

Commercial radio licence award: Bristol

Statement

Summary

The fully re-advertised FM local commercial radio licence for Bristol has been awarded to Celador Radio Limited. Two applications were received:

- Celador Radio Limited ('The Breeze', the incumbent licensee)
- Bristol Sound Limited ('Bristol Sound')

The reasons for this licence award are set out in the statement below.

Bristol licence award decision

Ofcom¹ considered the two licence applications against the four statutory local commercial radio licence award criteria specified in section 105 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, which are set out in full in the second part of this statement.

In assessing the ability of the applicants to maintain their proposed services, the decision makers recognised that, since its launch as The Eagle in 1999, this Bristol licence (which covers significantly less population than the Bristol & Bath licence held by Heart, or the Bristol licence held by Sam FM) has struggled for audience and profitability under a variety of different owners and programme formats, both mainstream and more specialist. It was noted that, under Celador Radio's ownership and benefitting in recent years from a number of co-location and programme sharing arrangements, the licence has been profitable for the past year, and does not require significant additional funding to continue its operations. Ofcom considered that the audience, revenue and costs forecasts going forward were realistic, and that Celador Radio's board of directors and management team contains a wealth of relevant local commercial radio experience.

In assessing the extent to which 'The Breeze' would cater for the particular tastes and interests and broaden choice for those living in the licensed area, the decision-makers recognised that the service would continue to provide over 40 hours per week of programming broadcast live from Bristol, with local news and travel bulletins reflecting the demand for this content demonstrated by the applicant's research. In addition, it was felt that The Breeze's Format requirement to play "easy listening" music for listeners aged over 40 provided a clear alternative to the music formats provided by the other local analogue commercial radio services (Heart, Kiss and Sam FM) available in Bristol.

In considering the extent to which there was evidence of demand or support for the applicant's proposals, we noted that The Breeze's quantitative market research showed that a majority (68%) of respondents preferred a station that broadcasts all, or mainly, music. Some 83% of respondents in the station's target age categories who had listened to The Breeze within the past three months said that The Breeze's music mix was "very much" or "fairly" in tune with their personal tastes, although The Breeze did not attempt to compare the appeal of its chosen music format – easy listening – against other potential formats that are not currently available in the analogue radio market in Bristol. It was also noted that two-thirds (66%) of those who had listened to The Breeze over the past three months rated the news and speech content on the station as being "very" or "fairly" good.

¹ This decision was taken by Ofcom executives under delegated authority from the Ofcom Board. They are referred to in this statement as the "decision makers".

Statutory requirements

The section below sets out the statutory requirements relating to analogue commercial radio licensing. The public versions of the two applications can be found at:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/manage-your-licence/radio-broadcast-licensing/radio-licence-awards-process>

Statutory requirements relating to the specific local licence award criteria

In considering the applications it receives for local commercial radio licences, Ofcom is required to have regard to each of the statutory criteria set out in section 105 of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

These are as follows:

- a) the ability of each of the applicants for the licence to maintain, throughout the period for which the licence would be in force, the service which he proposes to provide;
- b) the extent to which any such proposed service would cater for the tastes and interests of persons living in the area or locality for which the service would be provided, and, where it is proposed to cater for any particular tastes and interests of such persons, the extent to which the service would cater for those tastes and interests;
- c) the extent to which any such proposed service would broaden the range of programmes available by way of local services to persons living in the area or locality for which it would be provided, and, in particular, the extent to which the service would cater for tastes and interests different from those already catered for by local services provided for that area or locality; and
- d) the extent to which there is evidence that, amongst persons living in that area or locality, there is a demand for, or support for, the provision of the proposed service.

The legislation does not rate these requirements in order of priority, but it may be that Ofcom will regard one or more of the criteria as being particularly important in view of the characteristics of the licence to be awarded and the applications for it.