

Starmela Response Community Radio Consultation:

Question 1:

We believe that, beyond licensing of new services, Ofcom should play little role in either providing effective training or raising awareness of community radio. We believe that this should be the role of the licensee. For example, the Starmela group has a history of 15 years where through numerous RSL's we have worked hard to provide effective training and raise awareness of community radio. We have worked in partnership with many local groups including Alcoholics Anonymous, Metropolitan Police, Crimestoppers and domestic violence units from several local councils. We believe that Ofcom should be supportive towards licensees, and that its role should be acting as an information centre rather than being directly involved in such areas.

Where Ofcom should be directly involved is ensuring that community radio is being used for the correct purpose, namely benefiting the local community. We would hope that people do not abuse the system of licensing community radio, and there should be strict mechanisms in place to ensure this does not occur. We do not believe that Ofcom should have a completely hands-off approach once the licensing process had completed.

Question 2:

Whilst we welcome the announcements made regarding spectrum allocation, our view is that spectrum allocation for community radio stations on FM in urban locations is restrictive. We do not understand how, if a community radio licence in an urban area is restricted to a 5km radius, Ofcom can say that there will be only be enough spectrum for one or two services in major cities/conurbations. The existence of large numbers of pirate radio stations on FM in major cities across the UK indicates that spare spectrum exists. We believe that, rather than having a strict ruling as proposed by Ofcom, flexibility should be shown and that each licence and local area should be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

We also agree that community radio spectrum allocation should take priority over improvements to the coverage of existing FM commercial radio stations. It is unjust and dishonest for commercial operators to demand for coverage improvements once a licence is awarded. Such issues should ideally be dealt with during the licence application process and not once spectrum has been allocated.

Question 3:

We agree with the licensing process proposed by Ofcom.

Question 4:

We do not agree that Ofcom should invite submissions from commercial operators. This appears to be a mechanism allowing commercial operators to maintain their monopoly on radio services, and appears to be disruptive to the progress of community radio.

It is difficult to see how a not-for-profit community radio service will be directly competing with commercial services whose aims are to make as much money as possible.

Is it likely that in future community radio services will ever be asked by Ofcom to comment on commercial radio licensing and how it may affect the listenership of community radio?

We do not believe it is Ofcom's role to maintain inefficient radio services, whether commercial or community, and we believe the result of this proposal will be to allow inefficient radio services to continue.

Question 5:

We believe that this should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Given that different communities and areas have differing economic profiles, it would be unhelpful to have one prescribed limit.

Question 6:

We are very pleased to hear Ofcom's new proposals for the submission of applications. Our view is that previous procedures were onerous and weighted towards large commercial groups who had large budgets allocated for licence applications.

Question 7:

We are content with the proposals.

Question 8:

Aside from the Government's selection criteria, we believe the main criteria to be used to decide between applications should be prior experience, in working with local radio and the local community. Such experience would be beneficial to ensure that community radio will benefit the local community, is used in an appropriate context and ensure the success of community radio ventures. We firmly believe that community radio services should be

professional in their outlook and services, and that this would be best appreciated by the local communities in question.

Regarding the two suggestions stated in the consultation document, the first suggestion, where the Index of Multiple Deprivation is used, would be extremely useful as a selection criteria. All of our RSL's have been based in Newham, a London borough that scores very highly on several deprivation criteria and surveys. Newham also consists of a large, diverse ethnic population that would benefit greatly from community radio.

The second suggestion, where neighbourhood services are focused on, ignores the reality of community life in metropolitan areas. However such a focus may be appropriate for rural areas that have a homogenised population.

Question 9:

We are content with the proposals.

Question 10:

We believe that producing an annual report may be onerous for small, community based operations and adds to the burden of administration. Currently commercial radio operators have no requirement to produce such reports, even though they are in a position to be able to allocate resources to such tasks.

We feel this proposal to be excessive when regulating community radio.

Our suggestion as a possible alternative could be for Ofcom to hold telephone interviews with key management of Community Radio licencees. They could also obtain further feedback from local councils, as local councils would be promoting community services through community radio.

Question 11:

We suggest that local impact of community radio services could be achieved by speaking to local community leaders. Starmela has worked with a substantial number of local community groups, examples of some of these include:

Age Concern

Asian Women's Association

Bangladesh Education Initiative in Waltham Forest

Barnardos

Crime Stoppers Scotland Yard

East Ham Dashmesh Darwar Gurudwara

Gujarat Welfare Association

East Ham Immamia Mosque

Maha Lakshmi Temple London

London Lighthouse

Mauritian Association

Malayalee Association of UK Trust

Newham Asian Arts & Cultural Society

Metropolitan Police, New Scotland Yard

Tamil Welfare Association

Newham Child Health Care

Toynbee Hall

Tower Hamlets Education & Community Services