
Community radio licensing

Our plans for inviting applications for community radio licences in 2018

STATEMENT:

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About this document

In November 2017, we invited expressions of interest from groups interested in applying for a community radio licence. We received 90 expressions of interest by the deadline. As a result, we have decided to invite applications for new licences in some areas later this year.

The areas for which we will invite applications will be drawn from the expressions of interest we received. At this stage, we will not invite applications for every area for which we received an expression of interest and we will use the priorities which were set out in our 'call for expressions of interest'¹ to decide on the areas.

For groups that submitted an expression of interest, and anyone else interested in applying for a community radio licence on FM, this document provides information about our plans.

¹ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/107570/call-expressions-interest.pdf

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2016, Ofcom consulted on plans for licensing more community radio services and changes to our technical policy. We published a statement in April 2017².
- 1.2 We then embarked on a fourth round of community radio licensing, which commenced in April 2017. So far, we have invited applications in two phases. The two invitations, which listed specific areas for which we were willing to accept an application, were drawn up from the 98 expressions of interest for licences that we received in December 2016.
- 1.3 The first invitation was for applications for community radio licences in currently unserved areas. 36 applications were received and this resulted in 27 licences being awarded. The second invitation was for community radio licences in areas overlapping with existing services. Forty-four applications were received, and 17 licences have been awarded so far.
- 1.4 There are over 250 community radio services broadcasting in the UK today. We said in our April 2017 statement that after inviting applications for new licences, we would next invite existing stations to apply for an improvement to their existing coverage within their licensed coverage area or an extension to their existing licensed coverage area, if they wished.
- 1.5 We are inviting existing licensed stations to apply for these now and have published guidance and an application form³, alongside our updated analogue radio coverage policy⁴ on our website alongside this statement. The purpose of this statement on our plans for inviting applications for community radio licences in 2018 is to alert anyone still wishing to apply for a new community radio licence about our plans for a further round of licensing following on from improvements and extensions to existing licensed services.

² <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-2/cr-future-licensing>

³ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/manage-your-licence/radio-broadcast-licensing/amend/invitation-apply-improvements-coverage-community-radio>

⁴ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/54621/analogue-coverage-policy.pdf

2. Plans to invite more applications

Round 4: a third invitation to apply for community radio licences

- 2.1 During 2017, a number of groups contacted us to say that they wished to have the opportunity to apply for a community radio licence. As a result, we invited further expressions of interest in November 2017⁵, with a closing date on 6 December 2017. This was to help us understand the level of demand and where groups wished to apply for community radio licences.
- 2.2 We said that the responses we received would form the basis for a further invitation to apply for community radio licences. We added that *“we anticipate that we will have time to complete a further round of licensing before the licensing framework for small-scale DAB multiplexes is ready for us to implement”* (paragraph 1.2 in the call for expressions of interest).
- 2.3 The legislation that will enable Ofcom to advertise and award small-scale DAB multiplex licences is under preparation, but not yet in place. As a result, we will have some time available to offer further analogue (FM) community radio licences.
- 2.4 Separately, as stated in paragraph 1.4 and 1.5 above, we have invited existing stations to apply to improve their coverage (by 31 July 2018) or extend their existing licensed coverage areas (by 18 September 2018). We do not know what the level of demand will be in each case, but we wish to deal with the majority of these requests before we start processing further applications for new licences.
- 2.5 We had hoped to be in a position to invite further new applications earlier in 2018. In our April 2017 statement, we set out our priorities for community radio licensing. We said that our first priority was to conduct a new licensing round (drawing on the expressions of interest we had received in 2016). We said we would then consider requests for improvements to existing coverage within a licensed coverage area followed by requests for extensions to licensed coverage areas. Processing the large number of applications we received for new services has taken longer than anticipated, which has led to a delay in the timeframe we referred to when we invited expressions of interest last November.
- 2.6 We received 90 expressions of interest for new licences before the closing date (of which ten were from groups that had already applied for a licence in the licensing round that was open at the time, some of which have subsequently been awarded a licence). We have decided to invite applications for new community radio licences in the last quarter of 2018. However, we do not expect to be able to invite applications for every area for which we received an expression of interest at that stage.
- 2.7 When we invited expressions of interest we said *“If we receive a large number of expressions of interest, we may need to impose a limit on the number of areas for which we*

⁵ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/107570/call-expressions-interest.pdf

are willing to invite applications. In other words, we may not be able to invite applications for every area for which we have received an expression of interest” (paragraph 1.6 in the call for expressions of interest).

- 2.8 We added that, in this case, we would prioritise as follows:
- a) areas unserved by existing community radio services, and areas for which we have invited applications but not received any in our current round of licensing (see [our 'apply for a radio broadcasting licence' page](#) (under the 'apply for a community radio licence' drop-down menu) for lists of applications received during 2017);
 - b) areas not covered under a) for which we believe there is a reasonable likelihood of suitable FM frequencies being available;
 - c) any other areas.
- 2.9 We are using these priorities to draw up a list of areas for which we will invite applications. We anticipate that we will initially only have sufficient time to invite, and process, applications for areas that fall under priority a) above.
- 2.10 We are drawing up a list of areas and are planning to publish this list ahead of the invitation to apply.

FM frequency availability

- 2.11 Potential applicants should be aware that in many parts of the country there is a shortage of suitable FM frequencies and that this is particularly acute in urban and suburban areas, but some other areas are affected too.
- 2.12 It has been our policy for some time that we do not generally exclude areas from the applications process on frequency availability grounds. Ofcom cannot guarantee the availability of suitable frequency resources to meet the needs of any applicant group. This being the case, prospective community radio operators should note that applications are made entirely at their own risk.

Next steps

- 2.13 Using the expressions of interest we have received, we will draw up a list of areas for which we plan to invite applications for community radio licences, using priority a) above. We are planning to publish this list in the next few months.
- 2.14 We will then publish an invitation to apply in the last quarter of 2018. The invitation will include a list of areas, and we will not accept applications from areas other than those listed.
- 2.15 The closing date for applications will be approximately three months after the invitation is published.
- 2.16 Potential applicants are responsible for ensuring they keep themselves informed. We strongly recommend that anyone who submitted an expression of interest and is

interested in applying for a licence [sign up for Ofcom 'broadcasting updates'](#). We will not be writing to anyone who submits an 'expression of interest' with further information.

- 2.17 Potential applicants may wish to familiarise themselves with the further information on community radio licensing that is available on our website (including notes of guidance, an application form, advice for applicants, and how to choose a transmitter site). Please see [our 'apply for a radio broadcasting licence' page](#).