
Imagine Radio

Request to create a new approved area

STATEMENT

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1. Overview

Most local analogue commercial radio stations are required to produce a certain number of hours of locally-made programming. Under legislation passed in 2010, these stations are not only able to broadcast their locally-made hours from within their licence area, but may instead broadcast from studios that are based within a larger area approved by Ofcom. These wider areas are known as ‘approved areas’. Stations can also share their local hours of programming with other stations located in the same approved area.

Ofcom has approved an area for every local radio licence in the UK, to give stations more flexibility in their broadcasting arrangements. However, a licensee can ask Ofcom to approve a bespoke area, since the statutory framework allows for an approved area in relation to each local analogue service.

What we have decided

Following consultation, Ofcom has authorised a new approved area, ‘Stockport & Buxton (Imagine Radio)’, for the Buxton and Stockport licences, both of which broadcast as ‘Imagine Radio’ and are owned by Imagine FM Limited.

2. The approved area request

- 2.1 Imagine FM Limited ('Imagine') holds the local FM licence for Stockport, and is also the owner of High Peak Radio Limited, which holds the local FM licence for Buxton. In September 2020, we received a request from Imagine asking that Ofcom designate an approved area (which we have labelled as '**Stockport & Buxton (Imagine Radio)**'), as an approved area for the purposes of Section 314 of the Communications Act 2003, for the two licences. The Stockport licence is currently in the North West of England approved area, while the Buxton licence is currently in the Central approved area.
- 2.2 In its request, Imagine provided a number of reasons why it believed the proposed new 'Stockport & Buxton (Imagine Radio)' approved area would be appropriate in relation to the two licences concerned, based on considerations of distances between stations, local factors and financial viability.
- 2.3 Ofcom's preliminary view of Imagine's request, as set out in our [consultation](#), was that we were minded to approve the request. This was based on the following rationale:
- The proposed new area would be consistent with our view that approved areas should not generally be larger than ITV regions; in fact, it would be considerably smaller than any other approved area.
 - The proposed area matches the strategic and commercial interests of the licensee, given that it would encompass the licensed areas of the two licences it owns in this region, and should help it to put more resources into programme making and less into the "bricks and mortar" costs of maintaining separate local studios. This is particularly important given that the Buxton service has a licensed area with a population of fewer than 100,000 adults.
 - There are likely to be affinities between the Stockport area and the most northerly parts of the Buxton licensed area given their close geographical proximity and transport links (albeit we acknowledge that the licensed area of the Buxton service also includes Ashbourne, Wirksworth and Uttoxeter, all of which are considerably further away from Stockport and arguably look more towards Derby than Manchester and Stockport).

3. Assessment and decision

Consultation responses

- 3.1 In our consultation published on 30 October, we asked whether, for the purposes of where locally-made programming may come from, Ofcom should approve the new approved area requested by Imagine.
- 3.2 We received one anonymous response to the consultation, which was in favour of the change but did not provide any reasons for this view, beyond stating that the request should be approved if it was what the owner considered was best way forward for the business, and if the regulator (i.e. Ofcom) did not object to the proposals.

Analysis and conclusion

- 3.3 In the absence of any substantive consultation responses, we are not changing our preliminary view that we set out in the consultation, so we have agreed Imagine's request.
- 3.4 Now that the creation of the Stockport & Buxton (Imagine Radio) approved area has been approved, Imagine will be able to request – for the two stations it owns within in this area – a Format change to provide the locally-made programming on those stations from studios located anywhere within the new approved area.
- 3.5 In accordance with our published policy, we would also be likely to give consent to any request for the two stations to share their locally-made programmes, provided we are satisfied that each station will continue to meet its licence obligations to provide local material relevant to the listeners in its individual licence area. For the Buxton licence, this will include Ashbourne, Wirksworth and Uttoxeter as well as the northern parts of its licensed area including Buxton itself.