



**MARK GARNIER MP**

*Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest*

Tim Davie CBE  
BBC Director-General  
Broadcasting House  
Portland Pl  
London  
W1A 1AA

12 December 2022

Dear Tim,

**Planned reduction in BBC local radio content in England**

I am writing you in relation to the decision by the BBC to cut the weekly output of radio stations across England. This decision, which sees £19 million "reprioritised" from broadcast services towards online and multimedia production will have a devastating impact and I urge you to reconsider it.

Radio as a platform is as popular as ever, most recent RAJAR statistics show that 49.7 million adults or 88.8 % of the adult (15+) UK population tune into the radio each week.

Of that, BBC Nations radio and Local BBC Radio in England had a combined audience of 7.82 million. Covering my constituency is the excellent BBC Hereford & Worcester, which has a weekly reach of 91,000 people out of a population of just 535,000.

From speaking with my constituents, they treasure the mix of local issues, music, sport and news that is covered by local radio. Yet due to the decision made last month, longstanding and popular presenters, such as Malcolm Boyden, who has presented the Sunday morning show on BBC Hereford & Worcester since 2005, now face the prospect of losing their roles.

In total, 139 jobs would be cut in local radio as more programmes are shared between stations. The National Union of Journalists described it as the "biggest threat facing local radio since it launched in 1967".

Not only will the cuts mean that some excellent shows will be lost, but it will undoubtedly impact on the ability of local stations to run high quality campaigns. Following the campaigning of BBC Hereford & Worcester, I raised in Parliament the dangers of Nitrous Oxide and how young people are becoming seriously ill from the misuse of the substance. That campaign, started in local radio, has gained traction and put the issue on the map at a national level.



Furthermore, during flooding that took place last winter, when our road network was severely impacted, it was BBC Hereford & Worcester that my residents relied upon for up to date information.

At a time when local journalism is increasingly under threat due to the shift towards online news, it should be the role of the BBC to step in and supplement those services. Simply repurposing money currently spent on local radio is not good enough. With an annual budget of more than £5 billion, the £19 million that is being "reprioritised" is a small drop in the ocean for the BBC.

However, whilst I'm totally opposed to the planned cuts in local radio output, I would welcome investment by the BBC into more local journalism, which has been envisioned in this proposal.

A survey for the Public Interest News Foundation showed six in ten people said they would trust a news organisation covering local news in their area that is based locally, compared to 31% who would not. By contrast, less than a third (31%) would trust a news organisation based outside their area but producing local news for their area. This shows that more locally produced and locally based organisations are what residents want.

However, investment should not and does not need to be at the expense of local radio and in fact local radio stations with their trusted local brands should be at the heart of the local journalism that the BBC should be promoting. There should be an expansion of locally produced content, from broadcast to online based out of centres such as BBC Hereford & Worcester.

In announcing the news, Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director of Nations said that the plans were announced so that the BBC could "connect with more people in more communities right across England". I do not see how the proposals as they have been announced can possibly achieve those ambitions. The BBC should be focussed on more locally produced content across country, refocusing itself away from nationally produced radio content, where there is a thriving and growing commercial sector.

To be truly connecting with more people in communities across England, you need to have more investment and people based in those communities. I urge you to reconsider your planned announcement and would welcome a meeting with you to discuss further.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Garnier' with a date '1/2/14' written below it.

**Mark Garnier MP**  
**Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest**