

Cornwall independent local radio licence applications

Questions and responses: Sou West FM

These are the responses received from Sou West FM to the non-confidential questions asked by Ofcom regarding the group's application for the Cornwall licence.

1. It is stated in the application that "listeners to Radio Cornwall form a key target group for SouWest FM" (p.43). What evidence do you have that such listeners would be willing to listen to the proposed SouWest FM service as well as, or instead of, the local BBC station?

As part of the quantitative survey conducted by *mruk*, participants were asked the following question about a new local radio station soon to be broadcasting:

"If it is entertaining and professional, plays a wide range of your kind of music, and has plenty of local news and information, how likely are you to listen to it?"

We found that 96% of those who currently listen to BBC Radio Cornwall like SouWest FM's planned musical styles/eras. Within this large group, 90.2% answered 'yes' to the question above. This divides into 49.6% who say they are 'likely' to listen and a further 40.6% who are 'very likely' to listen. Our estimates of the numbers of BBC Radio Cornwall listeners who would listen to SouWest FM are based on the responses of these particular groups.

Detailed tables are provided in confidential appendix 2.

2. What evidence do you have of a demand for the three editorial themes – encouragement of active citizenship, issues related to rural life and low incomes, and the needs of older listeners – proposed in the SouWest FM Format?

The theme of active citizenship is specifically addressed in Q4b of our quantitative research¹. 72% of respondents, and 76% of those aged 45-64, feel it's 'important that local radio stations help listeners feel part of decisions made by politicians, businesses and public bodies that affect their lives'². Ofcom's own research by The Knowledge Agency in the region also found that 78% of respondents felt 'involvement with the local community' was 'important' or 'very important' 'in terms of making a local radio station appealing'³.

¹ Licence application, appendix 3.5

² Licence application, appendix 3.7 page 60

³ Devon and Cornwall Radio Licence Research, Final Report to Ofcom, April 2004. Table circa p 16

Rural living, low incomes and an ageing population are the big headlines of Cornwall's demography. A responsible broadcaster must give due weight to them when responding to the overwhelming demand for local news on local radio (rated 'important' or 'very important' by 87% overall and 91% of those aged 45-64)⁴. The national MORI survey within Ofcom's recent paper 'Radio – Preparing for the Future' also found that 81% feel coverage of 'community issues' is important for local radio, ranking it behind only local news, traffic and travel and weather⁵ – but their satisfaction with existing local radio in relation to community issues is significantly lower than for the other top topics⁶. Our Format promises a new focus on precisely those issues that help define Cornwall's special community.

A large number of the local people and groups we consulted have expressed a demand for material connected to the themes. By way of example, Lord George has written to us saying: "I genuinely support your outline prospectus generally, but I am particularly keen on 'actively involving the local community'". Blair Thomson of CSV Media South West wrote asking us to address "the impact of the ageing population on the local economy – for both good and ill... the issue of affordable housing [and] the management of change from a mining fishing and agrarian economy", saying "these are all matters that are not being seriously addressed in the existing media to the extent that they need to be".

But the Three Themes idea is not only intended to address the requirements of Section 105(d). We also noted from the licence advertisement the duties imposed on Ofcom by Section 3 (4) of the 2003 Act. While some of these duties can be discharged by Ofcom alone, others will need the active participation of relevant licensees. SouWest FM has highlighted those areas where our editorial content can help most, and offered a formal and binding commitment to give that help.

3. It is stated on p.28 of the application that the proposed 'SouWest on Stage' speech feature was "supported by 76%, and 80% of our core target". What is the source of this statistic?

'SouWest On Stage' is the name we give to our local entertainment reports, focusing exclusively on performance (including amateur shows) within the Duchy. Our quantitative research project asked respondents to rate the importance of 'Local what's on and entertainment news'. 76.3% of all respondents, and 79.7% of those aged 45-64, rated it either 'Important' or 'Very Important'⁷.

Support for the broader 'Arts and entertainment reports' category (which may include non-local material) was also fairly high, with backing from 46% overall

⁴ Licence application, Appendix 3.7, page 14

⁵ Radio – Preparing for the future, page 68

⁶ Radio – Preparing for the future, page 72, figure 40

⁷ Licence application, Appendix 3.7, page 15

and the strongest support, at 52%, from those aged 45-64⁸. We will also address this interest, but have not accorded it the same space in the schedule reserved for local content.

⁸ Licence application, Appendix 3.7, page 29