



# SWALE COMMUNITY RADIO SERVICE SWALE RADIO

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16th April 2004

Soo Williams  
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Radio Planning and Licensing Team Of com  
Riverside House,  
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Dear Soo,

**Reference: - LICENSING COMMUNITY RADIO**

Please find the enclosed submission of Swale Radio for inclusion in the discussions on  
The proposed arrangements for the future of community radio in the UK.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Bibby  
Project Direct  
Swale Community Radio Service (Swale Radio)  
Serving the Community of Swale 24 a day

## LICENSING COMMUNITY RADIO

### **Question 1:**

*What role should Ofcom have in respect of community radio, beyond the licensing?*

**Answer 1:** Section (6) paragraph 25 states a number of ways in which, Ofcom might become over involved with the day-to-day development of a Direct Access community radio service in the UK. This is not the job directly of the Regulator neither should the development of this new and exiting community service be left to an uncoordinated and at times ill informed groups.

Ofcom should maintain its role as the Regulator and distance its elf from the day-to-day monitoring function by the setting up of an "on-line" standards committee. This could take many forms (a) a select committee that would study any new suggestions for standards improvement in community radio and maybe TV.

It may (b) become an open "on-line" forum so that all those involved in their local community service can take advantage of the wider pool of community knowledge.

Ofcom in its regulatory role would be in a position to monitor the activities of this "on-line" interaction and if required could act as the final arbiter in any dispute of the standing regulations.

### **Question 2:**

*Do you agree with our proposals policy for the allocation of radio spectrum and size of coverage areas for community radio services?*

### **Answer 2:**

On the matter of spectrum allocation for the continuation of the RSL service and the intention (Section 7 paragraph 27) not to review the current Radio Authority policy, consideration of the following experience should be developed.

Swale Radio would like to see a development of the RSL service in such a way that would enable a far wide cross section of any community use the RSL service to promote its particular activity.

Community radio services in selected areas could be licensed by Ofcom to provide a cost effective alternative to the current system.

Swale Radio would be, due to its local geography, a perfect candidate

to pilot this 21<sup>st</sup> Century development of the RSL service.

Spectrum planning could be both maintained and simplified by maintaining a low power service to be used in a tightly defined geographical location. This service could be accommodated on the AM frequencies by providing a stepping-stone from the RSL experience through into community radio and beyond. By being able to operate both on AM and FM in a given location both local and higher educational establishments would be able to note at first hand the effects that weather and location (proximity to continental mainland stations) have on terrestrial transmission systems.

Kent is oversupplied with FM Commercial Radio in the form of the KM network, Invicta FM and BBC Radio Kent. The consideration by Ofcom for any future development of commercial radio in the Kent/Swale area must take into consideration the socio/economic limitations that exist. In the past Medway FM and Mercury FM failed due to financial problems even though their listener base was many times that of Swale.

The proposals for community radio radius of coverage and transmitter power and the consideration that one size will not fit all is acceptable as a starting point.

**Question 3:**

*Do you agree that community radio should be an applicant lead process with an annual 12-week period when applications can be submitted for any neighbourhood or community in the UK?*

**Answer 3:**

The proposals as outlined and in the light of the Community Radio Order becoming law seem, at this stage, to be a reasonable response to the matter. Section 8 (paragraph 41) would provide sufficient time for those who have developed their plans over the intervening years.

**Question 4:**

Do you agree with Ofcom's proposals to invite submissions from commercial radio operators if they consider that their economic viability might be affected by the provision of a community radio service, based on the application proposals?

**Answer 4:**

This proposal should take into account the proposed service area of the

intended community radio service before inviting any commercial service to influence the decision of Ofcom. In the case of Swale Radio, no such conflict exists, in that KM-FM is based in Rochester with their transmission footprint or licensed catchment area terminating at the boundary of Rainham and the proposed Swale Radio transmission boundary. It is hoped that this proposal will not be allowed to hinder the development of

Direct Access community radio. The community radio service is no threat to any commercial media organisation; in fact, the proposed service could work side-by-side to the mutual benefit of all concerned. If the proposal is allowed to get out of hand a situation could develop as happened in the early days of the development of the motor car, then a man had to walk in front of the car slowing both its progress in real time and its future development.

#### Question 5:

*Should there be a general of 50% of annual income that community radio stations are permitted to obtain from the sale of advertising and sponsorship, or should this be decided on a case by case basis?*

#### Answer 5:

The recommendation of Professor Everitt, that a diversity of funding for a community radio service should be encouraged is one that we at Swale Radio support. To any organisation that has set up an RSL in its particular patch will be fully conversant with the need to seek funding from as many pots that it can find. The use of advertising and sponsorship revenue is a two way street in that the advertiser/ sponsor has use of a local service but in return the community radio service develops important long term support for its future development. The figure of 50% must be flexible and therefore a case-by-case approach must be built into the final decision

**Licence term and ownership limits.** The content of paragraphs (55) & (56) seem to be out of context in relationship to community radio, in that those involved with a community are only interested in that one community. If a community has set up a "true" community radio and maybe a television service then it will, by its nature, continue in perpetuity. Therefore, to adopt the practice used for the licensing of commercial radio services is out of place when launching a very local and community supported terrestrial service.

Once again, with regard to groups and ownership we see the hand of commercial interest in the drafting of this particular paragraph. A

community radio/TV service is for the community that has set it up and that it serves. Swale Radio is only interested in the service that it can develop for the community of Swale, its 3 main towns and the 30 or so villages and hamlets that would be its service area.

Why would a community radio service be interested in holding 5 licenses at anyone time, this is an area of great concern and we hope that Ofcom will monitor very closely those who purport to be setting up a community service but latter succeed in converting them to a commercial service by the back door!

**Question 6:**

*Are you content with Ofcom's proposals for the submission of applications?*

**Answer 6:**

If the proposed written or electronic form is sufficient in size to allow a comprehensive application to be made then we see no problem with the proposals. We would like it to be noted that the limits placed on the "pilot scheme" application would make a sensible appraisal of any application very difficult for all involved.

**Question 7:**

*Are you content with Ofcom's proposals for the order in which it will consider application in the first year?*

**Answer 7:**

Has consideration been given to advising unsuccessful applicants of the reason taken by the Radio Planning & Licensing team. In essence, we see no direct or conflicting problems with the procedure as outlined.

**Question 8:**

*Aside from the Government's selection criteria, what other criteria should Ofcom use when deciding between applications?*

**Answer 8:**

In assessing an application, consideration should be given to past community involvement of the proposed service and the planned future development of that involvement. Education and training is a very important aspect of a community radio service but as we see from the Everitt report on the recent pilot project, how many people have really gained from their few hours in the studio. Swale Radio has always

insisted that any community radio or television service that intends to offer education and training as part of its application must demonstrate true long-term lasting gain in this area. We feel that in Swale we can meet the needs as outlined in the final clause of paragraph 67.

**Re-advertising of license.** The proposal of re-advertising the licences after five years is one that must be considered on a case-by-case basis. The particular service under consideration my, in the intervening 5 years, developed a service that it could not have foreseen at its inception and therefore to arbitrarily abort such a service would be a considerable waste by all concerned.

**Question 9:**

*Are you content with the proposal for listing a station's key commitments in its licence?*

**Answer 9:**

It is imperative that the full extent of the proposed community service is made available to all interested parties. If certain aspects of a particular application are considered to be of a "commercially sensitive nature" the applicant service must be given the right "without prejudice" to ask for that information to with held from publication.

**Question 10:**

*Are you content with Ofcom's proposal that each station should produce an annual report?*

**Answer 10:**

The annual report would provide Ofcom with information on the development of the new service. This could be a doubled edged sword, in that, unless a format is worked out for the annual report Ofcom will be inundated with all manner of formats. We see no reason why the annual report could not be an online report with section in the form of a question and answer with a progress report briefly listing achievements and future goals.

**Question 11:**

*Do you have suggestions on how we might research the impact of community radio services on target communities or on other or on other methods of seeking feedback from communities?*

**Answer 11:** Swale Radio has developed a plan to collect meaningful statistics on

the penetration of service offered as well as monitoring listener satisfaction. The demographic makeup of the Swale service area between the ages of 5 to 95 is approximately 150,000. Through the close cooperation with the local education service, the intended is to set up a statistics gathering service across the transmission area. Each school from primary through to local community colleges will, on a monthly basis, interview both the staff and students to quantify what penetration Swale Radio has accomplished. The development of a module in conjunction with local maths departments to carry out regular surveys in the wider population will be undertaken. The intended is to involve one of the national polling organisations like Mori to help develop the questionnaire so involving the community at all levels.

It would be useful if Ofcom could facilitate this type of not-for-profit commercial involvement with community radio services. Swale Radio intends to develop many links with commerce and industry so that true social integration will be implemented. A community radio service is but one small but vital step in gaining the confidence of disaffected youth and can help in returning them to education through involvement of a radio service.

**Content regulation.** The need to keep recordings of transmissions is acceptable but the period of 6 weeks as proposed is not long enough. In view of the fact that any service could be "on-air" 24-7-365 it recommended that, tapes of all transmissions will be kept for a minimum of 6 months. These recordings cannot be recoded over without permission from Ofcom in writing.

**Community media fund.** Funding should not be a hand out from either Government or any other funding body even by Ofcom. Start-up funding should be in the form of an "interest free" loan administered through a bank local to the radio service or the Business link organisation. Central funding handouts will not aid the development of a cohesive and sustainable community radio and television service. By its nature community radio must be funded through the combined effort of the community it is intended to serve, therefore the subject of funding must come from the community in its widest form. Some may say that central funding will be an extension of the welfare state with all the attendant problems that will generate for all concerned.

It should be remembered that all the RSLs that have been put on air have happened through the efforts of interested groups. These groups will form the backbone of any community service in the initial stages

so fund raising is not new to these people.