

16th February 2022

Sent by email: laura.trott.mp@parliament.uk

Laura Trott MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Ms Trott,

Thank you for your letter of February 9, which I received on Feb 14, hence the lateness of my reply, for which I apologise.

I understand the concerns you express in your letter and very much appreciate the regard with which you hold the Chronicle and its value to the community. I will outline, if I may, some of the wider issues that are faced by the regional news industry as a whole, including Reach plc, and how they have a bearing on titles such as the Sevenoaks Chronicle.

For the past 25 years, the foundations of our business have been under assault on all fronts. Demographic changes coupled with the rise of the internet have seen audience habits change irrevocably, leading to dramatic and relentless declines in the revenues we receive from the price we charge consumers to buy our newspapers and the advertising that goes in them.

In the meantime we have pivoted to become digital-first news publishers, recognising that online is where the majority of people now get their news and information, and we are striving to build a sustainable home for local and community journalism.

While we have made considerable progress, online we are subject to the whims of the platforms (mainly Facebook and Google) which to a large extent control how we reach our readers, while at the same time taking a disproportionate share of the digital advertising market, despite benefiting from the journalism the regional news industry pays for.

For these reasons we continue to manage our costs carefully as our print revenues continue to steadily decline, forcing us to make decisions such as the one you are aware of that affects the Sevenoaks Chronicle.

Reach

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The changes we are making here follow a pattern established successfully elsewhere in Reach, where, thanks to our continued digital growth, and our investment in online journalism, we are producing more digital coverage that can also be used to serve our remaining print readers. We have recently reorganised our digital newsrooms in the South East and in Kent, where we aim to provide more locally focused coverage to major towns such as Sevenoaks.

Furthermore, neighbourhood-level news and information is increasingly being served on our hyperlocal platform, [InYourArea.co.uk](https://www.inyourarea.co.uk), which is actually extending the reach of community news across the UK. In addition, we are committed supporters of the Local Democracy News service, which sees Reach and other regional publishers manage a network of reporters dedicated to covering local authorities and other institutions.

You will find all of these initiatives thriving across Kent and Sevenoaks, and while I appreciate they may not be as immediately visible or well known as a 140-year-old institution such as the Sevenoaks Chronicle, they do demonstrate our commitment to building a thriving local journalism ecosystem for the 21st century.

Please be assured that we will indeed continue to publish the Chronicle, and you will continue to see our reporters covering the major issues for KentLive and the paper.

Print content editor Katie Boyden and KentLive editor Luke Jacobs remain your key contacts within our newsrooms, and David Bartlett is our Audience and Content Director, overseeing all of our newsrooms in the South East. I have copied this letter to each of them and will ask them to keep in touch with you as our journalism evolves and grows in Sevenoaks and the county as a whole.

Thank you again for taking the trouble to express your concerns about the changes - I hope I have gone some way to explaining them and putting your mind at rest.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MR', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Marc Reeves
Marketplace publisher, Reach plc
Midlands & Wales / South