

Local newspapers must be protected amid crisis

9 Apr 2020



Scotland's regional media must be supported by both Scotland's governments to ensure their survival now and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Scottish Conservatives said the vital role played by the country's trusted traditional press was clearer than ever as the coronavirus crisis continues.

Shadow finance secretary Donald Cameron has now urged his SNP counterpart Kate Forbes to work with the UK Government to ensure action is taken as quickly as possible.

He said a 100 per cent rates holiday was essential, and that the Scottish Government should direct more advertising in the direction of newspapers.

Ministers are spending considerable sums on public health messages, but most of that is online to companies who are ultimately based overseas.

He also suggested investing in a similar scheme to the Danish government, which has introduced a fund for media organisations during the crisis.

A similar initiative by the Scottish Government could be replicated for around £25 million.

A trusted media loan scheme has also been floated, which established titles could sign up to.

As well as providing a vital public service, news publishing supports around 4000 jobs in Scotland.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Donald Cameron said:

"We are seeing throughout the coronavirus crisis just how vital newspapers and broadcast media are.

"They play a crucial role in holding both the Scottish and UK governments to account, and in carrying vitally important public health messages.

"But these are also publications who, in some cases, are a month away from collapse.

"We simply cannot allow this industry to disappear, and the Scottish Government needs to step in and ensure these publications are supported.

"It should be providing support in the form of a rates holiday, and

channelling more of its considerable advertising budget in the direction of the local press.

“It would be extremely regrettable if newspapers, having played such a critical role during this health and economic emergency, were allowed to collapse immediately afterwards.

“We know papers have been struggling for years, but this could be a chance to finally boost their resources and ensure they can continue operating for generations to come.”