



The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ

3<sup>Rd</sup> April 2020

Dear Secretary of State

The Community Media Association wrote to you last week to ask you to recognise that now, possibly more than ever, we need strong and resilient communities to support us all through the immediate crisis and in the months and years ahead.

However the nation's community media, including 295 on-air community radio stations, have a vital role to play in galvanising local support, information networks, and neighbourhood connections and are now are facing significant financial loss, reductions in staff and volunteers, and possible closure – at a time when their communities will need them most.

Please note the following:

- Since the commercial radio networks have retreated from localism, local radio is now primarily delivered by the BBC and community radio networks. The BBC offers regional local radio and community licensees broadcast hyperlocal radio. Plans are now in place for these two networks to work together for the benefit of delivering key messages to the public. BBC Local Radio is financed by the licence fee. However, community radio has no comprehensive funding source.
- For the majority of communities, the only dedicated local broadcaster they have comes from community licensees. There has never been a greater need for local radio.
- Community radio is the only network broadcasting to communities of interest across ethnic, religious and specialist lifestyle and interest groups.
- Local voices make community radio. This makes it trusted and respected as a local broadcaster. This is an ideal platform to disseminate information on the public need during the COVID-19 epidemic.

There is now an urgent need to address how this crisis is affecting the sustainability of the community media sector. These impacts come from a number of fronts:

- Loss of trading through cancelled advertising and contracted events
- Cuts in grant-funded projects

- Reduced opportunities for the delivery of training
- Impact on contractual and service delivery income
- The wider impacts from economic downturn

The Community Media Association and its members, colleagues, and supporters urgently ask the Government for a Community Media Support Package.

As it currently stands, the existing measures announced to date do not support community organisations. Our sector needs a dedicated Community Media Support Package that should address the following:

1. To substantially increase the Community Radio Fund for 2020-21 to provide an *ex gratia* grant of £10,000 for each Ofcom-licensed community radio station currently broadcasting that will contribute to the resilience of community radio stations that are facing serious financial hardship as a result of the current crisis.
2. Community broadcasters are providing airtime free of charge to broadcast public health information. However, government and public bodies such as Public Health England are buying advertising slots from broadcasters for public health information spots and a proportion of this available funding should be allocated to community radio and for not-for-profit local TV broadcasters to ensure that the Government's messages get through at the community level to the public.
3. To establish a Public Health Content Fund to support high quality and accurate local public health news reporting and the production of programmes or series of programmes, made by community broadcasters, that increase public understanding and contribute to psychological support during the present public health emergency.

We request that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport considers our proposals favourably and will take the necessary steps to support community media - a much needed and vital public resource in this difficult time.

Yours sincerely



**Danny Lawrence - BEM, BCAC**  
**Chairman, Community Media Association**  
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- <https://www.commedia.org.uk>
- [https://www.twitter.com/community\\_media](https://www.twitter.com/community_media)
- <https://facebook.com/CommunityMediaAssociation>

**About the Community Media Association:**

The Community Media Association (CMA) is a non-profit making organisation founded in 1983 to support community radio – and our remit has expanded to include other community broadcasters such as a number of some local television stations. The CMA represents the community media sector to Government, industry and regulatory bodies.

Our membership brings together established organisations, aspirant groups and individuals within the sector. The CMA provides a range of advice, information and consultancy, offering support to anyone with an interest in the sector.