

Speech: PM's words at the regions and nations lobby drinks reception: 11 October 2018

Thank you all for coming today. I know some of you had to travel some considerable distance.

We all know that free, plural and vibrant media is the backbone of this country's democracy. This is a belief that I and the government hold very strongly. Your coverage, be it in print or broadcast, is a reflection of the rich diversity of the views that can be found right across the United Kingdom.

I think it is true to say, regional and local media is fearless. It is independent and we are committed to safeguarding its future.

I know from the discussions I have with my own local paper the significant pressures that are on regional and local press at the moment. Nowhere is this more true than in print journalism where the rapid changes in consumer behaviour and technology have led to falling circulations and advertising revenues. As we know, a quarter of local papers have closed in the past decade.

That is why we launched the Cairncross Review, to examine what more we can do to improve the long term sustainability of high quality journalism, because it is that high quality journalism, at a local and regional level, that is so important in underpinning our democracy.

Obviously, we'll wait for the review's findings and recommendations before we make specific policy decisions but nothing is off the table. This commission was launched because we see that there is a problem there and we need to have those voices looking into it for us and coming forward with their recommendations.

I have already heard of one group that has been sending in not just comments on the challenges but also some solutions. And I am sure that you all will be talking not just about the challenges you face but how you are also reacting to those challenges, to the digital age and what you are doing to improve sustainability. And I am sure you all have ideas on what the government might do to help in this area.

As a member of parliament, I have often seen that it is regional and local media which is a trusted source of news for millions of citizens. It keeps all politicians alive to what really matters beyond the Westminster bubble – understanding what is happening out there is so important for us all. Of course, we see it in our own constituencies but getting that wider reflection of what happens is important.

When that trusted local news comes under threat, then I think democracy suffers and people become ever more vulnerable to disinformation. So this is our local press, it is your profession, it is imperative that we work together to ensure it has a very good and viable future.

So thank you for all that you do to maintain those local independent voices, and we want to work with you so that we continue to see that vibrant local and regional press. That is an important element, underpinning our democracy.