

Dear Lady Hollins

At the debate in the House of Lords on the IP Bill, you were reported as saying that 'the local newspaper threat is a smokescreen' and that local newspapers were not at risk as they could choose to join a recognised regulator.

As the editor of many highly respected and long-established local newspapers can I say that this is anything but a smokescreen.

In his determination of the phone-hacking inquiry, Lord Justice Leveson made clear that local newspapers were guilty of no wrongdoing and should not be penalised as a result of his report.

Yet we face huge financial hardship if the proposed cost sanctions outlined in the Crime and Courts Act 2013 proceed - and similar hardship if we are forced to join a recognised regulator.

The reasons for the former are clear; for the latter may be less so. Regulation under Royal Charter requires newspapers to participate in compensatory arbitration. In the only approved scheme from IMPRESS this would require us to pay all the costs of an arbitrated complaint, up to £3,500, plus potentially the successful complainant's costs of up to £3,000, in addition to unspecified damages.

For tiny papers who have seen readers and classified advertisements migrate to entirely unregulated websites and social media, these are enormous sums. It is rare for our titles to incur any legal fees during the course of a year - we have always set the highest standards and when we make a mistake are quick to correct or apologise.

IPSO, our independent regulator of choice, is piloting an independent arbitration scheme without the requirement for the local press to join as it knows we have no need of it and could not afford it.

I have been a local newspaper journalist for 35 years and an editor for 25 of those. I am proud of the service we provide to our communities despite the tiny resources with which we now operate.

In the debate you acknowledged that small newspapers 'don't hack phones'. Nor do large ones.

Please do not allow newspapers, a vital component of every local community, to be further eroded because of a scandal which engulfed the News of the World - a title a world away from ourselves.

The views in this letter are not merely my own but reflect those of the editor in chief of Johnston Press Jeremy Clifford who represents some 250 titles across the UK.

My very best wishes

Gary

Gary Shipton

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