



Local Democracy Reporting Service: Principles of Operation

What is the LDRS? The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency: funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. It's like a franchise: different companies with different approaches, but using common editorial standards and all publishing into the same system.



The brief

- The core purpose of the LDRS is to provide impartial coverage of the regular business and workings of local authorities in the UK, and other relevant democratic institutions such as mayoralities, combined authority areas, P&CCs, quangos, etc.
- The Local Democracy Reporters' (LDRs) brief is to report on the decision-making process: what decisions are made in the public's name and how they are arrived at, what evidence is presented to the council, etc.
- In two-tier council areas the LDRs should cover district council affairs sufficiently to ensure that significant decisions (eg planning) are reported.
- 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 their work must be available to all qualifying partners.
- National politics is out of scope.

Who's in charge? LDRs report to the contract holder, not to the BBC or any other partner. LDRs work to their own brief covering the stories of greatest public interest and they should not undertake commissions for any partner. Direct questions and clarifications relating to content are acceptable, but any suggestions or comments relating to the service should go through a LDR's manager.

Is the BBC the same as every other partner? The only difference between the BBC and others is that it has a right to request interviews or 2-ways for BBC Local Radio. Depending on workload and commitments it is up to each LDR to decide whether or not to agree.

Is there a LDRS Style Guide? No. While meeting the highest standards of accuracy and impartiality, written content may conform to an employer's normal style. BBC training will help create a common standard for media content production.



The key principles of operation:

- All content must be created for all qualifying partners.
- Content should be published as soon as possible after a meeting or event.
- All content must be published using the LDRS Authoring Tool so all partners see it simultaneously.
- All content must be titled COUNCIL NAME: Story Name.
- It must be tagged with at least one top-tier local authority, but can have as many tags as are relevant.
- Images and media must have a descriptive label.
- Images and media must be rights-free (LDRs should not use their employer's picture library).
- LDRs should, where possible, assign a "Feature Image" to a story.
- LDRs must provide an Advisory note in the publishing system before the end of every week indicating their diary for the next seven days (or longer).

Best practice

- LDRs should source their content. An explanatory *Note to Editors* at the end of a story regarding the source will reduce queries from partners, especially around whether qualified privilege applies to all or part of a story.
- LDRs should not file a story based on a press release already in the public domain unless it has been significantly developed with new quotes or information.
- Embargoed content must explain why publication should be delayed.

Social media

- Posts should be via LDRs' personal accounts rather than contractors' branded accounts.
- LDRs are encouraged to post an Advisory in the LDRS Authoring Tool to let partners know if they intend live-Tweeting from a meeting, for example.
- Tagging #LDRreporter will help the partnership collate relevant tweets.

Credit

- LDRs should be credited as "First Name, Last Name, Local Democracy Reporter".
- By-lines or references within copy are acceptable.
- Broadcasters should acknowledge LDRs when they appear on air or when the format allows.
- Shared credit with other reporters is acceptable if LDRs' content is copied, edited or incorporated into new pieces of work.
- The LDRS logo can also be used in print, online or on TV, but is not compulsory.
- LDRs should refer to themselves as "Local Democracy Reporters", **not** "BBC Local Democracy Reporters" in all forms of communication, including social media profiles.