

Ipswich local commercial radio licence applications

Questions and responses: Orwell FM

These are the responses received from Orwell FM to the non-confidential questions asked by Ofcom regarding their application for the Ipswich local radio licence.

1. How, for the purposes of the Format, are you defining “low repetition”?

When we specify "low repetition" of music tracks, we intend this to be defined in relation to the existing ILR stations available in the Ipswich area. Vibe provides a "hot" format of contemporary dance-oriented music for a young audience; its format is based on the regular repetition of current and recent hits, as many as 6-7 times a day. SGR-FM, like other GWR (GCap) FM stations, is also heavily based on current and recent music repeated frequently, less often than on Vibe but still up to 6 times a day. Thus, our monitoring showed that the top 20 songs played by Vibe FM accounted for over 35% of the tracks played; similarly, the top 20 tracks accounted for 33% of SGR-FM's music output. "Gold" tracks are also repeated regularly from a limited selection programmed, even on Classic Gold Amber, where "oldies" regularly play twice in a day and are repeated several times during a week.

Our research found strong demand for a greater range and variety of music, with consequently lower repetition. As set out in our application (section 105(b), page 8), we plan to programme a wide selection from a library of over 3,500 songs, considerably broader than that of other stations in the area. This will naturally result in low repetition, with "catalogue" songs from the library generally repeating once a week, at most; many songs will air only monthly or more occasionally. Current and recent songs make up only a limited proportion of our music output and will thus also be able to rotate less frequently than on other stations, notably Vibe and SGR – generally no more than three times a day.

Our "low repetition" is therefore a significant qualitative difference, warmly endorsed by listeners. Expressing this in quantitative terms, we would say: "Music variety and low repetition are distinguishing features with current/recent titles played no more than 3 times a day and catalogue titles at most once a week".

2. In what respects (if any) will Orwell FM Ipswich's music policy be different to that of the company's Time FM stations, and in particular Time 107.5 in Romford (with which we note Orwell FM intends to share some output)?

In common with all LMC radio stations, music programming and scheduling at Orwell FM will be controlled locally. LMC does not believe in the 'standard database with centralised play-list' approach adopted by some other groups. Orwell FM will obviously benefit from the experience of its sister stations in catering for the musical tastes of their listeners, but it is fundamental to our philosophy that Orwell FM will shape its own musical identity in the light of local demand.

The music policy at Orwell FM will have some basic similarities with Time 107.5, but there are some distinctive differences –

- (a) Romford's Time 107.5 is aimed at a slightly younger audience, on average, than Orwell FM. Its Format specifically caters for 25-44 year olds, whereas

Orwell FM will be designed to appeal to the music tastes of a wider audience with a higher upper age-limit, i.e. 25-54 year olds.

- (b) The Romford area has a heritage of soul and dance music. This is reflected not only in the inclusion of specialised programming in its Format, but also in the general 'feel' of the station's output. However, in the Ipswich area we have discovered a particular liking for classic rock and guitar-orientated music, which will be reflected in the music mix and appeal to Orwell FM's slightly older core audience. There is also a significant rock heritage in the area – local people boast (and some websites concur!) that at one stage over 100 rock bands were based in Ipswich. In common with other LMC stations, we will respond to evidence of distinctive local tastes, with Orwell FM offering both specialised programming in its Format and also reflecting this in the main daytime music output.
- (c) We do not see that these differences will pose a problem when it comes to the overnight programming that will be shared between the two neighbouring stations. By combining ingredients from both stations' musical approaches, while avoiding an undue emphasis in the direction of either rock or soul music, the overnight music output will appeal to both sets of listeners, while at the same time offering an element of 'spice' to each individual station's output. The principal benefit of our proposals for overnight output is that it will bring live programming and continued local news and information to listeners in both of the neighbouring areas.