

## Community Radio: update on our stated priorities

An update on recent work and our priorities for community radio licensing

This document is also available in [Welsh](#)

### Coverage improvements and extensions

During 2018, we invited community radio stations to submit requests for an [improvement or extension](#) to their licensed coverage area. We received 127 in total and the work is nearing completion (most licensees that applied have already heard back from us regarding their request; those who have not can expect to hear from us shortly).

### Coverage improvements

So far, we have agreed to 63 improvements to coverage at community radio stations. Typically, this is achieved by allowing a power increase from the current site. In each case the aim is to help make reception more robust for listeners whose current listening is affected by interference, while also filling in some reception 'holes' in a service's coverage.

### Coverage extensions

We have also agreed to 33 requests from stations to extend their coverage. Community radio law says Ofcom can authorise an extension to a licensed area into an adjoining area or locality only if it would not result in a significant increase in the licensed area, or if Ofcom considers that the increase in the licensed area is justifiable in the exceptional circumstances of the case (these statutory criteria do not apply to coverage improvements). Extensions usually add a neighbouring town or surrounding villages to the licensed coverage area. Each month we publish the reasons for agreeing to requests, and they are published in our monthly [radio broadcasting updates](#).

### Benefits for listeners

Once the agreed changes are implemented a great many more local people will be able to enjoy community radio, hear local news and information, engage in local discussion, and even take part in making programmes and running the station if they wish.

Community stations are locally-run and focussed on serving their target community with an entertaining and informative service. Stations have told us about the benefits they want to bring to more people in their area:

- Stations want to seek out more volunteers over a wider area. Volunteers are the lifeblood of community radio, and benefit from training, being part of a team and doing work that makes a difference to people in their town.
- In many places (and especially rural areas) stations told us about how their service helps combat loneliness and isolation.
- A number of stations told us about their work with local partners, often working with particular groups such as children or the elderly. Stations want to get the message out about such projects over a wider area to benefit more people.

- Many stations broadcast from local events. This helps promote these events while giving people a chance to meet and talk to station personnel about what they do.

### Requests turned down

So far 27 requests have been turned down. There are a variety of reasons for not agreeing to a request. These include, for example:

- technical issues, such as an unacceptable level of increased interference to other services; or alternatively high levels of incoming interference;
- local terrain blocking the signal so that the desired coverage change could not be achieved;
- the requested extension did not satisfy us with regard to the statutory criteria, referenced above, such as:
  - the area applied for was not adjoining the current licensed area;
  - the increase in the population served, or the size of the area applied for would be significant and Ofcom considered that there were not exceptional circumstances to justify such an extension.

### Further requests for extensions and improvements

Community radio licensees may apply for technical changes, including a coverage improvement or extension to their licensed coverage area, at any time, in the same way that commercial radio licensees have always been able to. However, such requests are not usually treated as a priority and will join a 'queue' of requests to be dealt with when we have sufficient time and resource available. (Please see [information and community radio technical change request form](#) on our website.)

### Licensing new community radio services

We are now moving on to processing the [applications we received](#) earlier in the year for new community radio licences. This will be the last round of community radio licensing on analogue (FM or AM) for the foreseeable future as we turn our attention towards the implementation of the licensing framework for small-scale DAB.

### Small-scale DAB licensing

Small-scale DAB is a new way of transmitting digital radio that uses advances in software and low-cost computer technology to provide a flexible and inexpensive approach to the terrestrial broadcast of digital radio services to a relatively small geographic area.

Our [consultation on licensing small-scale DAB services](#) closes on 4 October 2019. After the closing date we will consider the responses and in due course, issue a statement. We anticipate inviting applications in 2020.

We are pleased to have received a high level of interest for these new licences (small scale multiplex licences and community digital sound programme service licences) in the form of expressions of interest from groups interested in applying. These small multiplexes will be of particular benefit to small commercial radio stations and community radio services, as well as people living in the areas covered. We plan to offer these licences across the UK.

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