

November 21, 2023

Dear Delyth,

I am writing to voice my serious concerns over a change to public notices in the Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill introduced to the Senedd this week.

Section 20 of the Bill removes the requirement for local authorities to publish changes in council tax rates in a public notice in a newspaper, instead replacing it with simply a requirement to publish it electronically.

This change is of great concern to local newspaper publishers, such as us, who provide an essential service of public interest journalism to communities across Wales.

Wales has a higher level of digital exclusion than the wider UK, [with 7% of people without the internet](#). Independent research shows that local newspapers are an essential platform for ensuring that the public, particularly the elderly and disenfranchised, have access to critical information that may have a profound impact upon their lives.

The recent report by the [Wales Public Interest Journalism Working Group](#), which included representatives from a wide range of publishers big and small, recognised that the publication of statutory notices in newspapers provides vital information to the community on a wide range of subjects, such as licensing applications, road closures and planning.

At the same time, it noted that such notices provide a vital revenue stream for news publishers, supporting coverage of national news, politics and current affairs and that some titles, would no longer be viable if public notices were removed.

As an industry, we recognise the need for people to receive information digitally too and have worked to leverage our huge digital audiences with the launch of the Public Notice Portal in May this year, which has already generated [more than one million page views](#). Amongst other things, the Public Notice Portal enables local people to set up email alerts by their postcode so that they can be kept informed of important proposed changes in their immediate area.

Removing the need to publish council tax changes in local newspapers is the start of a slippery slope that could have serious and lasting consequences for provision of local news across Wales.

The industry was recently hit by [Meta's decision to end funding for the NCTJ Community News Project](#), which will see numerous reporting roles removed from newsrooms.

Now is the not the time to add pile further problems on our industry. Instead, I would ask that as a local representative of South-East Wales and chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee that you join me in calling on the Welsh Government to re-state its support for local news and commit to retaining the public notice requirement on local authorities.

Sincerely,

Gavin Thompson

Regional editor, Newsquest, and editor of the South Wales Argus