the main driver moves on.

Your Harlow and its partner Your Thurrock are part of a very small group of local websites in the UK that make videos regularly. We shall investigate this further in our final report.

Your Harlow suggests that traditional local news shows the largest audiences:

*‘Stabbing in Abercrombie Way: 4,600 page views, Vet in cruelty inquiry 2,000. The next three are also crime related. As we also film crime scenes pieces with voice overs. It is only when you drill down further that you get the community stories.’*

The deliberately-paced start in a small community by the Digital Sentinel team led to the production of 36 posts from August to November, with the rate increasing to further 18 from November to January. The average time the audience spent on the site was quite high at two minutes and 30 seconds. In our experience, this pace is commensurate with a typical small community website in a community like Wester Hailes. The increase in pace at the end of 2013 reflects a change of personnel in the core team at Digital Sentinel. A new member of the team has a background in commercial local web publishing and her approach is to publish stories more frequently. We will consider the impact of this approach further in the final report.

The Neighbourhood News funds allowed Brixton Blog to produce at least an additional 93 pieces of content from July-November. These are both content created directly by trainees whose training and induction was delivered using CUKT funds, and content created by the core team with the extra capacity that the Neighbourhood News resources have freed up.

Port Talbot Magnet produced around 80 articles with CUKT funding in their print editions, distributed to 20,000 homes. Cybermoor has yet to start producing new content.

#### KEY FINDING

The Neighbourhood News partners vary widely in volume of output and audience. Variations in output and audience relate to the design basis of each project, which reflects its context. Trends within each project are more useful than comparisons between projects in this scheme and TAL will monitor this in the second half of the project period: is the story rate and audience growing or shrinking, what does this mean for sustainability and impact?

#### KEY FINDING

Output type also varies widely, including light and serious civic content. It’s encouraging that the Carnegie Partners are already able to cite articles that are clearly making a contribution to the local civic scene.

## KEY FINDING

In TAL's experience of broadly analogous local media projects across the country, the Neighbourhood News sites are currently faring well (with the exception of Cybermoor) when looking at output and content. Your Harlow has a particularly high production rate.

## 8. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Partners showed differing approaches to engaging the local community prior to start up and during early days. Notably, all have good community relations: as an independent news source they have developed good relations with local communities and bodies, or they are embedded in those organisations themselves.

Some of the Partners are integrated into formal or semi-formal community governance mechanisms. Cybermoor is part of the wider Cybermoor project in Alston, Digital Sentinel came from a group of formally constituted community organisations in Wester Hailes. Port Talbot Magnet:

*'...is a member-based co-operative and have held annual meetings and informal meetings with many local community organisations and representatives.'*

Brixton Blog were looking to set up a 'community panel' as part of the project for feedback and guidance. Port Talbot Magnet's main output from Neighbourhood News was a paper, so they sought feedback by survey in a shopping centre using their partnership with University of Cardiff. General comments were positive, suggesting that the Magnet covered local news and issues well, when asked what could be covered better there appeared to be appetite for more local events and 'what's on'.

## 9. TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTION PROCESS

The majority of the Neighbourhood News projects are not highly technical – projects were selected as Carnegie Partners on the basis that they had sufficient technical capability to deliver the media, rather than as technology projects. This is an important distinction. Talk About Local always advise that local web projects should choose technical approaches that fit the essential core of their projects and be wary of 'nice to have' add-ons which drive up risk and cost. It's the community that is important, not the computers.

Two partners reported technical issues: Digital Sentinel had some difficulty with a gifted word press from a partner and, for a time, the site moved around between different hosts. However, it is now running stably. Cybermoor has got off to a slow start in part because of the need to commission a refurbishment of an existing bespoke Joomla website from a local company. The existing mature platform hosts a number of bespoke community services. Cybermoor itself seems to lack the capacity to produce its own site and this has increased the number of stakeholders to be consulted, complicating and delaying the redesign process. The new site still isn't live in January 2014.

## 10. INTERIM FINDINGS

At this early stage, the Neighbourhood News interventions by CUKT are enabling partners to produce a good range of news and information to serve their communities with relatively low expenditure. The community-driven projects combine paid-for labour with a strongly philanthropic element, mainly use digital technologies and mainly not-for-profit or co-operative structures. This keeps costs low, yet output quality high, driven by pro bono input of labour that supplements paid input. The Carnegie Partners were able to lever in most of the capital equipment that they needed, keeping costs and risks down. The partners appear to be creating news and information as public goods that the market has not produced. We are confident that the one partner who is not yet publishing will do so successfully in the near future.

Each partner demonstrates a blend of skills – pro bono and paid input by professional journalists, skilled storytellers without formal journalism training, community building and outreach, design and to a lesser extent some technical capability. Their work is measured and of good quality. We are not seeing web news led by technical geeks or opinionated internet ranters. All the Carnegie Partners demonstrate a passion for their community and are putting huge amounts of their personal capital into the project – we do not observe vanity publishing, nor purely commercial approaches. In our view, Neighbourhood News demonstrates that grassroots community media in print and online is an important form of community action. The local web has been around for 15 years and grassroots print for several hundred, yet genuine grassroots media in these forms hasn't attracted intervention on the scale of local broadcast media.

The level of funding deployed through the Neighbourhood News project is very low when compared to other interventions or subsidies in the local media market (as described above). CUKT, with a small budget overall, chose to fund several projects at low cost rather than trying to pick one from a diverse field and fund it at a higher level. This approach spreads risk – both in having more chances of success with more projects, but also reducing the cash exposure on any one project in the portfolio that might fail.

Neighbourhood News demonstrates that local media projects need not be capital intensive and respond well to small packets of funding. So for a funder looking to support community media projects, but uncertain about risks the 'fund many small projects' route seems a good portfolio approach, as long as the funder can assemble an experienced, broad-based selection panel similar to CUKT's Advisory Group.

In Neighbourhood News, we see both print and web projects. The application process was media-neutral and also attracted audio/radio and video proposals, but these did not succeed on this occasion. In 2014, with media technologies constantly changing and small start-ups challenging and overturning incumbents in many sectors, it's anachronistic that so many local media market interventions in the UK are tied to fixed technologies by historical accident and serve large corporations.

Each Partner is different, but there seems to be a degree of common experience amongst them. In our final report, we shall look at whether people engaged in community media want to be networked together better, whether they have the time to do physical meet-ups or whether they get sufficient benefit from existing loose networks. We shall also consider whether there are any skills gaps either in provision or knowledge of available skills support, such as the Media Trust, Creative Skillset, Cardiff Centre for Community Journalism etc.

On the basis of the interim outputs of Neighbourhood News, it seems that there is a gap in the market for a media-neutral funding mechanism that awards small pots of money directly to well-organised projects rooted in communities across the UK. There are many funders of community action in the UK who could take an easy step into what is new territory for them by taking up the CUKT Neighbourhood News model.

## ANNEX

### *External Advisory Group members*

Douglas White	Acting Head of Policy	CUKT (Chair)
Professor George Brock	Head of Journalism	City University
Malcolm Dean	Former Guardian journalist	
Gavin Sheppard	Director of Marketing	Media Trust
Seamus Dooley	Irish Secretary	National Union of Journalists
Deborah Fox	Programme Manager	NESTA, Destination Local
Bill Livingstone	Trustee	CUKT
Ruth O'Reilly	Editor	The Detail, Northern Ireland
Mandy Rhodes	Managing Director	Holyrood Magazine
John Fellows	Head of Communications	Big Lottery Fund Scotland
Professor Richard Sambrook	Director of Centre for Journalism	Cardiff School of Journalism
Will Perrin	Founder Director	Talk About Local
Sarah Hartley	Author	Talk About Local
Lauren Pennycook	Policy Officer	CUKT
Jim Metcalfe	Head of Practice	CUKT

# ANNEX

## Evaluation framework for CUKT Neighbourhood News

<b>Partner name</b>	
<b>Questions for partners to answer</b>	<b>Notes for partners</b>
	It's OK to mark N/A (not applicable) if your project isn't at that stage yet
<b>Inputs to the project</b>	
What grant money have you spent this period?	We shall compare this to the plan in your bid – if the plan has changed that's fine, just send us the new one.
Has the project benefited from outside expenditure – such as from a parent or sister project?	We would like to estimate the total cost of doing the project, the ability to leverage other support or assets is important to understand.
Have you made use of other pre-existing assets – such as computers or office space – that aren't funded out of the project? Very roughly what would it cost to buy those assets new?	
How many jobs have been created by the project, including part time this period?	Several projects are paying staff freelance, part time etc
How much have you paid for people's labour – wages, freelance etc for project resources?	
Roughly how much unpaid/volunteer labour has gone into the project this period this period in days or hours?	We know that volunteers are the lifeblood of projects like this and want to understand the leverage the project delivers
<b>Quantity of output and statistics</b>	
If you produce printed material what was the quantity produce and successfully distributed in this period, listed per edition?	Please send a copy as a pdf to hello@talkaboutlocal.org
From your google analytics over the period, could you provide the following per day for the period:	For the first return could you provide a starting baseline – in some cases that will be 'nil' or relate to a site that is being made over
Visits	
Page views	
Bounce rate	
Average time on site	
Pages per visit	
New visits	
Traffic sources	
Devices used	
Country of visit	

We would like to understand how people interact with your content – please give an indication of:	
Most popular content items (top five by views)	
Most commented upon content (top five)	
Outgoing links/clicks – top five	Outgoing clicks can be important for a local site as it signposts people to other local information sources.
If you use Twitter to distribute your content, please tell us the follower numbers at the beginning and end of the period	Also please tell us the @name.
If you have a Facebook page or group, please tell us how many Likes or Members you had at start and end of period	Please tell us the name of the group/page so we can join. If the discussion is mainly on Facebook then let us know and discuss some more Facebook stats.
If you have an email list for your project what was its size at start and end of the period – if you have any metrics for engagement on this list please let us know (eg feedburner click-throughs).	Also please tell us briefly how the list works – is it manual/automatic, weekly, daily etc.
What trends do you observe in audience size and engagement using the above?	How do you think the audience is doing? size isn't everything in a local site, what do the numbers tell you or is there something about the audience that the numbers don't communicate?
We shall work with you on an audience survey at the midpoint of the project to test peoples initial reactions to the service.	
How many 'units' of content has the activity funded by the project produced in this period – posts, articles, stories, pages, videos?	We are seeking to capture what the project funds have enabled over and above what would have happened anyway. The count of these measures should be in your blog CMS or YouTube channel etc.
Can you provide all URLs at which you publish content directly under the project or indirectly through, say, RSS feeds to a Facebook page?	
How does the audience size you have achieved in this period measure against your expectations?	In highly local work, the absolute audience size needs setting in context – 100 page views in a small community might be highly significant, whereas bigger communities might expect more – if you could provide a context of community size that would help.



<b>Feedback and engagement with your community</b>	
What community feedback activities have you engaged in during the period?	Meetings, discussion, editorial boards, surveys etc – this can be formal or informal, promotion meetings to tell people about project or a governance system.
What positive feedback was received?	
What negative or could-do-better feedback was received?	It's really important to understand what people do and don't like about the project output. Someone is bound not to like it. Don't worry if people give negative feedback.
What community participation or co-creation in producing content occurred in the period?	That is people contributing rather than telling you what they think – sending pictures, providing stories by email, contributing to a hashtag, volunteering in the production team etc.
How much (roughly) of this was deliberate (people consciously sending things to you for publication) and how much passive, eg you harvesting other's content say from Twitter?	We are interested in how local news gathering networks propagate and sustain by active and passive participation.
Are your audience telling you that they want a different type of content – for instance: 'We want more sport' – or do they seem broadly satisfied? Please give examples.	
At the end of the project, we shall work with you to organise a focus group in your area to discuss the projects impact	
<b>Democratic engagement</b>	
Has there been any 'campaigning' element to this period's output? Can you describe it briefly and what the project output has contributed to it.	For instance, trying to open or close something for community benefit, persuading local elected representatives to change their mind.
To what extent have you covered local democratic issues in this period – for instance local council bodies community governance, planning, licensing, public housing, benefits, roads etc?	CUKT is particularly interested in the impact the project has on local democratic discourse – this doesn't mean though that your content should only be about this – if it is, no-one will read it!
Do you think you are doing a good job in covering these community issues?	
Do you consider that your audience engaged with this 'local democracy' content – have their comments and interaction added to the sum of local knowledge about an issue? Please cite examples.	

How does the audience react to content that isn't available elsewhere – unique information that only you are producing?	We would like to understand to what extent the project is meeting a need for news locally that would otherwise go unmet.
Do you think that people who consume your content have gone on to engage with local democratic processes – eg responding to a consultation, signing a petition, going to a meeting, sending an email to the council etc?	
We shall sample your output to assess the range of issues covered, but please say if there is a particular highlight topic or issue you wish to draw to our attention.	
What interaction has other news media in the area had with your content – have they added to it, linked to it, stolen it or otherwise commented?	
<b>Legacy and continuity</b>	
In the second half of the project we shall ask you if you have thought about legacy and continuity beyond the funded period.	
<b>Awkward final question</b>	
Do you still feel that the project is achievable within the time and budget you have available?	All projects go up and down, it's good for us to know honestly if you feel that this isn't going to work or needs rescoping, then we can discuss how to help.

## ANNEX

### ***Further analysis of interventions in the UK local media market***

The local media market in the UK is characterised by heavy intervention within a detailed framework of local media ownership rules.

BBC – the BBC provides a comprehensive local, regional and nation media service, targeted at localities through radio, television and the internet. The radio service targeted at geographic areas (local radio, BBC Scotland, Wales and NI) totalled over £220 million in 2013. The local television and web services are not split out, one would hope that there are some synergies between these operations. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/annualreport/2013/executive/finances/expenditure.html>

Newspapers – for decades, papers (in print) have received a consistent income from local government for mandatory local advertising of statutory notices. Many acts of parliament prescribe that a notice is published in a local newspaper (literally ‘a newspaper’) when something is done under that act – this can be road closures, insolvency notices, licences etc. In a declining print advertising market, this income is steady and forms what appears to be an important part of the cash flow of local papers. Work by Professor Steven Barnett at the University of Westminster suggests that this is worth £45-50 million per annum. There is no explicit trade-off by the Government or local government that this expenditure supports public service reporting by newspapers.

VAT subsidy – Barnett also suggests that the UK VAT zero rating for newspapers is also an intervention in local media markets worth ‘tens of millions’

Radio – OFCOM administer a Community Radio Fund for DCMS that makes small grants to local community radio projects. DCMS allocated £429,000 for 2012/2013, with grants averaging around £15,000.

Local TV – the UK Government is delivering on the coalition agreement commitment to stimulate local TV in the UK. The Government has chosen a route of technical and programming subsidy to achieve this goal. Precise figures are hard to come by, but website localtv reports:

*‘The BBC Trust agreed with the Government as part of the BBC’s licence fee settlement in 2010 to make up to £40m available to help establish local television until March 2017. These funds include up to £25m for the establishment of the local television infrastructure, administered by the BBC Trust, and up to £15m (up to £5m per year from 2014/15) for the acquisition of Local TV content, managed by the BBC Executive.’*  
<http://localtv.org.uk/news/2013/comux-announces-launch-local-tv/>

Community Channel – The Media Trust, a successful charity, spends around £1.1 - 1.5 million in cash per annum to run the channel, according to its accounts. The Media Trust receives substantial support in kind from major broadcasters to distribute the Community Channel on digital TV. Media Trust also has a programme Local360 to work with community publishers of all sorts and provide publishers with skills and advice – Talk About Local has worked with Media Trust on this programme.

NESTA the innovation charity has supported hyperlocal web media through its Destination Local scheme. In 2012/13, NESTA made 10 grants of up to £50,000 to web projects to help them develop more mobile focussed services. NESTA and the Technology Strategy Board have announced a further £2 million scheme to help local online publishing innovation by larger companies.

In the UK, grant-makers in general, with the exception of NESTA and the single £1.3 million grant made to the Media Trust by BIG Lottery, make few grants to community media projects. There is no UK equivalent of the Knight Foundation in the USA. The Journalism Foundation, set up by the Lebedev family survived only a year, but did make grants to several small local media projects.

In shaping this overview of the market, TAL's conversations with Professor Steven Barnett at University of Westminster, Dave Boyle of Co-operatives UK and Dave Harte of Birmingham City University and the AHRC Creative Citizens Project have been valuable, as has the advice of Jon Kingsbury at NESTA.