

THE BBC BY NUMBERS

Election fears expected to hit Johnston press

BY CHARLOTTE HENRY

REGIONAL newspaper publisher Johnston Press yesterday put out a trading update, in which it forecast a decline in revenues for the first half of 2015.

The firm said it expects total revenue to have fallen by around five per cent. It has been hit by a drop in advertising revenue, which it also expects to fall by five per cent.

The picture is more positive in digital media, with average monthly unique visitors to Johnston's websites increasing by over 20 per cent. It expects to report 17 per cent growth in digital revenue.

Ashley Highfield, chief executive, said: "Trading conditions in the first half of 2015 have undoubtedly been challenging, especially in the period around the General Election."

Embattled BBC tries to bite back

BY CHARLOTTE HENRY

THE BBC yesterday tried to fight back, having been forced to accept a tough settlement by the government, during the release of its annual report and accounts that explain how it spends licence fee payers' money.

Director general Tony Hall revealed clashes with the new Tory government during recent negotiation's over the state-backed broadcaster's future: "There were two moments when I said the deal was unacceptable," he said.

However, he said that the fraught exchanges had not prompted him to consider his position: "Resign? No, for the simple reason I believe in fighting for the BBC and I believe in the BBC," he explained.

The BBC will have to pay for all free licence fees provided to those aged over 75 years old by 2020. However it did manage to change licence fee rules so that those who use the iPlayer as an on-demand service will have to pay for it, which is not currently the case.

Hall was particularly bullish about

his corporation's output, despite a decline in the time people spend using its services. "I think BBC One is in seriously good shape" he said, "radio is in stunning shape."

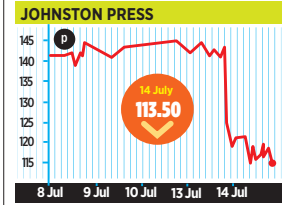
The BBC is hugely concerned that the government will decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee. Non-payment is currently an offence punishable by imprisonment. It insists the move would cost it hundreds of thousands of pounds a year.

"We've had assurances from both the chancellor and the secretary of state

that if they were to impose decriminalisation that will be taken into account in some arrangement to do with the money coming back in it," Hall said.

The BBC also released a report by the Good Corporation into its child protection and whistleblowing procedures, in the wake of the Jimmy Saville scandal.

Managing director of finance and operations Anne Bulford said: "We must make sure that what happened historically at the BBC must never happen again."



STAND TALL

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