

Summary of project to evaluate local media content in Northamptonshire:
November 2010

1. Background and overview of Methodology

The principle objective of the project was to evaluate sources of local content in Northamptonshire across various different media – newspapers, radio, online, regional television and social media. The project sought to answer two fundamental questions:

- a. How many local news and sports stories are published by each media channel?
- b. What is the source of those stories?

Northamptonshire is currently covered by two Johnston Press daily newspapers, the Northampton Chronicle & Echo and the Northants Evening Telegraph, as well as one paid for weekly newspaper, the Daventry Express. All three newspapers have associated websites. In terms of commercial radio the county is served by Connect FM, which focuses on the towns of Kettering, Corby, Wellingborough and other areas in the north of the county, as well as Heart FM, which covers the whole of Northamptonshire. The BBC serves the county via BBC online and specifically the local Northampton website, BBC Radio Northampton and BBC Look East provides local TV coverage to most of Northamptonshire.

The content of all the media outlined above was monitored over the course of a 4 week period which took place between 1st and 27th November 2010. As well as story counts for news and sport, the source of each item of content was also recorded against the following 13 categories:

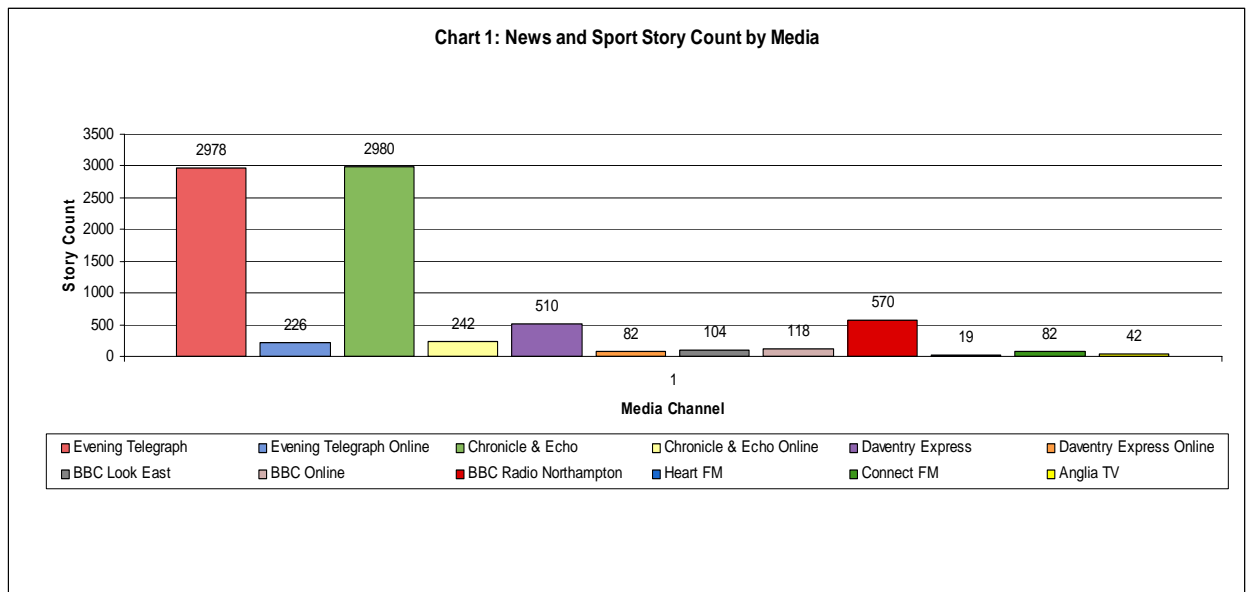
- Court / inquest
- Blue light calls
- Public Meetings / Agendas
- Press Release
- Other publicly available
- Diary
- Nibs – Press Release
- Own Campaign
- Possible paper original
- Likely paper original
- Possible BBC original
- Likely BBC original
- Other

It should be noted that two BBC strike days fell during the monitoring period and have been excluded from the data where indicated. In addition, the counts include Sunday output for the BBC with Sunday being a non-publishing day for the daily newspapers. Given the subjective nature of the monitoring and evaluation process these discrepancies are not considered to be material in terms of significantly influencing the story count data or proportional splits and in any event an average story count per day can still be calculated.

Note in terms of commercial television, Northamptonshire is part of the ITV Anglia broadcast region. Anglia TV was not monitored live throughout the period however detail on story counts were provided at the end of the monitoring period.

2. Summary of story count data and sources of stories

Chart 1 summarises total story counts by media over the four week monitoring period.



Chronicle & Echo

1832 news items (76 per day on average) and 1148 sport stories (48 per day on average) on 24 publication days (no Sunday publication).

Evening Telegraph

In the same 24 day window published 2121 news items (88 per day on average) and 857 sports stories (36 per day on average). Again there is no Sunday publication.

Daventry Express

Published 351 news stories and 159 sports stories on four publication dates.

BBC Radio Northampton

400 stories were broadcast over a 26 day period with 2 BBC strike days excluded (15 a day on average, excluding some listings, general showbiz interviews and a variety of individual consumer queries). 213 sport stories - around 8 per day not including commentary.

Look East

Look East covered 63 news stories in the same period excluding strike days but including Sundays (less than 3 a day). Look East broadcast 41 sports stories almost all fixtures, previews, results round ups, or goals sequences. There was only one longer item, as the Formula One championship was decided. That reflects the size of the Look East patch and the relatively status of the key football teams in Northamptonshire. Coverage of areas with Championship football teams in the region are anticipated to be higher.

ITV Anglia

In the same period ITV Anglia appeared to have covered around 27 stories (likely to be an underestimate as this does not include all news bulletins) and around 15 sport items which again includes multiple result items.

Connect FM

Broadcast 82 stories across a 22 day monitoring period and this equates to less than 4 per day.

Heart FM

Producing very little Northamptonshire content. Once regional and national content is stripped out there were no more than 3 stories mentioning Northamptonshire in any way on any day, routinely less and often none. Even regional round ups routinely ignored the county.

Online:

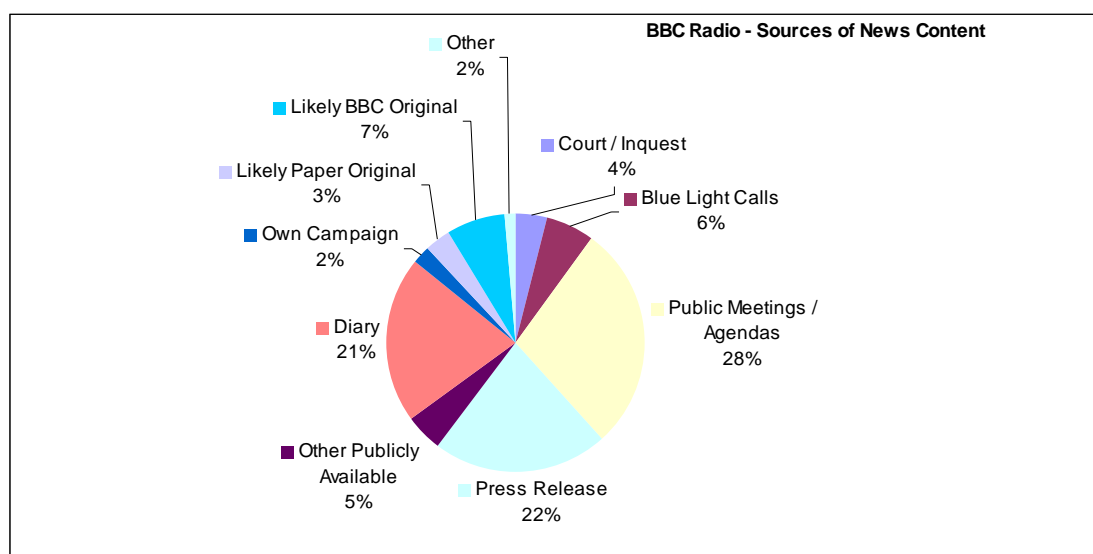
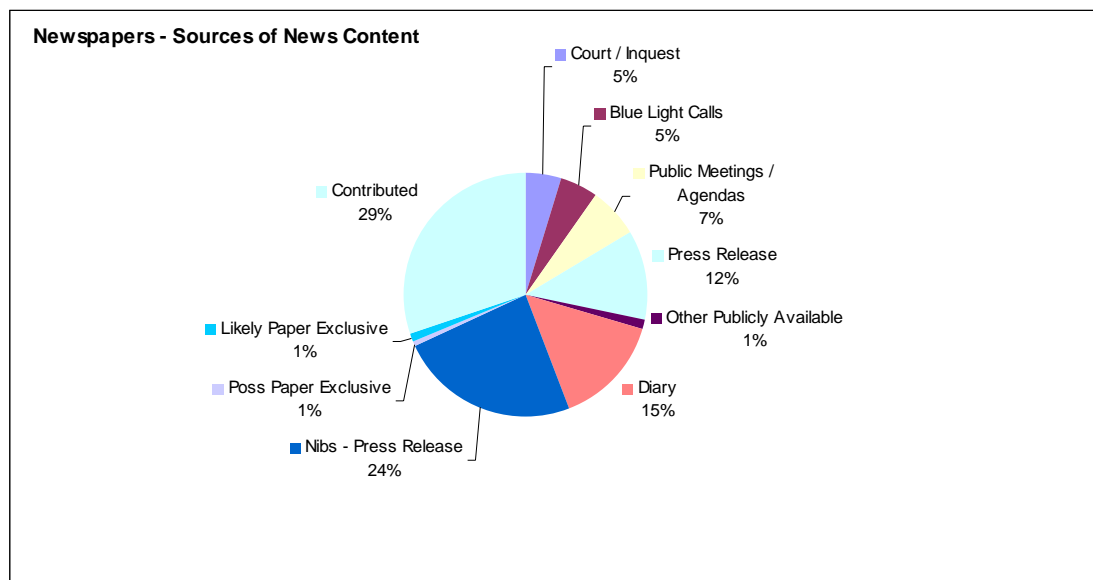
The Chronicle & Echo published 196 news stories in the period and claimed 7 exclusives. It published 46 sport stories.

Evening Telegraph published 239 news stories and 125 sports stories

Daventry Express published 50 news stories and 32 sport stories in a four week period.

BBC Online across the entire period the BBC published 79 Northamptonshire news stories (less than 3 a day) and 39 sport stories (less than 2 per day).

In terms of the sources of stories there was significant variation between the newspapers (in aggregate) and the BBC (all channels) with close to half of the newspaper content (including Sport) being diary based with the BBC placing greater emphasis proportionately on the activities of the county's key public bodies (refer Chart 2 and Chart 3)



3. Headline summary of findings

- Newspapers remain overwhelmingly the major publisher of local news. The two daily newspapers in Northamptonshire each publish more than four times as many news stories as the BBC local radio station every day. Every day each paper publishes more than BBC Look East did in the entire period.
- Online the papers are also the volume provider with the two daily papers publishing 435 news stories and the BBC delivering 79.
- Radio carried the vast bulk of BBC material, duplicated on TV or online, with 15 news stories per day on average being covered. Overall the BBC published around 440 different stories (400 on radio). Around 250 of these stories were also carried by the papers. There were around 160 news stories that did not obviously appear in the papers in this period and a further 20 or so that probably would have appeared in the paper outside this period for a variety of reasons.
- Excluding BBC strike days the two daily papers had 44 front-page leads; the BBC did not carry 24 of them. In 22 relevant Evening Telegraph days 16 front page stories were not covered by the BBC. Of the six also covered by the BBC two reflected bad weather and three were clearly diary or agenda items. The subject of the Northampton Chronicle & Echo front-page lead was also aired on the BBC on 14 occasions. Seven of those would have been on all newsrooms diaries, or in agendas, and a further five were from some form of press release. Only one was clearly a newspaper exclusive and that received a single airing on one TV late bulletin only.
- During the pure counting exercise it appeared that out of the stories covered by the BBC no more than around 30 stories might, or were likely, to have been sourced by reading the papers or checking on their websites. After detailed discussions with both radio and newspaper news teams that figure is now 11 stories including 5 hard news stories.
- The BBC covered more regional stories and used the BBC's overall resources to generate material e.g. A Faith map of the UK and coverage originating in Parliament, which tended to get more emphasis on the BBC.
- The newspapers are clear that despite the financial pressures on the industry they have maintained front line reporting in a way others may not have. Their coverage of the county's courts remains particularly strong and they remain the place many people go to tell their story.
- Four significant stories in this period went national – A poppy seller attacked on the street was on radio first and then probably via the Press Association went national; a poetic judge and an attack on Ian Huntley were ignored by the local and regional BBC, the murder of a teenager received widespread attention across all media.
- Connect FM remains a significant presence in its area (North Northants) but Dunstable based Heart regularly carries no Northants stories.
- A significant change is that both the radio and newspaper newsrooms are increasingly using social media to source stories. round 6 stories a week are already originating from this source according to newspaper estimates. That number is clearly growing rapidly with more users and more expertise in harvesting that information which is potentially available to all outlets simultaneously.