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Also highly commended was Leigh Boobyer, of Gloucestershire Live, for a series of stories that included the discovery of sensitive information left exposed in an open skip by



Watch the awards ceremony in full

The awards were announced online on June 19 due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

In a message to those viewing, BBC Director General Tony Hall said: "I have championed the Local News Partnerships scheme and the Local Democracy Reporting Service from the very beginning because I profoundly believe in local journalism.

"And over the past two-and-a-half years you have proved time and time again why the stories you are finding matter so much."

Referencing the role of LDRS in the reporting of the Covid-19 pandemic, Lord Hall added: "If there was ever a time to re-emphasise the value of the work you do, it is now; when the country continues to grapple with the biggest crisis of our lifetimes.

"Over the past three months, you have written and delivered more than 8,000 stories related to the Covid crisis; stories that have helped us keep informed about what is happening where we live, in our towns and in our communities.

"So, from me, from everyone at the BBC and all our partners, a huge thank you for your commitment and dedication these last few months.

"And thank you for your continued and vital coverage of the day-to-day workings of councils and other public bodies."

The full list of category winners was as follows:

- **Best Use of Freedom of Information**

Winner: Rachael Burford, London Evening Standard
Schoolgirls feared FGM after being sent abroad to be 'de-westernised'

Category judge Paul Bradshaw, author, data journalist and Birmingham City University lecturer: "This is an excellent piece of reporting that not only sees an opportunity to use FOI but draws on the reporter's previous knowledge, creative deduction and understanding of news angles to deliver a story with impact beyond the local areas."

Highly-Commended: Chris McKeon, Liverpool Echo
Tapas restaurant given £100,000 of public money was taken to court over unpaid taxes

- **Best Broadcast or Use of Multimedia**

Winner: Joe Burn, Stoke-on-Trent Live
Pedestrians run the gauntlet of being hit by vehicles on Stoke-on-Trent's quickest pelican crossing

Category judge Chris Van Schaick, BBC trainer: "This film was enterprising, entertaining and brought to life a matter of local concern. Joe showed a praiseworthy set of film-making skills and a have-a-go attitude."

Highly-Commended: Maria Zaccaro, Southampton Daily Echo
Council wastes thousands on mobile phones not being used

- **Best Use of Social Media**

Winner: Jessie Mathewson, Newsquest North London

Category judge Miriam Phillips, Journalism Academic and NCTJ Lead at Bournemouth University: "Jessie demonstrates what an important role social media has in breaking local democracy stories. I was particularly impressed by her Twitter strategy and use of hash tags and tagging."

Highly-Commended: Lucy Ashton, Sheffield Star

- **2020 Special News Award:** Acknowledging coverage of the Covid-19 crisis

Winner: Leigh Boobyer, Gloucestershire Live
Leaked map shows postcode next to Cheltenham Racecourse had highest number of coronavirus hospital admissions on April 3

Category judge Joanna Carr, BBC Head of Current Affairs: "This story stood out from the start - based on a genuinely fresh insight, this is meticulously explained and written. The story sheds light on both a matter of supreme local importance but also played, and will continue to play, into a national debate."

Highly-Commended: Richard Whitehouse, Cornwall Live
Holiday home owners have claimed £50 million in lockdown business grants

- **Story of the Year**

Winner: Tanya Fowles, Impartial Reporter
Lessons have been learned, says health trust after 86 women are recalled over smear test results

Category judge Tim Burke, Political Editor, BBC England: "This is a triumph of investigation over intimidation - a refusal to be cowed by the intransigence of the Trust and a confidence to publish the story without them if necessary...it shows some bravery. And the story exposed serious failings."

Highly-Commended: Leigh Boobyer, Gloucestershire Live
BBC Points West lead on Cheltenham Festival exclusive

- **Local Democracy Reporter of the Year**

Winner: Gurdip Thandi, Birmingham Live
- 'Throw them at dangerous criminals instead' - the hundreds of Taser guns bought that don't work

Category judge Declan Wilson: "Gurdip is able to adapt to a broad range of deployments and delivers journalism with real impact."

Category judge Will Gore: "Gurdip has an excellent nose for a good story, and a sensitivity for tackling difficult issues."

Highly-Commended: Sarah Hilley, Ayrshire Post
- Mum says she was sexually abused for years by teacher in Ayrshire

Declan Wilson: "Sarah tells really strong stories that should be told. One to watch."

Highly-Commended: Leigh Boobyer, Gloucestershire Live
- Council dumps bank details in skip outside Gloucester offices

Will Gore: "Consistently breaks big stories which would interest wider audiences."

The awards were due to be held alongside the annual LDRS Conference at BBC Media City, Salford.

Postponed due to Government guidance on social distancing, the conference is now planned for a rearranged date in November.

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