



**Local Democracy Reporting  
Open Justice  
A review**



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# SUMMARY

The Local Democracy Reporting and Open Justice schemes were funded under the Public Interest Journalism Fund, which has now been closed. The purpose of this review is to determine how well each of the schemes achieved its stated purpose. The review concludes both have done so, and both should be continued.

LDR reporters express satisfaction with the way the scheme operates, and most editors rate its operation and output a success. For their part, elected representatives LDR believe it has improved coverage. Collectively, they are convinced that its coverage and output have led to significant improvements.

The scheme is not without its issues (set out in 2.5-2.7) but these are due in large measure to the disparate nature of media outlets in the scheme. Some solutions are canvassed in 2.9. Overall, when coupled with the results of analyses conducted as part of this review, it is clear that the LDR scheme has made quantitative and qualitative improvements to coverage of local democracy and should continue.

The ending of the PIJF requires any continuation of the scheme to be under a new funding regime and a partnership between NZ on Air and RNZ has been mooted. Few objections have been raised to such an arrangement, but it would require new terms of engagement with partners and certain safeguards to ensure balances are maintained. Elements that should be incorporated in any such arrangement are discussed in 2.9.

The Open Justice scheme is fundamentally different to LDR in that it was conceived and has been run as a proprietary operation by NZME while LDR has the characteristics of a cooperative. Within the operating philosophy of the PIJF this sense of ownership and competitive advantage raised no issues because others had projects that had similar outlooks. Without the PIJF, such attitudes may be problematic and could count against continuation.

This review, however, suggests that ways should be found to also continue that project. Not only does it pass muster in terms of assessments of the stories it has produced and the additional areas of coverage that it has met, it has a civic imperative that is little different from the local democracy driver behind LDR.

It is telling that senior members of the judiciary and court officials not only view positively what the scheme has achieved, they regard its continuation as a necessity (3.9). What it does and how it does it are covered in 3.5 and 3.6. The performance of its team of dedicated court reporters is discussed in 3.7 and the gaps they have filled in 3.8. How an Open Justice scheme might be funded in the absence of the PIJF is challenging, but the conclusion drawn from the review is that a way needs to be found. Some possible approaches are offered in 3.9.

While the PIJF has delivered two outstanding programmes in the Local Democracy Reporting and Open Justice schemes, it also left a less helpful legacy. A concerted disinformation campaign seeded, in the public mind, the notion that state funding of private sector journalism meant the government had bought off the media. There is no evidence that either LDR or OJ were directly targeted but they are the unfortunate beneficiaries of that taint. Some remedies are contained in 4.1.

# PART 1 REVIEW PROCESS

## 1.1 Review brief

The NZ on Air brief for the review was set out in a letter on 9 March 2023.

It required reviewing two elements of the Public Interest Journalism Fund – the Local Democracy Reporting and Open Justice schemes. Both schemes have been the recipients of significant funding and assessments of their outcomes and effectiveness would assist in determining (a) whether they have achieved their stated purposes in redressing coverage shortcomings (b) how well they have met PIJF General Guidelines, Round Criteria and Te Tiriti Framework (c) whether their outputs meet acceptable journalistic standards (d) whether affected parties – including audiences – value the schemes and whether they have been efficiently organised and managed.

Appraisal of the schemes would involve the following:

- Content: Digital analytics plus limited sampling of stories
- Participants: Editorial executives and scheme reporters
- Community: Directly affected parties
- It made clear that the exercise was to be an appraisal of the schemes and not a personal performance review of journalists involved. Media staff were to be given that assurance by the reviewer.

## 1.2 Methodology

The Local Democracy Reporting and Open Justice schemes were reviewed separately. However, similar methodologies were employed where appropriate.

Four research elements make up the review: Quantitative and qualitative content analysis; data analysis; surveys; and personal interviews.

Where appropriate, methodological approaches used in a 2020 review of the Local Democracy Reporting Scheme have been re-employed. This has allowed, for example, some longitudinal assessment of the LDR scheme. The evaluative attributes employed in the 2020 qualitative content analysis have been used in the current LDR review. Qualitative analysis of Open Justice stories necessitated the use of different attributes, but evaluation of news value was the same in both reviews and based on the 2020 analysis.

Content analysis of local democracy stories was based on a sample of 14 stories from each of 11 publications<sup>1</sup>, a total of 154 stories. The majority were published in March/April 2023 although at least one story from each publication during the 2022 local body elections was also analysed. An analysis of local democracy subjects covered by LDR reporters was drawn from daily advisories produced between 29 March and 29 May 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> Stuff's Auckland community newspapers were included as a single publication. The reviewer was unable to access and assess broadcast material outside RNZ's website.

Open Justice is based on a more centralised publication model than the LDR scheme. Therefore, a smaller story sample was used in assessing Open Justice content. Twenty five individual stories published between February 2022 and June 2023 were analysed, along with four sets of stories focussed on specific subjects. In total, 42 Open Justice stories were analysed. An analysis of subjects covered by OJ reporters was based on advisories produced during March 2023.

Audience analytics were provided by NZ on Air, RNZ, and NZME.

Separate survey forms were developed for LDR reporters, LDR editors, OJ reporters, OJ editors, and local democracy representatives. Surveys were completed by all LDR reporters (14), LDR editors (14), OJ reporters (12), and OJ editors (9). A total of 20 local democracy representatives responded to the survey, representing all regions covered by LDR reporters. The questionnaires are appended to the review (Appendix 1)

Personal interviews were conducted with executives of RNZ, NZME, Stuff, and the News Publishers Association; the administrators of both schemes; and representatives of the courts and judiciary. In addition, the LDR and OJ reporters met with the author during training courses in Auckland.

Formal documents relating to both schemes were also examined during the review.

### 1.3 Preliminary presentation

Following a request, a presentation of preliminary findings was made to a NZ on Air committee on 12 June. The presentation was limited to aspects of the Local Democracy Reporting scheme and the material presented is consistent with the contents and conclusions contained in this review.

### 1.4 Review structure

Both Local Democracy Reporting and Open Justice were funded under the Public Interest Journalism Fund. However, although similar methodologies have been employed, each is treated as a separate scheme and reviewed accordingly. Those reviews are followed by remarks on public perceptions of the PIJF which, although not in the brief received from NZ on Air, may have impacted the schemes.

In order to avoid any possibility that the review may be seen as a personal appraisal of individual reporters, all data has been anonymised. This includes survey responses and story identifiers.

# PART 2 LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTING SCHEME

## 2.1 Introduction

No single measure will prove the efficacy of the Local Democracy Reporting Service. There is, for example, a growing reliance on digital analytics as a test of story 'success', but the very presence of the word 'local' in the scheme's title means such indicators should be seen as only one piece in the toolkit.

The approach taken in reviewing the LDR scheme has been to seek answers to a series of basic questions that flow from its stated purpose:

- Does it work the right way?
- Does it do the right things?
- How well does it perform?
- Has it filled the gaps?
- How might it be maintained and improved?

Like democracy at any level, local democracy is a complex mechanism and the LDR service must be seen as only a small cog in the machine. A review must therefore be limited to realistic expectations. LDR cannot, for example, be expected to single-handedly reverse declining voter turnout or change the dynamics of civic engagement. Such a service can, however, make material contributions to a community's understanding of what is being done in its name, and to the accountability of those it invested with power.

## 2.2 LDR's editorial brief

The Local Democracy Reporting Service has worked to the following brief.

*The core purpose of the Local Democracy Reporting (LDR) service is to provide impartial coverage of the regular business and workings of local authorities in New Zealand. Coverage will extend to other relevant democratic institutions. The service is designed to provide timely coverage of the affairs of publicly appointed and/or publicly funded local institutions and organisations, including but not exclusive to: local councils (including district and regional councils), local trusts, council committees, community boards, council-owned or partially owned commercial enterprises, district health boards (and their replacements), port and airport authorities, and Māori incorporations and trusts.*

- *The brief is to report on the decision-making process: what decisions are made in the public's name and how are they arrived at, what evidence is presented to the councils etc.*
- *The LDRs may provide other stories which are focused on local democracy and which are in the public interest – so long as that does not detract from the core purpose of the service.*
- *All work must be available to all qualifying media partners, simultaneously and in a timely manner.*
- *National politics generally is out of scope but there will be occasions in which national politicians and their work/decisions/pronouncements have direct impact/interest at a regional level. This would, as a matter of course, attract the attention of LDR staff.*

## 2.3 Structure

The LDR service was a joint initiative by Radio New Zealand (RNZ) and the News Publishers Association (NPA), initially in a stand-alone pilot scheme funded through NZ on Air and then as an expanded scheme under the umbrella of the Public Interest Journalism Fund.

The scheme has placed reporters in local newsrooms initially chosen by RNZ and NPA through a weighted scorecard system and then further appraised by NZ on Air during the PIJF funding round.

Although funding approval allowed for up to 20 reporters, there were 14 in place in the following operations when the review was undertaken: *Northern Advocate*, *Stuff*, *Sun Live*, *Whakatane Beacon*, *Gisborne Herald, Daily*, *Te Korimako o Taranaki*, *AWA FM*, *Wairarapa Times-Age*, *Nelson Weekly*, *Marlborough Express*, *Greymouth Star*, *Canterbury News*, and *Ashburton Guardian*.

The service is administered by RNZ through an LDR manager and an editor. This duo manages reporters in collaboration with local newsroom executives, liaises with reporters over coverage, edits stories, produces and distributes daily advisories to media partners, supervises the LDR content management system, and conducts training. The LDR Manager is responsible for contract/relationship management, media partner sign-ups, budget oversight, and internal/external project reporting requirements.

The training for the LDR reporters arranged and conducted by the administrators also draws on external expertise.

The service has 30 media partners, and its daily advisories are distributed to more than 120 news executives and staff.

NZ on Air's oversight of the scheme has been through its Head of Journalism, Raewyn Rasch (now Head of Partnerships).

## 2.4 Funding

Total funding for the LDR scheme is \$3,667,920 over two years, comprising \$2,977,920 in role funding through NZ on Air plus \$690,000 in in-kind contributions by newsrooms.

Funds are drawn down in nine instalments: A first instalment of \$559,000, seven quarterly instalments of \$340,300, and a final instalment of \$36,820 at the end of the current scheme. Each of the quarterly payments has required the presentation of performance reports.

These allocations do not include the LDR pilot, which was separately funded and amounted to \$1 million. However, it is noteworthy that the individual LDR reporter employment cost budgeted in the current scheme stands at \$85,500 per reporter, relatively unchanged from that 2019 pilot.



The conclusion of the Public Interest Journalism Fund left the future of LDR uncertain at best. New arrangements through other forms of government funding would be welcome but, as in the past, the scheme may suffer if funding has limited duration.

## 2.5 Does LDR work the right way?

The structure under which the LDR service has evolved is unusual. It involves cooperation between private and public media, potentially delicate operational relationships, territorial tensions, and the uncertainties of a limited time span.

The originators of the scheme – the News Publishers Association and Radio New Zealand – remain positive about its benefits and are convinced that its coverage and output have led to significant improvements. LDR reporters express satisfaction with the way the scheme operates, although two express concerns on matters that are specific to their locations and which do not impact on the wider scheme.

NPA general manager Brook Cameron: “There were audiences that were underserved. It has absolutely filled gaps. Given the decline in the number of journalists in certain areas, this has allowed smaller communities, in particular, to have additional resources to cover important local matters. The fact that content is shared has also allowed the benefits to be spread.”

RNZ chief executive Paul Thompson: “It has grown in size, and we have seen improvements in systems, processes, and partner relationships since the pilot scheme. We have retained all the original partners and added more partners, both in terms of host newsrooms and people who take content. And that’s good. We now have all the major players signed up to take content. Of course, much of what the LDR reporters produce is hyper-local, for local communities, and that’s where it really works. However, we have signed new licensing agreements and we also see content popping up there.”

Nonetheless, assessments by other executives on the appropriateness of the LDR structure vary. This variation is driven in part by imperatives to which, it is fair to say, the scheme falls victim through no fault of its own.

Editors in smaller, regional newsrooms that host LDR reporters have few issues with the structure of the scheme and its operation. Responses to a survey question on day-to-day operation elicited largely positive responses. Some take issue with ‘double editing’ by the LDR editor as well as in the local newsroom, which is discussed below. Other issues that were raised related to matters of detail such as patchy communication and a desire to see the online content management system updated.

The following comments are representative of the views of regional editors.

- “It works well. It’s good to have a staff member getting the training and networking opportunities they do through LDR, and them having another editor to bounce ideas off.”
- “I have handed over some of my duties to those that administer the scheme in order to manage my time better – i.e., the release of stories when I am otherwise engaged. I have a good relationship with the LDR editor, as does the

LDR reporter. Being open and honest about releasing stories has worked well on a day-today basis.”

- “It seems to be working fine. I have no issues with it.”
- “[It is] hands off which is good (more so recently); local editors [are] in charge (as they should be).”
- “I’m happy with the way it’s handled. Communication is good and any issues are able to be dealt with swiftly. Our LDR reporter says that he has clear direction from both our editor and the LDR editors without too much friction. I think overall the scheme has been managed well.”

It is clear, however, that some of these editors do take issue with the LDR previewing or editing stories before they are accessed by the local newsroom. Some felt this double handling was unnecessary, some regarded it as impinging on local control. However, other editors – particularly in newsrooms with fewer resources – welcomed this form of quality control.

On balance, it appears that previewing by the LDR editor is a positive form of quality control. It does, of course, require close liaison with the host newsroom to ensure that its needs are not impaired by such an operational overlay. It serves a second purpose that local editors may have discounted – determining whether a story also meets the needs of outlets beyond the source newsroom.

The 2020 review noted the potential for LDR reporters to combine their efforts to produce stories with broader interest than a single newspaper or local radio station. That is one of the functions of the LDR editor, a role introduced after that review. It is evident that the preview process, along with liaison protocols, aims also to fulfil that broader brief.

An assessment of the survey results shows strongly that pre-editing by LDR administrators is by no means a make-or-break issue. Where it is creating problems such as interrupting deadline copy flows, it should be dealt with by direct discussion between the parties.

Editorial executives with wider, national responsibilities driven by major news websites and apps have a more negative view of the LDR scheme’s operation. They bemoan what they see as a lack of stories that will have currency with a wider audience and point to a poor showing in online analytics for many LDR stories.

Such views need to be kept in perspective. Although there is some potential for collective story production by multiple LDR reporters, that is not their primary purpose. The LDR scheme was devised to fill serious gaps in coverage of elected bodies at local and regional levels. By definition, much of what is produced *is* local. The primary focus is on those directly affected, with the aim of improving participatory democracy at a local or regional level. The potential for such stories to attract large digital audiences is low, but that must not be seen as a weakness in the scheme.

If anything, lower levels of support from these editorial executives in head offices suggest LDR reporters should not be placed in national newsrooms where the reporting focus is too broad to capture the essential purpose of the scheme.

There is, however, a more pressing structural aspect of the scheme that needs to be addressed: Pre-emptive publication by rivals.

LDR reporters are required to file their stories 'in a timely manner'. There is a clear expectation by the LDR administrators that this means a story will be filed as soon as an LDR reporter is able to write it and that, after editing, it will be available to all LDR recipients. For news stories that would usually mean same day and therein lies a dilemma.

Among the host newsrooms are several with non-daily publication cycles. Some have publication days that are later than nearby rivals. And, even among publications with greater frequency, there may be a sense they are being pre-empted by rival news websites with greater reach (and, of course, immediacy) with the result that the value of their own print edition is diminished.

Consequently, story filing in a given LDR host newsroom may gravitate toward its own publication schedule. This can lead to frustration on the part of LDR partners who have seen a particular story on an advisory of upcoming topics, and to strained relations between the host and the LDR administrators. The survey of editors reflected some dissatisfaction at this situation. It should be stated, nonetheless, that most stories are filed within the spirit of the scheme.

However, it is a matter that should be addressed in any continuation of the scheme. There are several issues.

There is a question of definition: What does 'in a timely manner' mean? The output obligations in any future contracts should spell out that timeliness is to be determined by the reporter's ability to file a story as soon as practicable after newsgathering is completed, and not by external pressures from a host newsroom.

More difficult to resolve is the fundamental problems of frequency and competition. It is understandably galling for an editor to provide facilities and other benefits to an LDR reporter only to find others 'freeloading' on that reporter's stories before the host has an opportunity to publish that material. However, public funding of the scheme carries with it the principle of universality or availability to any bona fide news organisations that sign up for the scheme.

There is no solution that will satisfy all parties, and there is potential for a solution to have unintended consequences. It would be unfortunate, for example, if rigid enforcement of daily filing saw weekly publications withdraw from the scheme. These publications fill vital roles in local communities.

Any continuation of the scheme should consider changes to the host newsroom's obligations to recognise asymmetrical publication cycles (see 2.9)

Publication by rivals may be problematic and, at times, intractable. One host editor has suggested a change which, while not removing the issue entirely, may take some of the sting out of it. They suggested that each LDR story should be required to carry not only the name of the LDR reporter but the name of the host newsroom i.e. Jane Jones is an LDR reporter hosted by the *Yourtown Weekly Bugle*. This would at least

signal to the community the role that a host newsroom is playing on its behalf. It is a suggestion worth considering.

At the core of the LDR service is its content management system. The CMS system may fairly be described as inelegant, but it is functional. Its authoring tool – into which reporters write their stories and add ancillary material such as photographs or audio-visual files – is spare but reporters say it meets their needs. If any improvements are contemplated, they should include an expert assessment of the tag system. It is currently an ever-growing list with little obvious attempt to curate it. The longer it gets, the less useful it becomes. It would benefit from the creation of a thesaurus of index terms.

The CMS system is not, of course, the public face of LDR. The role is served by dedicated space on the RNZ website, where selected LDR stories are available to a wider public.

Overall, problems with the operational structure of the LDR scheme are largely matters of detail. However, if it is to continue – particularly if it is jointly funded – there must be manifest recognition of its unique characteristic in placing reporters in someone else's newsroom. Each of these newsrooms rightly asserts its editorial independence (either individually or with a group) but agrees to enter into agreements with the provider (RNZ) and to work cooperatively with the administrators of the scheme.

The dynamics of this relationship can be delicate and, at times, requires skilled diplomacy. The LDR administrators observed during this review, LDR manager David Reid and LDR editor Conan Young, are to be commended for the way in which they have maintained well-balanced relationships with the host newsrooms.

A key factor in the success of the current relationships is that the LDR administrators maintain a degree of day-to-day operational separation from RNZ itself. As a result, there is no sense that the LDR scheme is simply an extension of the RNZ newsroom. It is vital this separation be maintained in any new arrangement that would see the LDR service continuing. Should RNZ be a major funder of the scheme, there is a danger of a damaging power imbalance in the relationships – particularly with smaller publishers – if LDR's day-to-day operational independence is diminished or lost.

LDR hosts and partners would be reassured by the inclusion in any agreement between RNZ and NZ on Air of a requirement that the day-to-day administration of the service remains separately staffed within RNZ, and that the administrators exercise independent editorial decision-making.

LDR's relationship with RNZ's news service should be one of two-way liaison and the LDR administrators' reporting lines should be with RNZ's editor-in-chief. This should not be seen as a poor reflection on RNZ's news executives but, rather, as a means by which the independence of the LDR scheme would be made clear to the public to reassure host newsrooms. To ensure a power balance is maintained with host newsrooms and LDR partners, there should be a joint-party (RNZ/NPA/LDR host/LDR partner) editorial monitoring group. NZ on Air should continue to be responsible for ensuring that the terms of the LDR contract are met (through a regular reporting and review process). NZ on Air should not, however, be part of the editorial monitoring group in order to prevent any misplaced allegations of undue influence.

Transparent governance, together with operational separation, will be necessary components of a future LDR scheme if it is to enjoy the public's trust. The spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories around the Public Interest Journalism Fund (through which LDR has been funded) make such mechanisms not only desirable but essential (See Part 4).

The LDR reporters themselves express broad satisfaction with the way the scheme operates and no major systemic issues were detected during the review. Reporters also expressed appreciation of the training sessions that had been arranged by the LDR administrators.

The following training has been undertaken since January 2022:

- Session with members of the BBC's LDR team which covered several areas, including how to cover elections.
- Stuff's senior Auckland affairs journalist, Todd Niall, on local body election coverage and the relevance of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act.
- RNZ senior journalist and former Morning report presenter Susie Ferguson on interviewing techniques.
- New Zealand Herald data journalist Chris McDowell on data journalism.
- New Zealand Herald business investigations reporter Matt Nippert on investigative journalism.
- Workshop on Te Tiriti issues and improving cultural competence.
- Workshop on photography and video production.

## 2.6 Does LDR do the right things?

The funding agreement between NZ on Air and RNZ refer to generalised expectations of coverage of local democracy but also bind the service to meet undertakings given in the LDR funding application. That document is quite specific on how the service is expected to improve reporting in each designated area covered by an LDR reporter.

The *Whakatane Beacon*-based LDR reporter, for example, would be “[a] full-time local authority reporter, better able to get to Ōpōtiki District Council meetings (alongside Whakatāne and Kawerau), able to cover Murupara Community Board and BOP Regional Council meetings in Tauranga – both an hour's drive away – and spend more time at multi-day hearings and committee meetings, particularly Environment Court hearings and appeals. [The reporter would provide] some coverage of Ngāti Awa, Tuhoë, Ngāti Tuwharetoa, Whakatōhea, Te Whānau ā Apanui.”

Each LDR role is similarly described, allowing for local requirements and differences. In every case there are references to limitations on the scope of coverage that the newsroom would be forced to accept without LDR assistance.

LDR reporters were surveyed on the organisations they covered. Collectively they are responsible for at least 150 constituted bodies including district and regional councils (including boards and committees), CCO and CCTO enterprises, environmental organisations, iwi authorities (and hapu), Civil Defence, regional Te Whatu Ora offices, port/airport authorities, school boards of trustees, local trusts, and community groups.

However, whether LDR is achieving its aim is not to be judged simply by measuring the number of organisations or how often a reporter touches base with a given authority. Indeed, some LDR areas are so extensive that only occasional coverage of a distant local authority meeting can be expected when travelling time is factored in. The response to the question survey also confirmed that it is too limiting to think of local democracy simply in terms of statutory bodies.

The question of whether LDR does the right thing may be best addressed by examining the subjects that its reporters cover.

The pilot project review in 2020 revealed a wide range of subjects covered by LDR staff. The Covid pandemic cast its shadow over a significant number of stories and, although that emphasis is no longer evident, weather events may have replaced pandemic as a skewing effect. An analysis of subjects covered under the current scheme shows that not only has a wide range been maintained but there have been significant gains in some important areas and a de-emphasis in areas that have limited impact on local democracy. The current subject analysis covered 385 stories in advisory lists, compared with 239 stories in the 2020 study. This reflects the increase in the number of LDR staff.

The largest subject area remain stories connected with the environment (18% compared with 17% in 2020). It is a relatively broad category that includes planning decisions with environmental impacts. In some areas the emphasis in the current analysis also reflects local authority attempts to deal with extraordinary weather events. The concentration of environmental stories is unsurprising as they are likely to affect the largest number of people. This is followed by stories relating to development (15%), which includes relevant planning decisions by councils. Again, it is a subject area likely to impact significant numbers of people in the catchment area. Transport-related stories (13%) filled the third highest category.

Although politics represented only 9% of the stories in the sample, they were limited to subjects directly involved in the representational aspects of local government and stories in other categories also contained components that reflected the roles of elected representatives. The politics category showed a significant increase over the 2020 sample. It should also be noted that LDR reporters played a mayor part – often the principal role – in coverage of the 2022 local government elections. The category should be seen in conjunction with stories on finance (12%) and regulation (10%) which are often the result of deliberations by an authority's elected representatives. Collectively, the democratic overlay of coverage is well in evidence and show improvements over the 2020 survey in most areas.

The 2020 review noted a lack of coverage of Te Ao Māori. There has been some improvement – up from 5% to 7% of the total – but this remains a challenging area for LDR reporters. The situation is discussed later in the review.

Two areas have been de-emphasised since the pilot – culture and leisure. In the pilot subject analysis these categories accounted for 10% of all stories. They have now been reduced to less than 5%. While both have a place in the news offerings of partner sites, they are arguably not the province of LDR reporters, even when council facilities may be involved (budgeting – also included in the finance category – excepted). The

following graphs (Fig. 1 & 2) are strong indicators that, although anything can be improved, LDR content fulfils its mandate.

Fig. 1

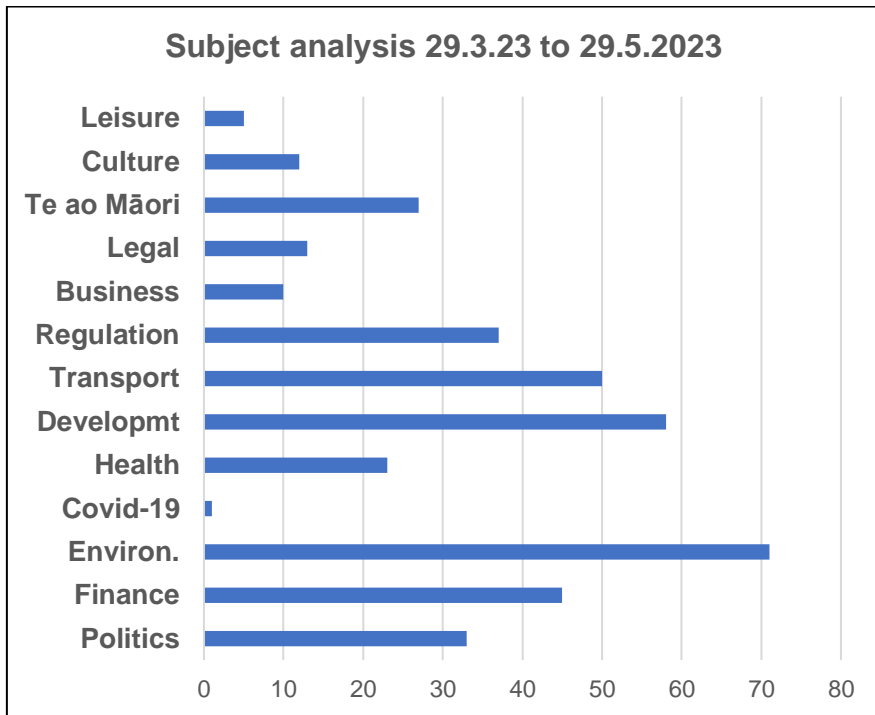
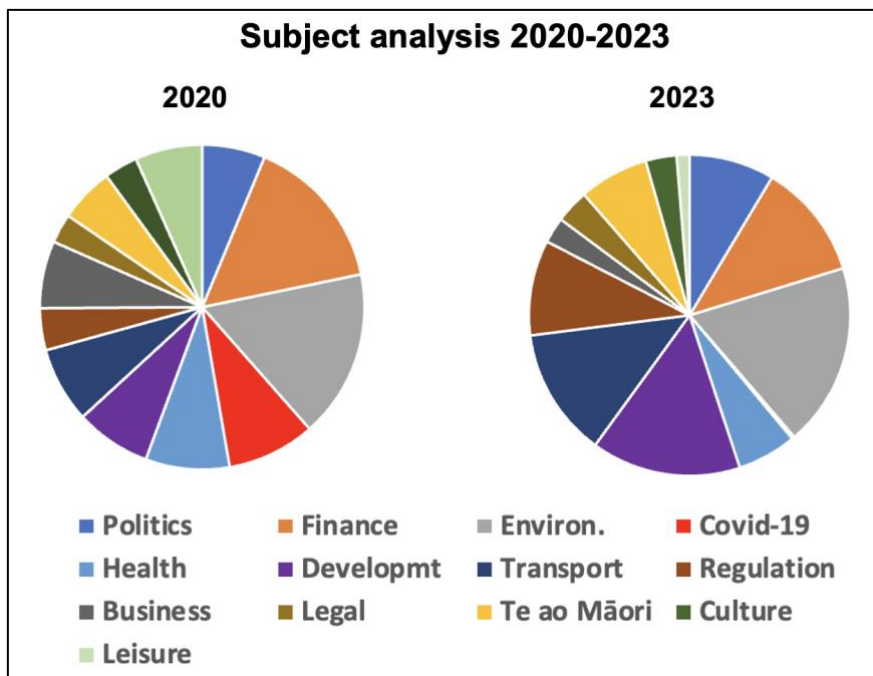


Fig. 2



## 2.7 How well does LDR perform?

NZ on Air already has the benefit of an RNZ survey gauging satisfaction levels among users of the LDR service (Appendix 2). This review expands on those results and also assesses the quality of the LDR editorial output and its impact.

The RNZ survey's results on the mechanics of story distribution and the advisory process show general satisfaction although some results point to the 'timeliness' issue discussed above.

In this review's surveys, LDR hosts and partners express general satisfaction with the quality of content produced by LDR reporters, although a small number expressed negative views that were significantly coloured by the issues discussed in 2.6 above.

The high satisfaction level is borne out by the results of the story content analysis conducted for this review. Of the 154 stories sampled, almost two-thirds had been published on pages 1, 2 or 3 of the respective editions. Forty seven (30 per cent of the total) were front page stories, the vast majority of them leading the newspaper.

Content analysis of the stories, using the same attributes matrix as in the 2020 review, showed better than average results in each category. On most attributes, there were slight improvements, although it should be noted that the 2020 content analysis was across a smaller number of reporters and a smaller sample of stories.

The review will not discuss the performance of individual LDR reporters, which is expressly outside its brief,<sup>2</sup> but it should be noted that none of the reporters fell below an acceptable median.

The content analysis applied six attributes to each of the 154 stories: News value, democratic impact, community engagement, journalistic attributes, content depth, and general interest. Journalistic attributes included such qualities as accuracy, fairness and balance, and media ethics. Content was evaluated on scale of 1-5 [1=very poor 2=poor 3=average 4=good 5=very good/excellent]. The overall assessment of each story was the combined average of all attributes.

The highest value given to an individual attribute on a story was 5 and the lowest was two. The highest combined average i.e. the total value of a story was 4.5 and the lowest was 2.5. These 'scores' do need to be put in context: A low scoring story does not mean poor overall performance. The reporter with the lowest combined average on a story (it was a transport story that averaged 2.5) also scored 4.33 on an environment regulation story. A representative set of analyses is attached (appendix 3)

The following graph (*Fig. 3*) shows performance across all attributes, measured against the 2020 results. Again, some context is required as the 2020 analysis covered fewer reporters and fewer stories. The larger sample in 2023 had a diluting effect but a general observation of stories would suggest improved quality since the first sample. To illustrate: The top scoring story in the current sample, which related to politics and

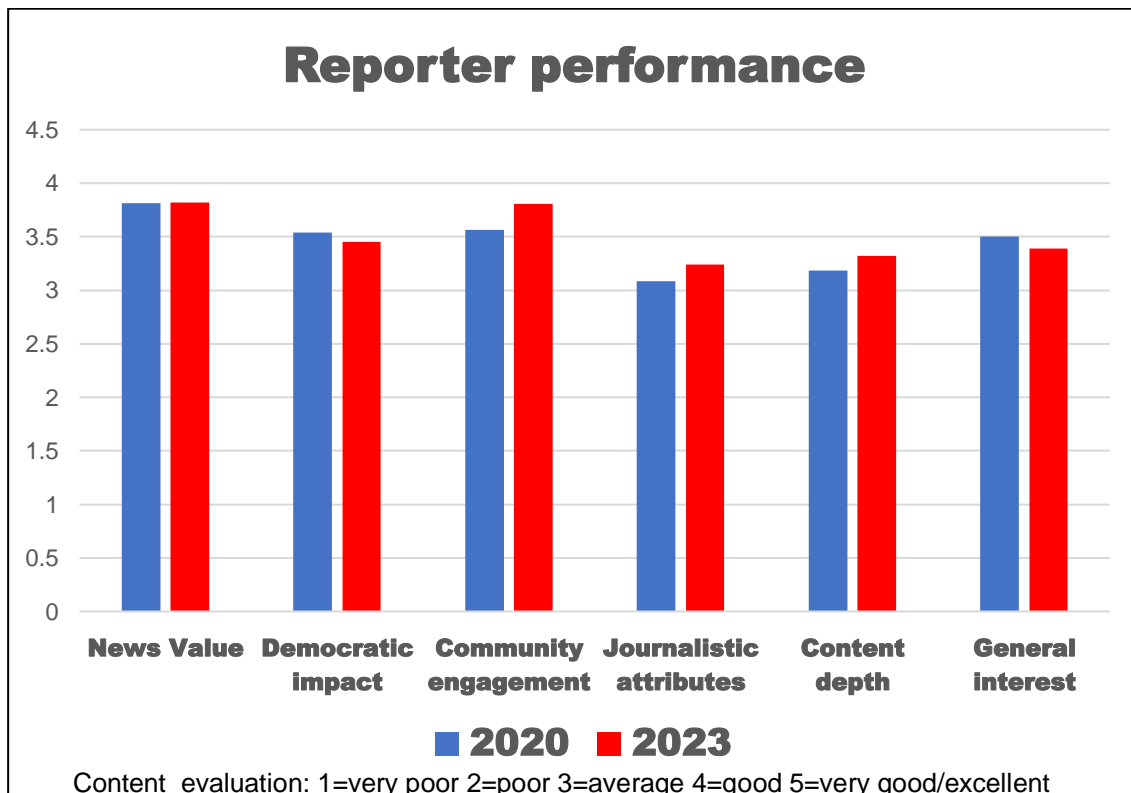
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<sup>2</sup> All data created in the content analysis was anonymised and the order randomised to protect the identity of individual LDR reporters.



Te Ao Māori, achieved a top score (5) on news value, democratic impact, and community engagement, while journalistic attributes, content depth, and general interest each registered 4. That represents quality journalism. At the bottom of the scale, the story with the lowest average had only one attribute (democratic engagement) below the median and, as the story was culture related, it was not a material factor.

Fig. 3



After assessing the sampled stories, daily advisories, and the story file in the LDR CMS system, it is clear that the service is producing stories that meet acceptable standards and are relevant to the scheme’s brief. In particular, the stories filed display consistent – and often very high – news value.<sup>3</sup>

As noted earlier, digital analytics need to be kept in perspective in a scheme that has local (sometimes relatively small) audiences at its core. It should also be noted that those analytics, while perhaps capturing traffic on local websites, do not provide insights into the readership of stories in local newspapers that are a primary source of local news for some residents.

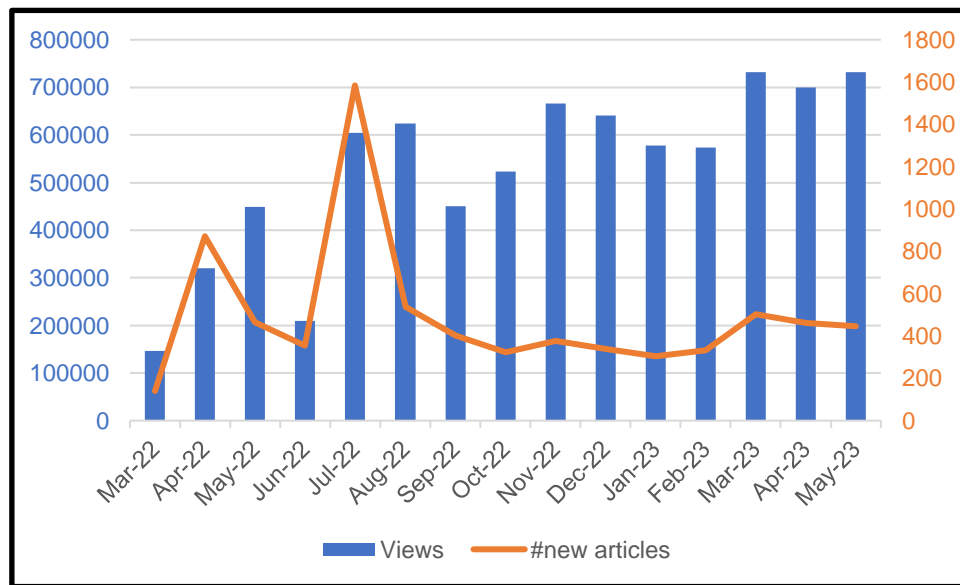
Nevertheless, digital analytics do provide some insight into the performance of the scheme over time. The following graph (Fig. 4) shows that in the March-May quarter of 2023 there was a significant rise to 2,163,520 content views (1.17m users and

<sup>3</sup> News value is defined here as the value of the information to the local community, and not by an ability to attract a national audience. This is consistent with the scheme’s raison d’être – meeting perceived gaps in media coverage of *local* democracy.

2.05m sessions. The number of views per month has been consistently over 500,000 since October 2022.

Digital data on the number of new articles also must be put in context. The large spikes, particularly in July 2022, occurred when new publishers came on board the scheme and an influx of old articles were tagged by the system. Nonetheless, the story output of the small LDR team has been satisfactory.

Fig. 4



There are two areas, perhaps ancillary, that should also be mentioned in considering how well the service does its job.

The first is the regular interviewing of LDR reporters on RNZ programmes such as *Nine to Noon*. This practice is an extremely useful adjunct to the LDR story service and provides another, broader, platform for discussion of regional issues. Such appearances have given the scheme added profile and should be encouraged. There is scope for other radio and television networks to similarly utilise LDR ‘talent’.

LDR contributions in other audio/visual areas have had less impact. Although LDR reporters contribute still images and video clips to support some stories, the quality is highly variable and some LDR partners have preferred to match LDR text with their own visual content.

All LDR reporters can (and do) take still images on their cell phones but there are only four sets of video equipment available. The administrators have attempted to deploy this equipment to LDR reporters who display a willingness to file clips with their stories. It does, however, place an added burden on those reporters.

The LDR administrators attempted to address quality issues with a training session for all LDR reporters in May and have noted some improvement. This is not an issue limited to LDR. Even with training, reporters generally rank second best to dedicated photographers and videographers.

It should be noted that the LDR administrators have performed well with training in general, given restricted budgets. They have, however, had some issues with staff retention. When individual cases are examined, this proves not to be a systemic issue with LDR itself but part of the wider problems of retention facing the industry, particularly in rural areas.

An issue that is not pervasive but, nonetheless, of some concern is the practice of partially removing LDR identification. For example, LDR reporter by-lines or location may be removed. This is no failing by service providers. It is a fault with users of the service. The practice should stop and identification made mandatory (see sections 2.9 and 4.2).

Profile is an added measure of performance and LDR reporters have a good profile among the local authorities on which they report. Sixty per cent of local government representatives were either highly or well aware of the LDR reporter in their region, while a further 30 per cent stated the LDR reporter was known to their local body. Only 10 per cent stated they were not aware of the LDR representative.

For their part, a majority of reporters stated that their LDR status had assisted in building relationships with elected representatives and staff. This was particularly the case where the LDR reporter was new to the area or was not already covering local government in the region. In a number of cases, awareness was greater with elected representatives than with council staff (communications staff excepted). This may reflect the fact that, in many local authorities, elected representatives are the public face of the organisation and other enquiries are directed through communications staff.

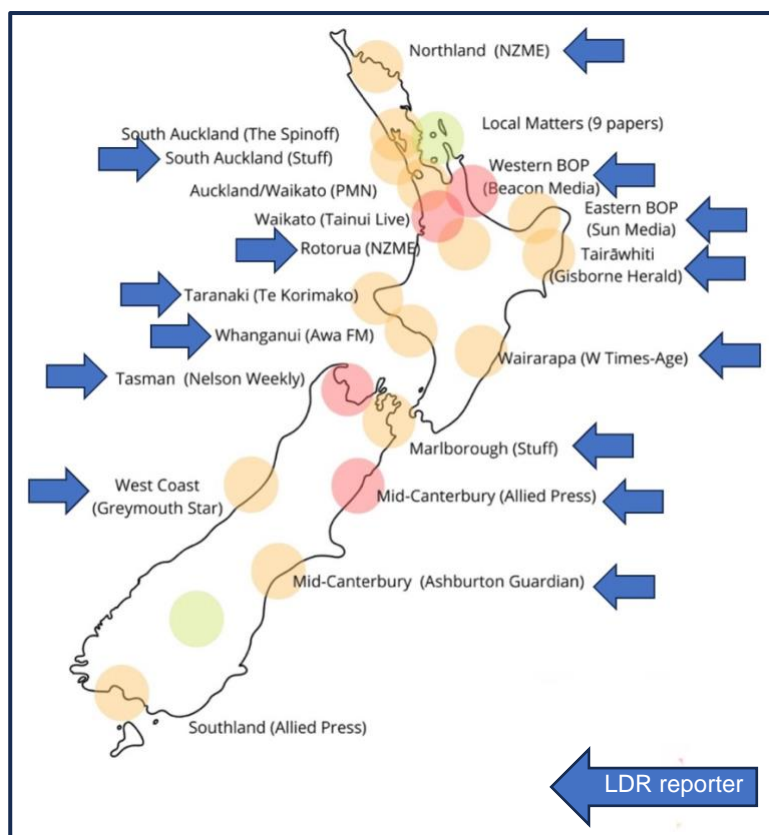
## 2.8 Does LDR fill the gaps?

The rationale for the creation of the Local Democracy Reporting scheme was a widely-held view that the newsroom privation that has affected all media had eroded coverage of an important component of civic life in New Zealand – governance at regional and local levels. Lack of reporting resources meant coverage of primary local authorities had been reduced and oversight of some bodies was virtually non-existent.

New Zealand is not alone in facing these issues, or in finding partial solutions through the state funding of schemes designed to fill the gaps. Several such schemes were examined in the 2020 review and will not be re-examined here. However, a review of five schemes (including LDR) was contained in a study of news sharing models produced for the Department of Canadian Heritage. The study, undertaken by Professor Dwayne Winseck of Carleton University in Ottawa and Associate Professor Peter Thompson of Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington, can be found here: <https://gmicp.org/share-and-share-alike-news-sharing-models-in-the-digital-media-ecology-selected-international-case-studies/>.

In New Zealand, gaps in local democracy reporting exist throughout the country and to fully fill those gaps in coverage would require a vastly bigger scheme. Not all requests (shaded circles on the map on the following page) for an LDR reporter could be met and significant geographic gaps remain (see *Fig. 4*). As the scheme stands, some of the areas covered by a single LDR reporter are large and represent very real challenges in attending meetings with extended travelling times.

Fig. 4



Within those areas where an LDR reporter is hosted, there is evidence of improved coverage. Newsrooms with LDR reporters are now reporting on a greater range of local authorities than in the past, and authorities that had been previously covered were now being reported with greater frequency and in greater depth. This has included attempts to improve (or to start) coverage of iwi authorities and trusts, which has been reflected in a modest but welcome increase in stories from these sources.

The survey of editors reflected a broadly held belief that important gaps had been filled by the scheme (once the issues discussed in 2.6 were set aside). The following comments reflect that positive assessment.

- *“It has helped provide a voice to the community with issues that directly affects them.”*
- *“Has greatly boosted coverage of local bodies.”*
- *“A dedicated reporter has allowed much broader coverage of the four councils in our area. Local government news content has probably doubled as a result.”*
- *“This has, since its inception, been a game changer for us in that we have been able to better hold local government – especially the local district council – to account in a way that we could not in the past.”*
- *“...we have been fulfilling this important role better with the LDR focus on it and thanks to having had high-quality reporters in the LDR role. National coverage of democracy issues in the [region] has risen to a whole new level as national media have picked up a lot of our LDR stories.”*

- *“The scheme has had a positive impact on the number of stories being generated out of [region], which in the past has seen little consistent coverage.”*
- *“The LDR reporter now ensures consistent coverage of these elected bodies, without this reporter coverage would be very patchy.”*

LDR reporters also believe their roles have improved coverage. They were asked to respond to a survey question that asked what the scheme had contributed to the communities in which the reporters were working. A sample of their responses:

- *“Overall, the ability to attend meetings, show what happens, and follow matters is good, given that comprehensive coverage in this region had significantly declined or had been dropped in the past decade due to declining reporting resources. It has opened up wider coverage of local democracy bodies which directly have an impact on the region...I believe it has contributed towards a broader audience in the region.”*
- *“It has given communities greater coverage of the decisions councils make on their behalf, especially of councils that tend to get limited news coverage because they are smaller than the nearby city council. It has enabled our newsroom to provide more council coverage because previously there were not enough resources for a dedicated council reporter.”*
- *“It allows us to provide insight in decision making – why/how those decisions are made and how that affects the community, and it holds the decision makers to account so the community can understand.”*
- *“The LDR role enables consistent, accurate, balanced, and in-depth coverage of issues many in our community face. It means people who may not ordinarily care about local politics can see how decisions made locally impact on them – for better or worse. It is a satisfying part of the job to see people get fired up about a topic, perhaps learn from it or even open themselves to a different perspective. The local council is my main focus, and it is gratifying seeing direct change as a result of my reporting or questioning.”*
- *“...there has only been one occasion in my time as an LDR reporter that another reporter has been present at a council meeting.”*
- *“Having a dedicated reporter focused on council decision-making and processes has forced greater transparency from local government in our region. It means that all council meetings are covered and reported on, and has resulted in increased interest from the community in issues of local democracy.”*

The picture is more nuanced on ‘the receiving end’ – the local authorities on which the LDR service reports.

Sixty per cent of the local government representatives who responded to the review survey expressed the view that coverage had been improved by the LDR service. Thirty per cent were more equivocal, expressing the view that there had been some improvement but with specific reservations. Ten per cent believed there had been no

improvement because (a) the area was already well-served by media, or (b) there were poor professional relationships and changes to LDR personnel.<sup>4</sup>

Responses to the survey question on coverage improvement are set out below. It is interesting that, where some respondents did not see great change in local coverage, they were impressed by the fact that LDR also has a national audience. This suggests that, while a small number of editorial executives were unimpressed by what they saw as the service's lack of wider appeal, a number of mayors did not share that view.

- *“[There is] much more detailed reporting and also someone who attends more of our meetings.”*
- *“It is mixed. [There are] fewer articles but greater detail in those covered.”*
- *“Meetings are reported via LDR that are not otherwise covered.”*
- *“Coverage is more consistent and regular. Coverage is also picked up by a wider media audience via the LDR network.”*
- *“...it feels like an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party that the public can trust to be impartial.”*
- *“In general, yes. The LDR reporter has a good relationship with Council’s Community Relations team and goes to some lengths to cover Council and Committee meetings and ensure that copy is accurate. The LDR coverage seems to be reasonably widely used by other media, locally, regionally and further afield.”*
- *“It has provided national coverage via RNZ and Stuff when articles get picked up. We have a strong local newspaper that has always provided great (robust) coverage of the LG sector, however this is seldom broadcast to a wider audience nationally.”*
- *“[It provides] an additional local interest source.”*
- *“The regularity and depth of coverage of Council’s wider activities does seem to have improved. The range of media outlets covering Council activities also seems to have increased.”*
- *“Not in the local paper, but in national media it has [improved].”*
- *“It has certainly helped maintain the level of coverage following the departure of a dedicate Council reporter from a local media outlet. The fact the LDR covers multiple media publications is also valuable to us.”*
- *“It has in not only providing stories to local media...but has also caused the locally based national news organisations to further their coverage.”*
- *Definitely, we have a good working relationship with our LDR...We have seen some really good reporting as a result and happy that this reaches [wider] circulation rather than just the local paper. [The LDR reporter] is very proactive for comment and inputs from us.”*
- *“Sometimes.”*
- *“It has improved the coverage of Council. Alongside the implementation of livestreaming council meetings, we are committed to being more transparent in our processes and decisions. It’s what the public want and the LDR scheme amplifies this by reporting on all issues.”*
- *“We do not see much LDR content in [a local publication] that has reduced its coverage, but I think it has improved coverage in the [LDR host publication]. It*

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<sup>4</sup> Survey comments on (b) have not been included in the review because there is a real possibility they could identify an LDR reporter and risk breaching the undertaking that this will not be a personal performance review.

*has meant that they have the resource to look at issues long term and return to issues, whereas previously they were relying more on coverage of one-off events.”*

- *I believe the LDR reporter has given more depth to the coverage of Council meetings and issues but I would also note that there does seem to be some double-up [with other publications].”*
- *“News is now syndicated across more publications. The quality of [LDR] coverage has also reduced sensationalism. The local LDR reporter has been able to establish quality relationships with councils and there is two-way trust which is important for the wide and accurate distribution of local council news.”*

The review also sought views from members of the Community Newspapers Association, which serves the most local of audiences. The following is a sample of their responses:

- *“The fund has given my newspaper an opportunity to keep the community informed of the inner workings of council, and to give some insight into council’s decision making processes. As a sole owner/operator who is busy reporting on hyper-local matters, without the PIJF funding I simply do not have the resources to cover council meetings. Being able to utilise a council reporter allows me to keep abreast of council matters and to ensure council’s decision making process is transparent to our community.”*
- *“We have utilised LDR as a partner with content access to bolster our news coverage for the past six months or so... predominantly interested in articles by [a local reporter] but also checking stories from [two further LDR reporters] out of interest. I’d like to see NZ On Air fund these reporter roles on an ongoing basis, but I can understand the perception among some that the government would be muddying the waters on independence by subsidising private enterprise core business.”*

Iwi authorities have tended to be circumspect, with some wary of the government funding aspect of the scheme. While there has been some increase in the number of stories, and LDR reporters list iwi bodies among their areas of responsibility, there is still work to be done in closing this gap in media coverage. In fairness, however, this is an issue that extends beyond the LDR scheme and one which must be addressed across a wider front.

Overall, however, it is apparent that the LDR scheme has filled gaps. The number of bodies that constitute the LDR reporters’ ‘rounds’ – at least 150 – suggests a marked improvement in oversight of local democracy. While some of these bodies may not be monitored on a daily or weekly basis, the fact that they are monitored at all is a gain.

## 2.9 Can the LDR scheme be maintained and improved?

The prospect of the Local Democracy Reporting scheme ending with the wrapping up of Public Interest Journalist funding was greeted by regional editors with what was little short of dismay.

Their responses to survey questions related to the end of LDR funding were almost unanimous<sup>5</sup> in their negative assessment of impact. A sample of responses:

- *“[It is] a massive worry.”*
- *“It would be a travesty to set up a quality network like this, then pull the plug on it.”*
- *“It would have a profound impact [as] we simply will not be able to tell the stories we have been.”*
- *“It would create a void in reporting council issues in this region.”*
- *“It would have a chilling effect on local body news reporting, and a negative impact on struggling regional newspapers.”*
- *“It would be a great loss to our region and seriously impact coverage of local democracy at grassroots level.”*
- *“It would be a real shame. Our local issues reporter would no longer be ring-fenced and could be re-assigned.”*

In spite of these reactions, the editors’ responses made it clear that newsrooms were not in a position to take over the functions of the LDR reporter without significant impact. Some simply said they could not sustain the role, others said they could not sustain it at the current rate of pay (if at all), while others said maintaining the role would be at the cost of some other equally important role in the newsroom. None said they could absorb the LDR reporter role without detrimental effects on their operations.

The response of each editor was driven by the impact on their own operations. None addressed the issue of funding the central administration of the scheme and the maintenance of a CMS system. In other words, if the LDR reporter role continued to exist without external funding, their stories would be written for the local publication and, apart from those syndicated as part of a larger group, they would travel no further.

It was clear that the current scheme – or anything approaching it – could not be continued without funding support. Setting aside those host newsrooms whose issues are set out in 2.6 above, the vast majority would happily continue with the scheme if funding could be found for it. They were committed to maintaining coverage of local democracy their area so long as they had the resources to do it, although they were under no illusions about their own budgets.

The vast majority of editors were comfortable with the idea of RNZ involvement in funding the future of LDR, although 60 per cent of those said their support would depend on the detail of an agreement between the host newsroom and RNZ. A number explicitly cited editorial independence as a bottom line issue. One editor was unsure whether they would agree to an arrangement with RNZ in the absence of any detail, while another – who had a generally negative view of the entire LDR scheme – said their attitude to it would not change irrespective of who funded it.

There was near total support for maintaining the scheme from respondents to the survey of local authorities. The only respondents opposed to continuation were one

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<sup>5</sup> The response from a national newsroom prioritised other PIJF funding ahead of LDR; one editor conflated the questions with issues over filing frequency; and a third editor did not feel they were in a position to answer these particular questions.



with a philosophical objection to public funding of commercial media, and another that appeared to have a wider issue with the host publication.

The level of support for the scheme from RNZ, LDR reporters, host newsrooms, and the democratic organisations under scrutiny, is such that there can be little doubt the service can be maintained, so long as funding is available.

On the basis that such funding was made available through a partnership of NZ on Air and RNZ, changes and improvements can and should be made.

A summary of suggestions for improvement drawn from the review surveys are included as appendix 4. Many are functional or matters of detail and can be discussed or implemented at an operational level. Others are more fundamental, and they form part of the thinking behind the recommendations that follow.

The most pressing needs would flow from a joint NZ on Air and RNZ funding arrangement. It is assumed that funding for LDR by the broadcaster would be drawn from the extra \$25 million a year for RNZ approved by Government in April.

RNZ funding potentially alters the power relationship with host newsrooms in the private sector (see 2.5 above). It is vital for the maintenance of editorial independence that (a) RNZ treat the funding as an arm's length arrangement i.e., as if it had come through NZ on Air and (b) new agreements on terms of engagement is negotiated with LDR hosts and LDR service receivers. It is strongly recommended that NZ on Air and RNZ meet with all of the parties *before* drafting terms of engagement to discuss their respective relationships. The parties should create a standing committee (based on the LDR pilot working group) to monitor the scheme and ensure that editorial independence is not compromised.

Any change to funding will require a rewriting of the funding agreement that currently exists between NZ on Air and RNZ. It is highly desirable that this document be written in parallel with partner terms of engagement and not in advance of those agreements. The funding agreement should codify structural separations as discussed in 2.5.

Terms of engagement must recognise the unique nature of the relationships within LDR – a State funder, working with a State funded broadcaster that part-funds and also administers the service, that places journalists within independent host newsrooms, from where stories are produced for use by the host publication as well as the administrator and contracted service recipients. The terms must ensure that changes to funding do not alter the fundamentals of existing relationships that underscore the scheme's success.

New terms of engagement should also address some systemic issues that have been identified during the review and should more effectively codify expectations and obligations. Areas to be addressed should include:

- Establishing a clear and non-negotiable separation between funders and LDR's editorial operations, overseen by a monitoring group.
- Setting out direct reporting lines for LDR administrators that establish they are not part of the RNZ news services.

- Setting out clearly and explicitly that the primary focus of any LDR reporter must be the communities in which they are located and whose democratic needs are most directly met by their journalism. The imperative in setting up the LDR scheme was recognition of gaps in reporting that left local and regional communities poorly informed on public bodies acting on their behalf.
- Re-writing the contractual expectations for each LDR appointment. Current contracts reflect funding applications (and a need to impress) but, as the scheme matures, it is appropriate that these expectations are more focussed on a holistic view of local democracy in each area. Larger catchments should be re-examined to determine whether area coverage is sustainable.
- Re-assessing benchmarking (stories per month is a crude measure of success).
- Addressing filing issues: It is clear the requirement to file stories “in a timely manner” is inadequately defined. The usual expectation by an editor of their staff is that *stories will be filed as soon as staff finish information gathering and are physically able to compile their stories (in the newsroom or remotely) without contrived delay*. This requirement should be reflected in terms of engagement.
- Addressing problems caused by asymmetric publishing cycles: Terms of engagement should, if possible, acknowledge the position of weekly LDR host publications that see material appear in rival publications before they are able to publish it themselves. There is a fair argument that hosting an LDR reporter should confer some rights, particularly when a rival organisation acquires first publication rights by default. There could be some form of waiver in the output obligations whereby the host editor may request that uploading of a story to the CMS story file be delayed and provide reasons for the postponement. However, any decision to delay should be at the discretion of the LDR administrators. The inclusion of any waiver should, however, signal an obligation to otherwise file according to the agreement, it should be emphasised that there is an inherent obligation to file stories with wider significance in the (more clearly defined) timely manner. If possible, automated monitoring of daily advisories and story filing times should be implemented to track adherence to the spirit of the agreement. Possible approaches could include:
  - Withholding some exclusive stories by prior agreement with LDR administrators.
  - Embargoed release.
  - A two-tiered system for daily and non-daily publications.
- Reviewing of output reporting requirements: Some smaller host publications find reporting requirements onerous. The requirements should be reviewed during Terms of Agreement discussions to determine whether they could be amended without adversely affecting accountability for public money.

Contracts with parties that subscribe to LDR stories now carry an obligation to acknowledge the funding scheme. Any change to the funding arrangement may require alteration to the wording of that obligation. An alternative suggestion is contained in 4.2. There should be a requirement to publish the LDR reporter by-line together with the name of their host publication. Consideration should be given to embedding a website link in that host name. This would be a means by which some of the ‘sting’ could be taken out of a story appearing, say, on a national website before it is published by the host.

Any move by the Local Democracy Reporting scheme into a new arrangement will provide an opportunity to formalise some of the practices that have evolved since the scheme began. These are not matters that need to be dealt with contractually, but some form of documentation would be beneficial. For example, editing by the LDR editor prior to release is an issue for some, but not all, host editors. Some codification of the process should be considered, along with measures to ensure that potential delays to production cycles are avoided. For example, if the LDR editor experiences a sub-editing backlog, there could be provision for a back-up sub-editor to be provided from with RNZ or a host site. Other areas that should have documented procedures are liaison between host newsrooms and LDR administrators, processes for correction of stories, and dispute resolution.

Any continuation of the scheme under an altered funding model would be an opportunity to re-evaluate which newsrooms should continue to host LDR reporters. The placement of an LDR reporter within a large newsroom already covering metropolitan local authorities could be reviewed on the basis that the scheme is less valued there than in regional or local publications.

Similarly, although competition between rival news outlets that has been encountered during the review is not limited to the LDR scheme, some form of resolution could be sought to a problem that creates an unwanted burden on LDR staff (although it may be intractable).

Care should be taken to ensure that any reconfiguration of the scheme to overcome the operational issues outlined above does not deny non-daily publications an opportunity to fully participate. These news outlets are often the preferred means by which their communities are kept informed on local matters and the activities of local authorities.

Engagement with Tangata Whenua through the scheme must be regarded as work in progress and the service undoubtedly would be improved by increasing the oversight of Māori governance. Consideration should be given to partnering the scheme with other funded platforms such as the access media network and any eligible future endeavours.

Digital system development is expensive and, while the LDR content management system would benefit from further development, it should have a lower priority than the maintenance (and possible improvement) of LDR reporter numbers. A first priority should be rationalising and curating the system of tags, which is random at best. Screenshots of the CMS system are included for reference (Appendix 5).

It is clear that RNZ has established a good relationship with its British counterpart, which should be maintained. The BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service has many parallels with the New Zealand service and both parties benefit from sharing experience. The BBC scheme is contracted on a three-year cycle, a funding arrangement that the New Zealand Government should emulate. This recommendation reflects the review's overall finding that the scheme has made significant contributions to local democracy in New Zealand and should continue to do so.

## PART 3: OPEN JUSTICE SCHEME

### 3.1 Introduction

Although Local Democracy Reporting and Open Justice are both schemes that were designed to fill significant gaps that have appeared in the fabric of newsgathering, they were conceived and constructed in markedly different ways. Basically, LDR is a public broadcaster-run cooperative from which a wide variety of media can be the beneficiaries, while Open Justice is a proprietary service limited to a host company and non-competing partners.

The genesis of the markedly different models lies in the creation of the Public Interest Journalism Fund and a decision to fold the pre-existing LDR scheme into it. Under the PIJF, media organisations were encouraged to apply for funds to hire journalists for specific areas of coverage that they were unable to sustain unaided. Many of the role-based proposals that were approved under the PIJF fell into exactly the same model as Open Justice, which was proposed by NZME. Stuff, for example, received funding to employ up to 20 journalists (on fixed term contracts) to “uplift the voices and stories of Māori and minority groups across Stuff publications”.

That said, the approach taken in reviewing the Open Justice scheme needs to seek answers to the same basic questions posed in assessing the Local Democracy Reporting scheme:

- Does it work the right way?
- Does it do the right things?
- How well does it perform?
- Has it filled the gaps?
- Should it be maintained, and can it be improved?

Media coverage of the justice system, like that of local government, requires a level of resourcing that newsrooms have found increasingly difficult to muster on a regular basis. This review assesses NZME’s Open Justice scheme to determine how well it has addressed what it described in its proposal as “the judiciary’s concerns about the impact of shrinking newsrooms and the loss of specialist court reporters on the fourth estate’s capacity and capability to report on the courts and the judicial branch of government”.

### 3.2 Editorial brief

NZME’s proposal accurately expressed the state of reporting on the courts and other judicial institutions in New Zealand. It stated: “Traditionally a key part of newsgathering, court reporting on all but high-profile cases has been significantly diminished over the past decade, predominantly for financial reasons.” It went on to state that financial restrictions had cut headcounts and significantly reduced the ability of metropolitan-based news organisations to cover a wide range of subjects in regional centres. As a result, the industry was not creating a strong pipeline of people with the skills required to knowledgably report the courts. It noted that, while coverage of local councils had been boosted by NZ on Air’s LDR funding, coverage of courts was still lacking. NZME also was aware of the judiciary’s concerns about the impact of

shrinking newsrooms, and the loss of specialist court reporters, on the fourth estate's capacity and capability to report on the courts and the judicial branch of government.

This final point is important: The judiciary *is* the third branch of government. As Sir Geoffrey Palmer and his co-author Andrew Butler put it in their book *Towards Democratic Renewal* (VUP 2018) it “carries out a vital role as a check and balance on the other two branches of government by overseeing executive action, and interpreting and applying the law made by the legislature”. The NZME application presented the unconscionable prospect that society, through the media, might lack the means to bear witness – in any comprehensive way – to the actions of such a constitutionally significant institution.

With a proposed network of 13 specialist court/legal affairs reporters, it undertook to fill gaps in the reporting of “a multiplicity of legal jurisdictions”.

*Most of the centres [on proposed coverage] hear matters before the District, Family and Youth Courts. Many also have High Courts. Many host inquests and a variety of tribunals too. It [the Open Justice scheme] is not meant to allow for coverage of every case for the sake of it, but to allow for experts in their field to identify which cases – that otherwise would not be covered – have the highest public interest.*

### 3.3 Structure

The Open Justice scheme has its own editorial operational structure but is physically integrated where there are NZME newsrooms. It is headed by an editor based in the company's Auckland newsroom, a Waikato-based deputy, and a part-time Auckland-based coordinator. Its 12 reporters are in Whangarei (based at the *Northern Advocate*), Auckland (in NZME's newsroom), Hamilton (in the NZME community newsroom), Tauranga (in the *Bay of Plenty Times* newsroom), Hastings (in the *Hawkes Bay Today* newsroom), Taranaki (no local newsroom), Whanganui (in the *Whanganui Chronicle* newsroom), Palmerston North (no local newsroom), Wellington (in NZME's Wellington newsroom), Nelson (in the Top South newsroom), and Christchurch (in NZME's Christchurch newsroom).

Content is carried across NZME's print publications, its digital platforms, and radio networks. The OJ editor and OJ reporters maintain daily liaison with NZME editors to ensure the needs of publications are met and to avoid duplication of effort. Regular advisories are provided to NZME and partner news operations. The OJ scheme's partners include RNZ, Whakaata Māori, Allied Press and Star Media. OJ has an arrangement with Allied Press (Otago Daily Times).

The OJ editor sits on the Media and Courts Committee, a body comprising judges, court officials, and media executives that provides a forum for discussion on matters of mutual interest.

### 3.4 Funding

The Open Justice scheme is funded for two years through NZ on Air under the Public Interest Journalism Fund. The total sum provided under the contract is \$2,877,577 paid in eight instalments and covers 14.5 roles. The final instalment is due to be paid

in October 2023. The terms of the agreement require NZME to provide regular reports on output and costs.

### 3.5 Does the Open Justice scheme work the right way?

This question needs to be addressed from two distinct perspectives. One is an operational assessment of whether it effectively meets the objectives and outputs for which it has contracted. The other perspective relates to its funding model under the Public Interest Journalism Fund.

Within the context of the PIJF, the scheme was appropriately funded as a role-based project. It has an acceptable level of expenditure and the draw down process is appropriate. However, that fund has now been closed. Appropriate forms of future funding are discussed in 3.9 below.

An operational assessment might begin by considering coverage. Compared to the Local Democracy Reporting scheme, OJ has acceptable geographic coverage. The map below (Fig. 5) is drawn from NZME's application. While some significance might have been attached to the omission of Otago/Southland from the map, it should be noted that the Otago Daily Times has very good court coverage compared to most other publications and has a content sharing agreement with NZME that provides court cover for both Otago and Southland. A similar arrangement exists with the Gisborne Herald.

*Fig. 5*



The Christchurch reporter's geographic area of responsibility is challenging and, realistically, the West Coast and Kaikoura should be considered gaps in coverage.

In the greater Auckland area, in which there is a daunting number of court and tribunal sittings, the combined resources of the NZME newsroom and Open Justice staff may be stretched to provide total cover. However, there are also limits to the number of justice-related stories that the publisher can place each day and a related limit to the number of such stories the public wish (or need) to consume.

On balance, and taking syndication arrangements into account, the geographic coverage of the OJ scheme is very good.

The range of justice-related bodies covered by the OJ team represents a significant advance on what NZME was able to cover before the scheme began. OJ reporters were asked to list the bodies whose work they monitored. The lists they provided were extensive but, likely, are not exhaustive. In addition to sittings of the District Court, Youth Court, Family Court, High Court, Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court, the reporters listed 25 other judicial and regulatory bodies (see 3.6 below) but suggested the list could be even longer.

A significant level of editorial management is required in order to cope with such a large number of bodies. The OJ editor maintains daily liaison with the group and also presides over a weekly planning meeting to discuss future coverage. The OJ editor and reporters liaise with their host newsrooms to ensure they do not cover hearings already assigned to a newsroom reporter. The OJ reporters are given a commendable degree of autonomy to seek out stories which are then 'brought to the table'.

The editor works closely on stories with reporters to ensure quality is maintained and to ensure the right focus is placed on each story. The OJ service has no control over where and how its output is used by the various outlets that are part of its distribution system but the editor 'pitches' significant stories to seek prominent placement and treatment.

Advisories are distributed via email to OJ users each weekday afternoon. They list 10-12 stories with a short synopsis of each. Some stories carry embargoes that, for example, coincide with print publication or notes of the times certain stories may be expected.

Unlike LDR, the OJ scheme does not operate a separate Content Management System. OJ reporters input into NZME systems and, after editing by OJ administrators, stories are placed in a designated section of the Herald website. OJ users access the stories from the website for further publication or broadcast. It is a low-cost solution to distribution.

In many respects the OJ system is akin to a wire service. Publications and broadcasters in the scheme handle each story according to their own needs and may truncate some content to meet the requirements of news bulletin to satisfy the dictates of limited space.

There is a danger in schemes of this sort that good organisation and quality are due to the skills of a single individual and therefore presents the prospect of a single point

of failure. While the Open Justice editor Elizabeth Binning is such a skilled individual, the smooth maintenance of the service while she was on extended leave demonstrated that the operation is systemically sound.

The OJ scheme is less complex than LDR because it operates within a single company structure and takes advantage of that company's existing partnership arrangements. Where it has extended its range to new partners, it has done so on the basis that its partners are not direct commercial competitors. As a result, it has avoided some of the pressure points identified in the review of the LDR service. Editorial executives who receive the service express no dissatisfaction with the way it functions.

### 3.6 Does the Open Justice scheme do the right things?

NZME's application for funding for the Open Justice scheme understandably focused on the deficiencies that had arisen over time in reporting of the courts. It was particularly alert to the impact of newsroom attrition in regional areas. The application also recognised the 'multiplicity' of judicial and regulatory functions that exist in New Zealand.

*This initiative is designed to fill gaps in reporting of a multiplicity of legal jurisdictions. Most of the centres named below hear matters before the District, Family and Youth Courts. Many also have High Courts. Many host inquests and a variety of tribunals too. It is not meant to allow for coverage of every case for the sake of it, but to allow for experts in their field to identify which cases - that would otherwise not be covered - have the highest public interest.*

If courts have been reported less over time, the reporting of tribunals and similar bodies has been even more impacted. Although neither the NZME or NZ on Air contract is explicit in what should be covered, it is clear that NZME has chosen a broad interpretation of 'justice'.

Several indicators have been used in the review to assess how well 'justice' is being interpreted under the scheme and how well this translates into published and broadcast stories.

Selected e-editions of print media that are partners to the scheme were examined to determine coverage by OJ reporters against coverage by newsroom staff and news selection by individual outlets, together with the level of Open Justice recognition. The editions were published between August 2022 and June 2023.

The examination showed that local staff's court stories were not prioritised over OJ reporters' stories and Open Justice stories led those papers on many occasions. Perceptions of news value, particularly across multiple outlets, are useful gauges in determining whether content is meeting a broad public need. By that measure, Open Justice fared well.

Particular attention was paid in examining the e-edition to the use by various publications of the multi-part series that were produced by OJ reporters. As expected, the most extensive coverage appeared in the New Zealand Herald, which



has greater capacity than its regional counterparts, but regional publications accommodated them to the best of their ability.

Daily OJ advisories during the month of April 2023 were examined to determine the range of subjects covered by OJ reporters. The advisories contained 131 story briefs. The advisories included coverage of some cases that extended over time but the range of subjects was extensive:

- Animal cruelty
- Arson
- Assault
- Child welfare
- Commercial conduct
- Compensation/reparation
- Defamation
- Driving offences
- Drug offences
- Employment
- Espionage
- Extremism/hate crime
- Firearms charges
- Fraud
- Gang related offences
- Governance
- Human rights violations
- Immigration
- Indecency/sexual assault
- Inheritance
- Inquests
- Land & building disputes
- Manslaughter
- Medical treatment (incl. vax)
- Murder
- Negligence
- Prisoner welfare
- Privacy
- Professional conduct (lawyers, police, teachers, security)
- Sentencing appeals
- Smuggling
- Tenancy
- Theft
- Workplace health & safety
- Workplace relations

A snapshot does not reveal the full range of subjects covered under the OJ scheme. It is fair to say that other subjects could be added to the list. It should also be noted that within each subject there is a range of disparate topics that have been covered. Tenancy, for example, covers subjects ranging from health risks in damp rentals to attempts to evict unruly gang members.

By any measure this range is extensive and it is encouraging to see that it extends well beyond the 'if-it-bleeds-it-leads' approach to newsgathering. It is particularly noteworthy that the subject range also extends beyond criminal law into civil proceedings that, in the past, received scant coverage.

Both the e-edition and advisory snapshots revealed that the OJ reporters are active at all levels of the court system to which they are entitled to have access. District courts as well as the higher courts receive good, if necessarily selective, coverage and OJ reporters seek access to relevant cases in the Youth Court and Family Court.

As stated above, Open Justice reporters were asked to list the bodies on which they reported. It was clear that most relied on memory to complete this part of the survey and subsequent investigation showed it was far from exhaustive. For example, none listed the Waitangi Tribunal but it has been the subject of OJ coverage (it has been added below). By one estimate there are 45 tribunals in New Zealand.

The following bodies have been covered in addition to coverage of the five courts:

- Employment Relations Authority
- Employment Court
- Environment Court
- Waitangi Tribunal
- Māori Land Court
- Coroners' hearings
- Independent Police Conduct Authority
- Privacy Commissioner
- Accident Compensation Commission
- Tenancy Tribunal
- Immigration & Protection Tribunal
- Human Rights Tribunal
- Lawyers & Conveyancers Disciplinary Tribunal
- Disputes Tribunal
- Health Practitioner's Disciplinary Tribunal
- Australian Administrative Appeals Tribunal
- Motor Vehicle Disputes Tribunal
- Private Security Personnel Licensing Authority
- Advertising Standards Authority
- Trades Disciplinary Board
- Racing integrity Boards
- Alcohol & Regulatory Licensing Authority
- Social Workers Complaints and Disciplinary Tribunal
- NZ Law Society Standards Committee
- Court Martial of New Zealand
- Court Martial Appeal Court

The OJ scheme has given the public insights into professional conduct across a wide range of disciplines with which people engage, often on a regular basis. Reporting of disciplinary proceedings has provided instructive insights into various means of redress.

Coverage of some of these bodies can be challenging, particularly when members and staff are unused to the presence of reporters. The procedures of the different tribunals vary widely, often for no apparent reason. It is to the reporters' credit that they have been undaunted by sometimes negative reactions to their presence in spite of their right to be there. Other bodies, such as the Independent Police Conduct Authority, sit in private but OJ reporters appear alert to the publication of reports of cases issued by such authorities.

The interactions between Open Justice editors and Open Justice reporters to determine coverage and approach have been described to the reviewer. It is a robust interrogation of both news value and public interest that is consistent with the objectives of the Public Interest Journalist Fund.

While its stories may seek out eye-catching angles, its approach does not compromise professional standards or the need to address often complex issues and procedures. The latter is reflected in both in-depth stories and decisions to sometimes hold publication until the end of proceedings in order to provide a more complete and balanced account.

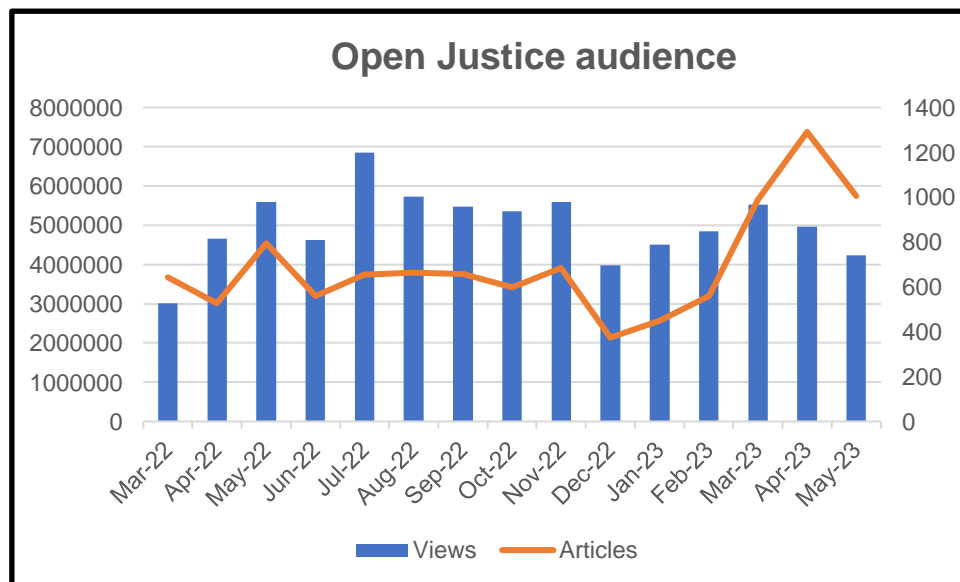
In summary, the Open Justice scheme provides the public with a window into a wide variety of subjects under the broad rubric of 'justice' and across a broader range of judicial and regulatory bodies than in the recent past.

### 3.7 How well does Open Justice perform?

In the digital age, performance is usually gauged by analytics. Open Justice’s digital performance is impressive by any New Zealand news measure. In the year ended May 2023 it amassed 67 million page views, making it a high achiever in the NZME digital ranks. An average of 700 new articles a month were being accessed.

Alterations to Facebook’s algorithms in April 2023 caused a drop in Open Justice’s online performance, which had been on an uninterrupted upward trajectory since the end-of-year judicial hiatus. There is no reason to believe the sudden downturn in May was due to a drop in performance by the Open Justice team. In fact, the changes by Facebook resulted in declining numbers across news media in New Zealand and elsewhere. Although there has been some improvement over time it is unlikely, in the short-term at least, that there will be a complete reversal unless Meta changes its approach. This data does not, of course, take account of newspaper readership.

Fig. 6



Open Justice participant publications report the scheme produces some of their best-read stories but there is little audience feedback other than from those directly involved in reported cases. One editor reported that an OJ story was “one of our most popular stories ever published”.

On the basis of analytics, and even given aberrations caused by Facebook’s arbitrary algorithmic downplaying of news,<sup>6</sup> Open Justice is a success with audiences. By its own admission, the OJ team angles stories to gain attention and does so skilfully, as shown in the sample story analysis below.

However, the Open Justice scheme must serve a higher objective than achieving millions of ‘clicks’. It must demonstrate that it is making a significant contribution to the

<sup>6</sup> Likely linked to international moves to regulate payments to news providers.

public's understanding of, and engagement with, the justice system in order to justify the investment of public funds. That is not directly measurable by online analytics.

Therefore, the first indicator of how well the Open Justice scheme has performed in achieving that higher objective should be whether dedicated court reporters have produced stories that help to redress standards of reportage that have been the subject of concern within the justice system.

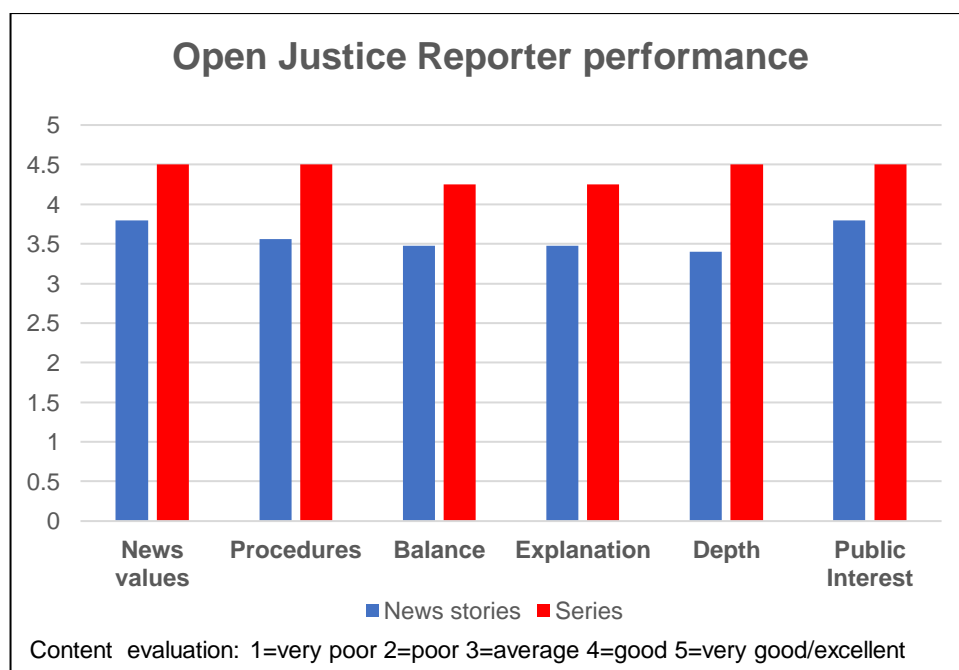
That assessment takes two forms: a content analysis of a representative story sample, and a polling of the opinions of editors and justice system representatives.

The content analysis comprised 25 news stories and 17 stories that were part of four investigative series carried out by OJ staff. As with the LDR content analysis, stories were judged on a five-point scale across six attributes. The OJ attributes differed from those in the LDR survey. Where that survey focussed on democratic contributions, the OJ analysis gauged how well a story assisted the public's understanding of the justice system. The key attributes in this regard were explanations of procedure, fairness and balance, and explanations of proceedings.

In order to prevent the analysis becoming a form of personal performance review, the identity of both the reporters and identifying details of individual stories were removed.

The aggregated averages across all news stories showed above average results (3.6 out of 5) and an even higher average (4.4 out of 5) across the investigative series. All individual attribute averages were also consistently above average.

Fig. 7



The dataset from the sample content analysis can be found in Appendix 6. It shows that in only one instance was an attribute below average<sup>7</sup>, and in another the story was judged very good/excellent across all six attributes.

It was encouraging to see almost half the news stories in the sample were rated 4 or 5 on incorporating descriptions of procedures, and 40 per of stories devoted significant space to explaining the case in terms readers could understand. The high average rating for news value (3.8 out of 5) correlates with the online performance of its output.

In choosing the sample news stories, care was taken to include a representative number of items to reflect the broadened scope of coverage noted in 3.6 above.

The series included in the content analysis suggest the Open Justice scheme has made a significant contribution to investigative journalism about the justice sector. Standards were high across all attributes and one series demonstrated not only tenacity but a comprehensive understanding of the justice system, its procedures, and standards. In fact, each of the series made a significant contribution to the public's understanding of the issues being canvassed.

The content analysis (together with the advisories examination) indicates the scheme has not only increased the range of cases covered but has also had an impact on coverage of disciplinary proceedings across a range of professions and on systems for public redress.

It also demonstrates the value of dedicated court reporting positions. The stories show a level of competency that is not always present in ad hoc court reporting. It also showed the benefits of being able to devote time to stories and a number pointed to the fact that the OJ editor had resisted the temptation to publish daily updates and had instead opted to wait until the OJ reporter was in a position to write a comprehensive account of proceedings.

Editors of publications in the scheme were unanimous in their belief that Open Justice had improved coverage of court and legal news in their regions and the stories in produced were useful additions to their news offering. All had positive views on the range and depth of stories and many cited the enhanced skill sets that dedicated reporters brought to coverage of the justice sector. The following summarises their views:

- How has it improved coverage of courts and justice issues?

Responses: Fulltime FTE in court; increased expertise as well as increased coverage; immensely improved; previous coverage a shambles; coverage of areas not previously reported including tribunals and prolonged hearings; very clearly with significant increase in geographic reach; have run stories previously unavailable to us; cover more than we used to and in more depth; we had limited court experience and resource before OJ and our coverage is now comprehensive.

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<sup>7</sup> The story in question related to an ongoing case and reported only that day's evidence, which affected a level of balance which would be restored across the full reporting of the trial.

- What is your view on the range and depth of stories provided by OJ reporters?

Responses: Very good. It provides both scoops & backgrounders; good mix; always wide range; weighted to the serious despite courts producing some lighter moments; thoroughly enjoy range from shorts to long-form; day-to-day coverage has been the biggest win but a dedicated reporter has led to insightful long-form; excellent; sometimes a lot of grim crime stories and we have to stagger their use; OJ is able to explore issues beyond the courtroom as well.

However, the most telling reaction to stories produced by OJ reporters has come from the justice sector itself.

The chair of the Media & Courts Committee, Justice Simon Moore, is in no doubt that there has been material improvement in court coverage as a result of the presence of dedicated court reporters. Perhaps most telling is his observation that now there are fewer mistakes in reporting.

Justice Moore also points to the way in which the scheme has improved geographic coverage of courts, opening proceedings in regional New Zealand that local news operators had found it impossible to cover. Similarly, reporting of civil proceedings had improved.

He recently told an Institute of Judicial Studies course:

*“The retrenchment of the media over the last decade or so had resulted in journalists being drawn back to the main centres so that coverage of our Courts tended to focus on high profile cases in those Courts. These new reporters are now turning up in courtrooms, and virtual hearings, from Kaitaia to Invercargill and putting the Courts and what happens inside them in the spotlight. Some regional Courts are seeing reporters in their buildings for the first time in decades.”*

He cited a New Zealand Media Council decision from 2018 that found serious fault in reporting of an acquittal in an indecent assault case. He said the shortcomings in reportage in that story had not been an isolated incident. “There were others; all it seems due to inexperience and under-resourcing or both.” However, he contrasted it with a more recent case involving a reporter, aware of court procedures, who avoided a potential damaging disclosure.

*I dare to hope that things are changing and there are some bright lights on the horizon which are the product of better resourcing and a higher degree of trust between the Courts and the media...I am sure that the increased contact between the Courts and the media through the various open justice initiatives, the seminars, increasing judicial awareness of the rights of the media and the importance of making sure they get it right, has gone a long way in restoring the balance.”*

Justice Moore regards the Open Justice project as not only desirable but a necessity as a way of maintaining a cadre of skilled journalists permanently assigned to cover the justice sector.

His support for the scheme is shared by Courts of New Zealand's Senior Communications Advisor Liz Kennedy.

She believes the extended geographic reach of the OJ scheme has been very effective and the number of stories produced has been impressive. While she wonders whether the sheer volume of stories on criminal cases may have influenced people's perceptions of rising crime, she also acknowledges that civil law cases had also received a substantial boost.

*"My overall assessment is it's been excellent. The judiciary relies on the media to raise people's awareness of what happens in courtrooms. We have appreciated the journalists going into the smaller tribunals. [The public] are finding out about the work of these bodies. And this is where the majority of New Zealanders access justice."*

She believes the quality of coverage has improved under the OJ scheme. Stories are generally well written and OJ reporters made an effort to be thorough about the matters they are covering. She noted that OJ stories contained defendant viewpoints as well as those of victims. She noted that victims of sexual crime, in particular, had found a voice through the OJ scheme.

*"I think their work shows what great stories there are in the courts, that people are really interested in these stories. It's right that the Fourth Estate is engaged where it should be in our courtrooms. They're reporting on how the judges are working, and they're reporting on the processes of the court. On that, it has galvanized us to look at registry processes around media access and access to court documents. That has been very helpful. Our judicial committees that focus on open justice issues – Huakina tia Hika/Open Justice Committee and the Media & Courts Committee – have been considering the issues that the Open Justice reporters have brought to our attention and working with the Ministry of Justice to resolve them."*

Liz Kennedy appreciates the significant boost in the number of 'ring-fenced' reporters that the OJ scheme has brought to the courts, echoing a view also expressed by Justice Moore – that the courts had missed having a significant cohort of dedicated court reporters who understood the intricacies of court reporting.

*"We do have some excellent court reporters, but not many of them who really made that round their own – I could count five or seven..."*

*and they also did other things. They simply couldn't do the whole job. Think about the Press Gallery, keeping an eye on that branch of government, then think about the equivalent [covering courts]...What the Open Justice scheme gives us is a group of people to work with. Across many jurisdictions in many countries, courts are understanding that they have a role to play in quite actively raising awareness of what happens in a courtroom. And largely, that's because the media hasn't been doing it as comprehensively as they did. But having these journalists to build connections with – knowing that they're going to be around for a while – is significant. It's an opportunity to really raise the level of court reporting in New Zealand.”*

It is clear that the judiciary has welcomed the Open Justice scheme, and most judges welcome the scrutiny. The consequences of losing it are discussed in 3.9.

The Open Justice scheme's performance should not, however, be judged only on the output of its reporters. Its administration is a vital ingredient of any success.

Open Justice's foundation editor, Elizabeth Binning has worked for NZME for two decades, the first as a crime and justice reporter. She has considerable direct experience in court reporting. She was later the *New Zealand Herald's* chief of staff, a role in which she gained experience in staff management. Her breadth of experience is reflected in the way the scheme has been structured and operated.

Editors in the scheme report the service is well-run and, although there have been occasional instances where there was confusion over who was covering a case (OJ or the local newsroom), liaison had improved. None reported friction between themselves and the OJ administrators. Several expressed occasional frustration over what they called 'a sub-editing logjam', which could be overcome if local newsrooms were able to edit OJ reporters' stories. This, however, is more a function of the decision to forego a separate CMS system and rely on main NZME newsroom processing than it is a systemic fault in OJ management.

There are varied levels of experience in the Open Justice reporting team. Some have decades of experience and well-developed skills in court reporting, while others have entered the roles as relative novices. Identifying suitable candidates for the OJ reporting role has been challenging. Many applicants have been junior reporters, and a number have had no experience in court reporting. This is, in large measure, a consequence of the reduction in the number of journalists who are assigned to cover the courts. There are simply fewer court reporters in the industry than in the past and the scheme cannot be criticised for taking on people who need to be given court reporting skills. A useful product of the OJ scheme will be that the existence of the scheme will boost the ranks of experienced court reporters.

Varied skill levels require differing approaches by the Open Justice editor and her deputy. There is a high level of interaction with OJ reporters before, during and after stories are written. Elizabeth Binning admits they spend much more time with junior reporters, going over their copy, than they do with the seasoned court reporters in the group. The scheme's training schedule also recognises these varied skill levels.



However, legislation and case law require all reporters to be aware of changes and advances, and training courses run by the scheme cater for all levels of experience.

Reporters are encouraged to produce long-form journalism and report 'no difficulty in going off-diary' to research and write such articles. OJ reporters are given a measure of autonomy in searching for topics and cases to cover.

Story development within the scheme is well-organised and achieves a workable balance between 'good stories' and the explanation of sometimes arcane judicial processes. The two are far from mutually exclusive but skill is required to turn the latter into the former. The scheme appears designed to achieve that end.

Court reporting can expose reporters to traumatic details. Reporters' responses to a survey question on the topic support the OJ editor's statement that she is mindful of the need for pastoral care. All reported ready access to counselling or mentoring when required.

Observation bears out editors' views that the scheme is well run. Of course, it does have the advantage of sitting within a wider structure that has focused on integration. There were, for example, pre-existing processes for the sharing of content within the NZME group as well as routine lines of liaison and control. These prior conditions may be why there is no evidence of the friction that exists in a small number of LDR relationships.

The overall impression is that the Open Justice scheme has performed well and is competently and efficiently run.

### 3.8 Has the Open Justice scheme filled gaps?

There is a common belief – among Open Justice staff, editors who use their output, the judiciary, and justice executives – that the scheme has added materially to coverage of courts. There is also clear evidence that the range of justice-related bodies covered by Open Justice is significantly larger than had been the case within NZME before the scheme started.

It is also clear that Stuff, in particular, has increased its own coverage of the sector in response to the OJ scheme. However, other media organisations have not had the financial support for court reporting available to NZME and the 'filling of gaps' must be seen principally in the context of the host's own 'reach'. Nonetheless, the overall effect has been a significant increase in the amount of content available to the public about this arm of government.

About 600 new stories each quarter have been uploaded to the NZ Herald website and re-published or broadcast. Given the quality of material in the content analysis sample, it is also safe to say that the gap filled has been qualitative as well as quantitative.

NZME had an existing Memorandum of Understanding with Whakaata Māori. The OJ scheme has filled a gap in the latter's news line-up through the inclusion of Open

Justice stories in its news bulletins<sup>8</sup>. The network's Director of Content, Maramena Roderick sees the benefits of Open Justice, particularly given her own organisation's current inability to provide such a service for themselves. She says that to have a dedicated justice reporter (who would need to be a reo Māori speaker) would "require strong checks and balances from producers who are already stretched or don't have the important experience in this space". She says the arrangement with NZME had allowed Whakaata Māori's news service to take Open Justice stories (which had already been subjected to such checks and balances) directly from NZME. In return, reo speaking reporters from Whakaata Māori have attended NZME's training sessions on law, and the relationship between justice and te Tiriti o Waitangi. They had provided a Māori perspective and lens on those issues. The inclusion of Open Justice in the two organisations' arrangement appears to have filled gaps on both sides.

That is not to say that all gaps in justice reporting have been filled by the Open Justice scheme. That is unlikely to happen, whatever the circumstances. However, some gaps that remain are a function of the scheme's design and could be remedied. These gaps are geographic. In a sense Fig. 5 is misleading. It accurately shows the location of OJ reporters but the shaded areas of responsibility mask a different reality. For example, the Christchurch reporter's 'beat' covers both Kaikoura and the West Coast but the courts in those area have not been covered. That is in no way a criticism of the Christchurch reporter, who is diligently covering courts and tribunals that sit in that city. The physical demands of covering such a large area make it an unrealistic expectation. It could only be remedied by adding staff.

The absence of OJ reporters south of Christchurch is partly compensated by coverage of courts and tribunals in those areas by Allied Press's arrangement to supply Open Justice content. However, there are courts and other institutions that are located a considerable distance from main centres in which OJ reporters are located and travel times make coverage difficult.

In short, the South Island contains gaps.

Doubtless there are areas of a wide and deep justice system that have not been brought within the OJ orbit. However, on balance, the scheme has honoured the obligations to which it committed itself in its PIJF application.

### 3.9 Should the Open Justice scheme be retained and how could it be improved?

In a sense this is a hypothetical question as the source of funding for the Open Justice scheme has closed and there is no indication that the Public Interest Journalism Fund – which was born out of the financial setbacks media suffered in the Covid pandemic – will be resurrected.

Were the PIJF the only source available to fund Open Justice, the answer to the question would be a blunt 'no'.

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<sup>8</sup> Whakaata Māori may re-version or seek further comment from Māori interviewees once a case has run its course.

However, the contribution that the scheme has made to public oversight of the third branch of government suggests the question should be: An Open Justice scheme must be maintained but how?

Use of the phrase “an Open Justice scheme” is deliberate: If NZME’s project cannot be sustained, an alternative structure should be sought.

NZME’s approach was workable because the PIJF allowed individual companies to promote projects of which they were the principal beneficiary – outputs were destined first and foremost for their own publications or broadcasts. Where one company received funding for Project A, their competitor received funding for Project B. There was a balancing effect and neither could say they had been disadvantaged. The exception, of course, was the Local Democracy Reporting scheme which had predated the PIJF but had been subsumed by the fund.

NZME saw Open Justice as a proprietary project and continues to do so. It sees the scheme offering a competitive advantage, and regards its structure as an integrated component of its news operations. It believes these attributes are essential parts of its success and sees sharing with direct competitors (in a scheme akin to LDR) as an untenable prospect.

The company regards itself in a highly competitive market where the output of Open Justice reporters has allowed it to provide high-interest content in the non-paywalled section of its digital services. It believes a change to the scheme, say, requiring it to freely share content would lead either to its newsrooms reverting to a situation where they sent their own reporters to court on an ad hoc basis or there could be less prominence given to Open Justice content. The production of investigative series would diminish or disappear without exclusivity.

Editors surveyed during the review support this view. While some saw limited scope for pooling arrangements on protracted trials, they were unenthusiastic. They did not believe the significant managerial resources NZME puts into the scheme could be justified in a shared scheme. The bottom line seems to be that NZME is committed to the current system but not to alternatives.

The civic benefits that have accrued from the Open Justice scheme to date suggests that, despite the end of the Public Interest Journalism Fund, some way should be found to continue to support the sort of coverage of the justice sector that has been evident since this scheme’s inception.

Editors whose publications are beneficiaries of the service view possible closure with considerable concern:

- A funding cut would see our court coverage reduced.
- There would be a dramatic reduction in court coverage as regional newsrooms have no ability to provide dedicated staffer.
- The public would lose a critical part of ensuring a functioning society.
- Justice is meant to be open but without this scheme it will not be.
- It would be a step backwards after a rapid step forward.

While regional editors have a number of priorities for the restoration of lost areas of coverage, all place a high priority on maintaining the Open Justice scheme. As one editor put it: “Nothing would pre-empt Open Justice”.

Some within NZME are nervous about the effect of disinformation surrounding the PIJF and, therefore, about the concept of state-funding of private sector journalism. That view notwithstanding, it is unlikely that a scheme on the scale of Open Justice is sustainable within the company’s own resources. This is particularly the case in the regional newsrooms that unanimously state an inability to fund a dedicated justice reporter from within their current budgets.

The dilemma in considering further funding of the existing NZME scheme is that the counter-balancing effect of multiple project funding across companies has been lost with the end of the Public Interest Journalism Fund. A direct grant to NZME in the absence of financial support for its rivals would lead immediately to charges of inequity, particularly when NZME acknowledges Open Justice gives it a competitive advantage.

There are two possible solutions, both of which assume there may be access by NZ on Air to the funds to cover them.

The first solution would be to widen the brief of the Local Democracy Reporting scheme to also embrace coverage of the justice sector. It would require expansion of the LDR reporting team as existing staff could not be expected to shoulder the additional burden. However, this may be a less desirable option because it could fulfil NZME prophecy on the watering down effects of sharing. Sharing on an LDR-like basis could also diminish the need for NZME’s competitors to step up to the court reporting plate (as they have clearly done now).

Should NZ on Air and RNZ jointly fund a continuation of LDR, it would also place responsibility for substantive coverage of *two* arms of government under the editorial control of a single organisation that is, itself, state funded. No doubt RNZ would take a professional approach to added responsibilities but the perception of such aggregation could prove negative.

The second solution would be to consider the NZME scheme within an existing NZ on Air funding stream.

There is a long-established track record of NZ on Air funding current affairs programmes under its Factual programming stream. Prior to the PIJF NZ on Air (through a contestable application process) funded Tangata Pacifika (TVNZ1), Newshub Nation (THREE), Newsroom Investigates (Newsroom NZ), Paakiwaha (Radio Waatea), Q&A (TVNZ1), The Hui (THREE) and two Stuff projects under its Factual Funding stream. All are news-related. Programmes that migrated to the PIJF but which have long-term support from NZ on Air will presumably migrate back to other funding streams. Consideration should be given to including Open Justice in this contestable mix. It would provide the potential for ongoing funding, assuming NZME’s application stood up against other applications for funds. The public would benefit even more if one of NZME’s rivals made an application for a parallel justice reporting team.

The civic value that has been demonstrated by the Open Justice scheme – and the recognition of that value at senior levels of the judiciary – point to the high desirability of finding a funding solution to allow it to continue. The obvious value that NZME has found in the scheme might suggest that a funding contribution from within is also warranted.

Should such a move require additional funding to be directed to NZ on Air then it should be sought from government. A relatively small sum of money is required to maintain the improved flow of information to the public about the activities of this arm of government, and the scrutiny of its institutions.

A senior judge told the reviewer: “ I have no doubt Open Justice has made a material difference to reporting in our Courts. It would be a tragedy for journalism in this country if the funding was pulled.”

## PART 4: REPUTATION

### 4.1 Situation

Although it is not strictly within the brief of the review, an assessment of the Local Democracy Reporting and Open Justice schemes cannot totally ignore the disinformation that surrounded the Public Interest Journalism Fund.

The fund was said to have ‘bought off’ the media which, in return for a total of \$55 million, would do the government’s bidding. The accusation spread widely and, like many conspiracy theories, was aimed at undermining both institutions. The most worrying aspect was that it was repeated by people who were otherwise imbued with a measure of common sense.

The claim was, of course, complete nonsense and there is no evidence that any recipient was coerced by the Public Interest Journalism Fund. Indeed, much of the funding put civic administration under scrutiny in one way or another.

A second accusation surrounded the obligation to observe the principles of te Tiriti o Waitangi. The claim was that it required media to “always take the Māori position”. While this ‘obligation’ may have been better expressed, it actually did little more than affirm principles that mainstream news media were already observing in recognition of New Zealand’s constitutional and cultural makeup.

The reviewer found no evidence of the LDR or OJ schemes being directly targeted by such disinformation. However, the effect of the disinformation was to tarnish the very concept of state-funding of private sector journalism. So, in that sense, both schemes were victims.

### 4.2 Remediation

Like most disinformation, the damage was done once the PIJF conspiracy theory was disseminated. Even emphatic denial has little effect on those for whom the disinformation is consistent with their prejudices and preconceptions.

That does not, however, remove an obligation to shorten the life of the PIJF conspiracy theory if direct (or even indirect) state funding of Local Democracy Reporting or Open Justice is continued under new arrangements.

The explicit separation of NZ on Air from any editorial decision-making or monitoring suggested in 2.5 above is an important way of demonstrating to the public that the arm’s-length relationship between the government and the funding body is reinforced by arm’s-length relationships with the journalism that the funding produces. It is a natural extension of the independence of the funding decision processes to which the reviewer can attest.<sup>9</sup>

Should the Open Justice scheme receive on-going funding – and if funding is approved to allow others to seek money for a parallel competitively advantageous proposal –

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<sup>9</sup> The reviewer was one of a group of independent assessors of PIJF applications.

complete editorial independence should be codified in any Memorandum of Understanding, as is suggested for LDR.

However, the stain of disinformation is difficult to erase and is unlikely to be removed simply by alternative funding to the now-defunct PIJF. Other measures may well be required to 'legitimise' state assistance for journalism, a normalisation that is already apparent in some other jurisdictions.

One means would be to remove the requirement that NZ on Air branding appear on articles produced with its funding assistance. "Funded through NZ on Air" is, to some, a flag for 'government money', with all the connotations they wish to place on it. It has a more indelible effect than the fleeting appearance of the NZ on Air logo on a funded television programme.

An alternative might be undertakings to prominently publish the announcement that NZ on Air funding has been approved, to cover any reviews of the particular scheme contained in NZ on Air's annual reports or other reviews, and to periodically publish a panel setting out the funding arrangement. Beyond that, the only requirement on each article should be to carry the established logo for the scheme or reporter's designation. This would identify a role that has been disclosed as the recipient of state funding, without over-emphasising the fact.

State funding per se does not carry with it an obligation for continued disclosure. For example, there is no requirement on the Order of St John to tell the public its emergency service is about 80 per cent funded through the Ministry of Health and Accident Compensation Commission every time an ambulance turns up. Disclosure is a must, but repetition does not carry the same imperative.

The remedy with the greatest effect, of course, is reporting that demonstrates the tenets of good journalism and is seen to hold power to account.

## Appendix 1: Survey questionnaires

### SURVEY #1: LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTERS

1. What has the LDR scheme contributed to the communities in which you are working?
2. How many organisations (elected and otherwise) do you cover?
3. Do you think LDR status assists your relationships with (a) elected representatives and (b) staff within those organisations?
4. Has the fixed-term nature of the LDR scheme affected your attitude and the attitudes of others toward it?
5. Describe the process used to determine what stories you will cover in a given week
6. Would you say there is a reasonable mix of news stories, backgrounders, and investigations?
7. How would you describe your workload?
8. How would you describe your relationships with editorial executives and other staff in the newsroom in which you are based?
9. Do the supervisory and CMS systems administered by rnz meet your needs and provide sufficient support?
10. have you identified any deficiencies in the LDR scheme or do you have suggestions for improvement?
11. have you made career plans based on the LDR scheme coming to an end?
12. if funding could be found to continue the scheme, would you wish to remain in your LDR role?

### SURVEY #2 LDR HOST EDITORS

1. What is your overall impression of the value of the LDR scheme?
2. To what extent has it improved coverage of elected bodies in your region?
3. Has the presence of an LDR reporter in your newsroom affected your organisation's relationships with elected bodies? If so, how?
4. Has the scope of the scheme created any anomalies in relation to roles of other staff?
5. What is your view of the way in which the scheme is administered on a day-to-day basis?
6. Has the content sharing requirement of the scheme created any issues? If so, what?
7. What is your assessment of the impact of the LDR scheme coming to an end with the exhausting of pifj financing?
8. Will you be able to absorb the existing LDR reporter into your newsroom staff when the scheme ends?
9. if alternative funding could be found for the LDR scheme, would you wish to continue as an LDR host newsroom?
10. would you support the scheme if it was absorbed into another organisation such as rnz?
11. How would you assess the value of the LDR scheme relative to other forms of support such as (a) direct funding for your newsroom to undertake local democracy reporting (b) funding of other roles or coverage?
12. If the LDR scheme continued, how do you think it could be improved?



### SURVEY #3: LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

1. How aware of the scheme are (a) elected representatives and (b) officials?
2. Has it improved coverage of your authority? If so, in what way?
3. How accessible are the meetings of your authority and does the LDR take advantage of access?
4. Have you had personal contact with the LDR reporter in your area and, if so, how often would you speak with them?
5. What is your reaction to the extra scrutiny that the scheme is designed to provide?
6. Have you encountered any difficulties as a result of the scheme?
7. Should it continue if funding was available?
8. Would you suggest any changes or improvements?

## Appendix 2: RNZ satisfaction survey

1. Is the scope and brief of LDR easily understood?

[More Details](#)

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| ● Yes | 25 |
| ● No  | 2  |



2. Are LDR stories proving useful to your organisation

[More Details](#)

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| ● Yes | 26 |
| ● No  | 1  |



3. Do LDR reporters improve coverage of local body news in your regions of coverage?

[More Details](#)

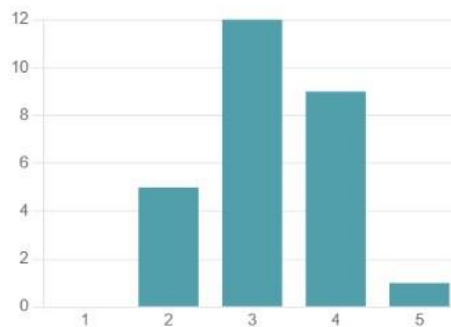
|       |    |
|-------|----|
| ● Yes | 20 |
| ● No  | 7  |



4. On a scale of 1 to 5 can you please rate the headlines

[More Details](#)

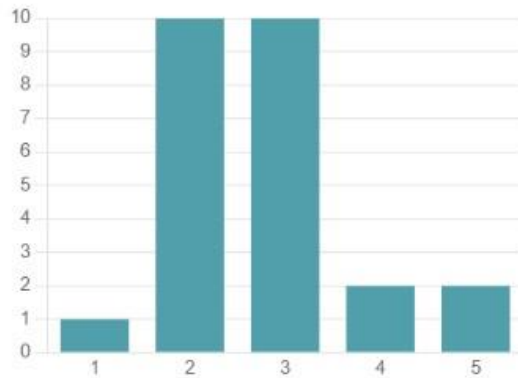
3.22  
Average Rating



5. On a scale of 1 to 5 can you please rate the photographs supplied

[More Details](#)

2.76  
Average Rating



6. If you could change anything about editorial content what would it be?

[More Details](#)

19  
Responses

Latest Responses

*"Stylistically I prefer news to be written in the present rather than the past te...*

*"Much of the coverage from North Canterbury has been about what is 'goi...*

*"Can't think of anything at the moment"*

7. How often does your organisation access the LDR website?

[More Details](#)

|                          |    |
|--------------------------|----|
| Daily                    | 18 |
| Weekly                   | 7  |
| Monthly                  | 2  |
| Never                    | 0  |
| I didn't know it existed | 0  |



8. Is the website easy to use?

[More Details](#)

|     |    |
|-----|----|
| Yes | 25 |
| No  | 2  |



9. Are stories easy to download?

[More Details](#)

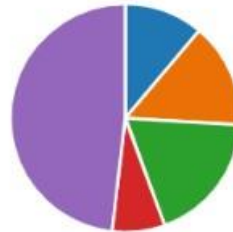
|       |    |
|-------|----|
| ● Yes | 24 |
| ● No  | 3  |



10. What time of day might your organisation typically consider LDR stories for publication?

[More Details](#)

|                   |    |
|-------------------|----|
| ● Early Morning   | 3  |
| ● Mid Morning     | 4  |
| ● Early Afternoon | 5  |
| ● Evening         | 2  |
| ● All the time    | 13 |



11. If you could change anything about the website what would it be?

[More Details](#)

11  
Responses

Latest Responses

"I would like all reporters to be accurate about which regional tags they sele...

"When I've wanted to look for something specific I haven't found searching e...

"NA"

12. Are the HOLD/Correction/Update processes easily understood?

[More Details](#)

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| ● Yes | 20 |
| ● No  | 7  |



13. Does the 1pm email advisory trigger interest in LDR stories?

[More Details](#)

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| ● Yes | 24 |
| ● No  | 3  |



14. Does the morning advisory trigger interest in LDR stories?

[More Details](#)

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| ● Yes | 22 |
| ● No  | 5  |



15. Do you find it easy to publish LDR stories in a timely manner?

[More Details](#)

|                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|
| ● Yes                                  | 14 |
| ● No                                   | 8  |
| ● Not applicable. I don't publish L... | 5  |



16. Is the LDR portal simple for your reporters to navigate?

[More Details](#)

|                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|
| ● Yes                                  | 17 |
| ● No                                   | 0  |
| ● Not applicable. I don't host a re... | 10 |



17. If you could change anything about operations what would it be?

[More Details](#)

11  
Responses

Latest Responses

*"I would like to unsubscribe from the advisories but I find I keep receiving the..*

*"NA"*

18. Are reporters sufficiently supported by LDR editorial?

[More Details](#)

- Yes 7
- No 0
- Not applicable. I don't host a re... 13



19. Are reporters sufficiently supported by LDR management?

[More Details](#)

- Yes 7
- No 0
- Not applicable. I don't host a re... 12



20. Are the reporters clear in their understanding of an LDR story?

[More Details](#)

- Yes 7
- No 0
- Not applicable. I don't host a re... 12



21. Does the operation of an LDR reporter fit easily within your newsroom operation?

[More Details](#)

|                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|
| ● Yes                                  | 5  |
| ● No                                   | 2  |
| ● Not applicable. I don't host a re... | 12 |



22. If you could change anything about management of reporters what would it be?

[More Details](#)

5  
Responses

Latest Responses  
"NA"

23. Is the invoice payment system working satisfactorily?

[More Details](#)

|                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|
| ● Yes                                  | 4  |
| ● No                                   | 0  |
| ● Not applicable. I don't host a re... | 12 |



24. Does the analytic system work clearly and is easy to understand?

[More Details](#)

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| ● Yes                                 | 4  |
| ● No                                  | 0  |
| ● Not applicable. I am not asked t... | 13 |



### Appendix 3: LDR sample content analysis

| LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTING: SAMPLE CONTENT ANALYSIS |             |                   |                      |                         |               |                  |                   |  |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| Subject area                                       | News Value  | Democratic impact | Community engagement | Journalistic attributes | Content depth | General interest | Attribute average |  |
| Regulation/environment                             | 5           | 4                 | 5                    | 4                       | 4             | 4                | 4.33              |  |
| Politics                                           | 4           | 4                 | 3                    | 3                       | 3             | 3                | 3.33              |  |
| Transport                                          | 4           | 3                 | 3                    | 3                       | 4             | 3                | 3.33              |  |
| Regulation, te ao Māori                            | 4           | 4                 | 4                    | 3                       | 3             | 3                | 3.50              |  |
| Environment                                        | 4           | 3                 | 4                    | 3                       | 3             | 4                | 3.50              |  |
| Environment                                        | 4           | 3                 | 3                    | 3                       | 3             | 4                | 3.33              |  |
| Transport                                          | 3           | 2                 | 2                    | 3                       | 2             | 3                | 2.50              |  |
| Politics, finance                                  | 4           | 4                 | 4                    | 3                       | 3             | 4                | 3.67              |  |
| Finance                                            | 3           | 3                 | 4                    | 3                       | 4             | 3                | 3.33              |  |
| Regulation, te ao Māori                            | 4           | 4                 | 4                    | 3                       | 3             | 3                | 3.50              |  |
| Regulation                                         | 3           | 3                 | 4                    | 3                       | 4             | 3                | 3.33              |  |
| Health                                             | 4           | 3                 | 4                    | 3                       | 3             | 4                | 3.50              |  |
| Politics                                           | 5           | 5                 | 5                    | 4                       | 4             | 4                | 4.50              |  |
| Politics                                           | 5           | 5                 | 5                    | 3                       | 3             | 4                | 4.17              |  |
| <b>Reporter average</b>                            | <b>3.86</b> | <b>3.14</b>       | <b>3.29</b>          | <b>3.50</b>             | <b>3.56</b>   | <b>3.50</b>      | <b>3.47</b>       |  |



## Appendix 4: Summary of suggested improvements

### Reporters

- Improved Content Management System (CMS).
- Rationalise CMS tags.
- Better story utilisation beyond the host publication.
- Focus on fewer organisations in greater depth.
- Provide LDR reporters with Te Reo Māori/English translation service.
- Improve audio-visual equipment including bluetooth microphones.
- Reduce workload.
- Provide greater focus on Māori development.

### LDR Host Editors

- Expand the scheme.
- Allow LDR reporters to write opinion pieces (seen as a counter to criticism that PIJF scheme privileges politicians).
- Reduce challenging output reporting requirements.
- Ensure good communication between LDR editors, host editors and host newsrooms (notes recent improvements).
- Consistent uploading of stories across regions (suggests KPI one story daily).
- Paywall stories to remove anomalies between some subscription host websites and large national websites displaying content free of charge.
- Make content less niche to improve national attraction.
- Embargo stories to host reflect host deadlines.
- Have better coordination with other newsrooms on who's doing what.
- Directly fund LDR reporters in each host newsroom to remove administration costs (RNZ involvement and content distribution).

### Local government

- Stress the need for face-to-face meetings.
- More regular coverage of council's work but less focus on internal disputes.
- A wider multi-media approach, especially local radio coverage.
- Do not undermine local newspapers.
- Introduce independent, transparent funding to overcome PIJF criticism.
- Hire more LDR reporters.
- Fact-check stories with local authorities before publication.
- Reconsider the scope of the LDR reporter role, which can be overwhelming.
- Strive for better coordination with other publications to ensure complementary coverage and avoidance of double-ups.

# Appendix 5: Content management system (CMS)

## Home page

**Latest Stories**

GISBORNE-CYCLONE-CATEGORY

[EMBARGOED: 'Gui-wrenching': Gisborne couple remaining positive despite losing home to Category 3](#)

Gisborne resident June Moore has a particular summer's day before Cyclone Gabrielle etched vividly in her memory. The Waimatā River on her back doorstep was calm and blue, the roses were in bloom and all was well on Vogel Street — a cul-de-sac home to a handful of houses just a stone's throw from town. "I walked down the end of the deck, and it was a beautiful day — blue, blue sky," June recalls. "I looked out there and said 'this is why we live where we live'." That was just days before Cyclone Gabrielle. Now June and husband...

Tags: [Cyclone](#)

Media: [image/jpeg](#) [image/jpeg](#) [image/jpeg](#) [image/jpeg](#)

Created at: 4:24 pm, July 7, 2023  
Updated at: 4:24 pm, July 7, 2023  
Written by: Matthew Rosenberg  
Approved by: Jeremy Muir

GISBORNE-CENSUS-UPDATE

[EMBARGOED: 'Brilliant' Census uptake in Tairāwhiti: Team lead](#)

The leader of a taskforce designed to deliver this year's Census to cyclone-hit communities says her team gave their all to raise the response rate. In March, Stats NZ announced it was setting up Te Ahu Kauaewhi — a locally led taskforce in Tairāwhiti and Hawke's Bay — which aimed to boost Census uptake and support people completing their forms. Census day was March 7, but those in areas covered by Te Ahu Kauaewhi were given a later collection date of June 1 for their paper forms. Speaking to Local Democracy Reporting, Te Ahu Kauaewhi lead Annette Papuni-McLellan said she...

Tags: [Cyclone](#)

Media: [image/jpeg](#) [image/jpeg](#)

Created at: 4:19 pm, July 7, 2023  
Updated at: 4:19 pm, July 7, 2023  
Written by: Matthew Rosenberg  
Approved by: Jeremy Muir

**Planning advisories**

[Nelson Jul 10-13](#)  
Stories: Vandilism across Nelson-Tasman, Kainga Ora needing market houses in city centre development. (hopefully) Walters Bluff landslide remediation Meetings: TDC 13 Thur Strategy and Policy Committee  
Region: [Nelson](#) [Read more](#)

[West Coast — July 3-7](#)  
Major survey work of aquatic weeds on West Coast by regional council. Hēkika seawall application/extension of public consultation; Waifo and Franz flood scheme future and delays in rating district meetings...  
Region: [West Coast](#) [Read more](#)

[North Canterbury — July 3 to 7](#)  
This week I am working on: - Waimakariri District Council meeting on Tuesday - Waimakariri District Council joins Welcoming Communities initiative - Hurunui District Council adopts coastal adaptation plan for...  
Region: [Marlborough](#) [Read more](#)

[Marlborough July 3-7](#)  
East Coast vehicle bylaw comes into effect, art gallery funding reaction, environment plan variation to protect ecological sites  
Region: [Marlborough](#) [Read more](#)

## Authoring tool

Local Democracy Reporting Project

Howdy, Gavin Ellis  
Screen Options

Workflows  
Stories  
Add New  
Planning Advisories  
LDR Help  
Collapse menu

**Add New Story**

Add title

More Fields

Slug \*

Notes

Word count: 0

Body \*

Word count: 0

Assets [Add File](#)  
Maximum file size: 300MB. If you're sharing a large video you may want to consider using Dropbox, Google Drive or OneDrive

Embargoed until

**Publish**  
Save Preview  
Status: Draft  
Publish immediately [Edit](#)  
[Submit to editorial review](#)

**Categories**  
All Categories Most Used  
 Ashburton  
 Gisborne  
 King Country  
 Marlborough  
 Nelson  
 North Canterbury

**Tags**  
 [Add](#)  
Separate tags with commas  
[Choose from the most used 1898](#)

## Story file

Local Democracy Reporting Project - View Stories

Stories [Add New](#)

All (8,862) | Published (8,705) | Scheduled (1) | Drafts (109) | Pending (47) | Trash (566)

Bulk actions  All dates  All Categories

8,862 items 1 of 444

| <input type="checkbox"/> | Title                                                                                                        | Slug                   | Journalist     | Editor | Date                                   | Assets |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------|----------------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Embargo* 'Beast of a building': Rotorua Museum strengthening challenges revealed in site work — Scheduled    | ROT-MUSEUM-WORKSHOP    | Laura Smith    |        | Scheduled<br>2023/07/10 at 8:00 am     | 2      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | EMBARGOED: Up every hour: anxious lakes resident's months-long flooding after record rain                    | ROT-LAKE-LEVEL         | Laura Smith    |        | Published<br>2023/07/08 at 8:00 am     | 10     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Study supports stadium extension and sports hub — Pending                                                    | ASH-SPORT-HUB          | Jonathan Leask |        | Last Modified<br>2023/07/07 at 7:15 pm | 2      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Inflation stretched budgets result in less being done — Pending                                              | ASH-INFLATION-BUDGETS  | Jonathan Leask |        | Last Modified<br>2023/07/07 at 7:15 pm | 1      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Kerikeri launch for new Government biodiversity protection builds on Northland protest march voice — Pending | NORTHLAND-NPSIB-LAUNCH | Susan Botting  |        | Last Modified<br>2023/07/07 at 5:25 pm | 4      |

## Planning advisories

Local Democracy Reporting

Stories Tags Planning advisories Help Authoring tool

### Planning Advisories

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><a href="#">Nelson Jul 10-13</a></p> <p>Stories: Vandalism across Nelson-Tasman, Kainga Ora needing market houses in city centre development, (hopefully) Walters Bluff landslide remediation Meetings: TDC 13 Thur Strategy and Policy Committee</p> <p>Tags: <a href="#">Nelson</a></p>                                                                                          | <p>Created at: 5:01 pm, July 7, 2023</p> <p>Updated at: 5:01 pm, July 7, 2023</p> <p>Written by: Max Frethey</p>     | <p><a href="#">Nelson Jul 10-13</a></p> <p>Stories: Vandalism across Nelson-Tasman, Kainga Ora needing market houses in city centre development, (hopefully) Walters Bluff landslide remediation Meetings: TDC 13 Thur Strategy and Policy Committee</p> <p>Region: <a href="#">Nelson</a></p> <p><a href="#">Read more --&gt;</a></p>                              |
| <p><a href="#">West Coast — July 3-7</a></p> <p>Major survey work of aquatic weeds on West Coast by regional council; Hokitika seawall application/extension of public consultation; Waiho and Franz flood scheme future and delays in rating district meetings...</p> <p>Tags: <a href="#">West Coast</a></p>                                                                        | <p>Created at: 2:40 pm, July 3, 2023</p> <p>Updated at: 2:40 pm, July 3, 2023</p> <p>Written by: Brendon McMahon</p> | <p><a href="#">West Coast — July 3-7</a></p> <p>Major survey work of aquatic weeds on West Coast by regional council; Hokitika seawall application/extension of public consultation; Waiho and Franz flood scheme future and delays in rating district meetings...</p> <p>Region: <a href="#">West Coast</a></p> <p><a href="#">Read more --&gt;</a></p>            |
| <p><a href="#">North Canterbury — July 3 to 7</a></p> <p>This week I am working on: - Waimakariri District Council meeting on Tuesday - Waimakariri District Council joins Welcoming Communities Initiative - Hurunui District Council adopts coastal adaptation plan for...</p> <p>Tags: <a href="#">Marlborough</a> <a href="#">North Canterbury</a> <a href="#">West Coast</a></p> | <p>Created at: 1:45 pm, July 3, 2023</p> <p>Updated at: 1:45 pm, July 3, 2023</p> <p>Written by: David Hill</p>      | <p><a href="#">North Canterbury — July 3 to 7</a></p> <p>This week I am working on: - Waimakariri District Council meeting on Tuesday - Waimakariri District Council joins Welcoming Communities Initiative - Hurunui District Council adopts coastal adaptation plan for...</p> <p>Region: <a href="#">Marlborough</a></p> <p><a href="#">Read more --&gt;</a></p> |
| <p><a href="#">Marlborough July 3-7</a></p> <p>East Coast vehicle bylaw comes into effect, art gallery funding reaction, environment plan variation to protect ecological sites</p> <p>Tags: <a href="#">Marlborough</a></p>                                                                                                                                                          | <p>Created at: 1:05 pm, July 3, 2023</p> <p>Updated at: 1:05 pm, July 3, 2023</p> <p>Written by: Maia Hart</p>       | <p><a href="#">Marlborough July 3-7</a></p> <p>East Coast vehicle bylaw comes into effect, art gallery funding reaction, environment plan variation to protect ecological sites</p> <p>Region: <a href="#">Marlborough</a></p> <p><a href="#">Read more --&gt;</a></p>                                                                                              |

## Appendix 6: Open Justice sample story analysis

| OPEN JUSTICE: STORY ANALYSIS* |            |             |             |             |            |                 |              |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Subject                       | News value | Procedure   | Balance     | Explanation | Depth      | Public interest | Item average |
| Sexual assault                | 4          | 4           | 2           | 3           | 3          | 4               | 3.3          |
| Security                      | 4          | 3           | 3           | 2           | 2          | 4               | 3.0          |
| Employment                    | 3          | 4           | 4           | 4           | 4          | 4               | 3.8          |
| Medical treatment             | 5          | 4           | 4           | 5           | 5          | 5               | 4.7          |
| Privacy                       | 4          | 3           | 4           | 3           | 4          | 4               | 3.7          |
| Drugs/assault                 | 3          | 3           | 4           | 4           | 4          | 3               | 3.5          |
| Sentencing appeal             | 3          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 3               | 3.0          |
| Justice                       | 4          | 5           | 5           | 5           | 5          | 5               | 4.8          |
| Justice                       | 5          | 5           | 5           | 5           | 5          | 5               | 5.0          |
| Inheritance                   | 4          | 4           | 4           | 4           | 4          | 4               | 4.0          |
| Sentencing appeal             | 4          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 3               | 3.2          |
| Justice                       | 4          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 4               | 3.3          |
| Professional conduct**        | 3          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 3               | 3.0          |
| Tenancy                       | 4          | 3           | 3           | 4           | 3          | 4               | 3.5          |
| Sentence appeal               | 3          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 3               | 3.0          |
| Drugs/firearms                | 4          | 4           | 4           | 3           | 3          | 3               | 3.5          |
| Environment                   | 4          | 4           | 4           | 4           | 3          | 4               | 3.8          |
| Youth crime                   | 4          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 4               | 3.3          |
| Deportation                   | 4          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 4          | 4               | 3.5          |
| Manslaughter                  | 3          | 4           | 4           | 3           | 3          | 3               | 3.3          |
| Governance                    | 4          | 4           | 4           | 4           | 3          | 4               | 3.8          |
| Poaching                      | 3          | 4           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 3               | 3.2          |
| Medical treatment             | 4          | 3           | 3           | 4           | 3          | 4               | 3.5          |
| Human rights                  | 4          | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 4               | 3.3          |
| Professional conduct          | 4          | 4           | 3           | 3           | 3          | 4               | 3.5          |
| <b>AVERAGES</b>               | <b>3.8</b> | <b>3.56</b> | <b>3.48</b> | <b>3.48</b> | <b>3.4</b> | <b>3.8</b>      | <b>3.6</b>   |
| Sexual assault                | 4          | 4           | 3           | 4           | 4          | 4               | 3.8          |
| Professional conduct          | 5          | 5           | 4           | 4           | 5          | 5               | 4.7          |
| Justice                       | 5          | 4           | 4           | 4           | 4          | 5               | 4.3          |
| Professional conduct          | 4          | 5           | 5           | 5           | 5          | 4               | 4.7          |
| <b>AVERAGES</b>               | <b>4.5</b> | <b>4.5</b>  | <b>4</b>    | <b>4.25</b> | <b>4.5</b> | <b>4.5</b>      | <b>4.4</b>   |

\* Content evaluation: 1=very poor 2=poor 3=average 4=good 5=very good/excellent. \*\* Multi-day hearing

