



The Bristol Cable



Location
Bristol



Founded
2014



Legal structure
Community Benefit Society



Description of services
The Bristol Cable is an online and in-print newspaper

Overview of the business

The Bristol Cable describes itself as: *'... redefining local journalism through challenging multimedia, community action and cooperative ownership. Online, in print and on the street.'*

Its main activities are producing a quarterly printed magazine, running a website with investigative and community-led journalism, facilitating democratic engagement with its members, and running free media training events to build media skills in the local communities.

The value-base of the business is about empowering and informing local people: *'We're a magazine – that's our flagship product. It's about community-owned media to inform and empower people in Bristol.'*

To this end, ownership is an important part of the organisation: people can become a member of the Bristol Cable for as little as £1 a month. Members have a say on how The Cable -op is run through online

consultations, at monthly member meetings, and at the AGM. Members and the general public can pitch ideas for content through our website or face-to-face at our media events, and member forums.

Why is community accountability important?

Local ownership and leadership is at the heart of The Bristol Cable – it is the primary way in which they remain accountable and fulfil their mission of empowering local people by using journalism as a way to hold others to account.

'It's locally run and aims to empower local people to understand what's going on... and to hold power to account.'

'We demand transparent accountability from others, so we should live up to demands of others in this respect.'



The business is underpinned by a team of paid co-ordinators, freelance contributors, and voluntary support from networks of people in the city with key skills in areas such as media, law and accounting. *'We're not in it for the business, but we understand that we need to run an organisation that can pay for itself and all the people who contribute their skills and time – this is both a political and practical objective.'*

What does accountability look like locally?

Here we use three categories to provide a snapshot of some of the mechanisms and methods that the business uses in community accountability. These categories are not hard and fast; there is some overlap between the areas outlined.

Structures

- A team of eight co-ordinators work on the day-to-day running of The Cable, from media to membership engagement, website development and events. This co-ordinator team has been mandated by the wider membership to implement the strategy of the organisation.
- Members – some may be very active, some fairly inactive. Some want to be directly involved; others want to support the initiative. *'People joined for different reasons – all want independent press but may have different aims.'*
- Members can attend regular meetings: *'At the monthly member meetings – members get an update on what has happened since the last meeting and any action taken – and get insight into how we do journalism – and ask questions.'*

- Community meetings – *'There are monthly meetings – students come, an elderly man (who became involved through local history), local residents who read the paper – we move the meetings round different areas of town... it's not specifically activists who come... we try to have a diverse content – although it could be more diverse.'*
- Residents are involved in deciding and creating content
- Democratic decision-making – *'We're also democratic – there is the AGM', although this process is helped by paid staff: 'There's a co-ordinating group – probably that's the most powerful body – we meet every two weeks.'* The workers organise and distribute the work between them.

Relationships

Wide range of relationships held, including: members of the Bristol Cable; those involved as workers and directors in the CBS; and the wider group of people who helped with stories, production or distribution of the magazine. It also sees local communities in Bristol, and further afield, as people it relates to. There were also 'professional' communities including journalists and those engaged in investigative work, or those who supported investigative work.

Getting out and about in the community to build local relationships and networks has been crucial – *'Physical engagement is very important! We wouldn't have gained the 1800 members without personal engagement, meetings, AGM and so on...'*

Communications

- Strong online presence is important – goes hand in hand with their face-to-face engagement. They are active on social media and host the online news portal.
- The Bristol Cable is a printed broadsheet newspaper distributed locally to individuals and businesses in Bristol.
- Loomio – an online consultation and organisation tool.