

Rob Butler MP

By email

Kevin Bakhurst

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5 August 2022

Dear Mr Butler,

Merging of BBC regional TV news coverage

Thank you for your letter to Dame Melanie Dawes setting out your concerns about the BBC's recent decision to end the Oxford edition of *South Today* from November. Melanie has asked me to respond on her behalf.

As you make clear in your letter, regional and local news are extremely important to audiences and are central to the BBC's remit.

The BBC's remit is set out in the [BBC Charter](#), including the requirement to fulfil the Mission and promote the Public Purposes. Public Purpose 1 requires the BBC to *provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them*, and Public Purpose 4 requires the BBC to *reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the UK's nations and regions*. BBC One plays a key part in delivering local news and continues to be the most used source of regional news in England (although the proportion using it to access regional news has declined from 38% in 2020, to 31% in 2022).¹

The BBC Board is responsible for setting the BBC's strategic direction, managing its budget, and ensuring that it delivers the Mission and Public Purposes for all audiences. This includes deciding how best to respond to changing audience behaviours and financial pressures. Ofcom's role is to hold the BBC to account for how it delivers the Mission and Public Purposes for all audiences. The [Agreement](#) requires us to set an [Operating Licence](#) for the BBC's services, and to include quotas within the licence for regional news programming.

Neither the Agreement nor the Operating Licence specify geographic areas for which the BBC must provide regional news programmes. The BBC therefore has some discretion to alter its local news delivery over time to best meet audience needs. The BBC's plans to merge the Oxford edition of *South Today* with the regional programme from Southampton are therefore not likely to breach its current licence conditions.

However, the BBC must continue to deliver news and current affairs, including local news, to all audiences. We monitor the BBC's delivery of its Mission and Public Purposes on an ongoing basis and report annually on its delivery. Our assessment draws on extensive audience research and industry data across different demographics.

¹ Ofcom's [News Consumption in the UK 2022 report](#), slide 71.

We will continue to closely monitor the BBC's delivery of local news, and how well it serves all audiences, including the impact of these changes on those over 55. If we have concerns about the BBC's performance, we will consider whether it may be necessary to introduce any regulatory provisions pertaining to the provision of BBC regional news programmes.

We are currently in the process of [modernising the BBC's Operating Licence](#) to ensure that our regulation of the BBC stays fit for the future. We have proposed to incorporate the BBC's online services more fully into the licence, to give the BBC more scope to determine how to meet changing audience needs, and to require greater transparency in relation to how it delivers for audiences and its future plans. We also propose maintaining quotas where we think they are still needed, such as for national and regional news on television. We will not hesitate to step in if we have concerns with the BBC's planned or actual delivery.

Our consultation on these proposals is currently open, and your letter will feed into our considerations for how we hold the BBC to account on behalf of audiences for its delivery of news content in the English regions.

Thank you for taking the time to raise your concerns with Ofcom. I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ke. Bakhurst". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kevin Bakhurst