

Invitation of applications for community radio licences

About this document

Following on from our Statement on '[Community Radio: future licensing and technical policy](#)', published on 28 April 2017, in November 2017 we invited expressions of interest from groups interested in applying for a community radio licence. In June 2018 we issued a short statement saying that we had decided to invite applications for new licences in some areas later this year, and on 3 September 2018 we published the [list of areas for which we planned to invite applications](#).

This document invites applications for licences to provide community radio services in those areas. Any applications for areas not included on the list referred to above will be rejected.

Ofcom is inviting applications for services operating on FM only. No areas are excluded on the basis of frequency availability, but this does not indicate that a suitable frequency will be available in every area. Ofcom will examine frequency availability once applications have been received. 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. The application fee is non-refundable under these circumstances.

We explain the importance of selecting an appropriate transmission site, provide details of the funding restrictions which apply to community radio services, and set out how we will assess applications.

The closing-date for receipt of applications is **3pm on Tuesday 26 March 2019**.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Ofcom, in accordance with section 104(1) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (“the 1990 Act”) (as amended by the Communications Act 2003 as modified by the Community Radio Order 2004, as itself amended by the Community Radio (Amendment) Orders 2010 and 2015), invites applications for licences to provide community radio services in the areas listed in Annex 1 (A1) of this invitation to apply.
- 1.2 We are inviting applications for licences for the provision of services on the FM (VHF) waveband, for an initial maximum period of five years from the commencement of broadcasting.
- 1.3 Following on from our Statement on ‘Community Radio: future licensing and technical policy’ (published on 28 April 2017), in November 2017 we invited expressions of interest from groups interested in applying for a community radio licence. In June 2018 we issued a short statement saying that we had decided to invite applications for new licences in some areas later this year, and on 3 September 2018 we published [the list of areas for which we planned to invite applications](#).
- 1.4 We will not accept applications in relation to any areas or localities in the United Kingdom outside the areas described in Annex 1 (A1).
- 1.5 The closing-date for the receipt of completed applications will be **3pm on Tuesday 26 March 2019**. A non-refundable fee of £600 will be payable for each application submitted.

2. Frequency availability and transmission arrangements

Frequency availability

- 2.1 We will accept applications for services proposing to operate on FM only. We are not excluding any areas from the applications process on frequency availability grounds as we have done in the past. However, applicants should note that there is a shortage of suitable FM frequencies in some areas, and this is particularly acute mostly in urban and suburban areas. Because of this, all applications will first be assessed for frequency availability before any further analysis is undertaken, to ensure that only those applications for which there is a suitable frequency available will be considered for the award of a community radio licence. This is likely to result in some applications being rejected before a full assessment against the statutory criteria has been carried out, but will ensure that only those applications for which a suitable frequency has been identified are further considered against the statutory criteria.
- 2.2 An applicant may wish to seek to establish the likelihood of a suitable FM frequency being available in their chosen area, from their chosen transmission site, before deciding whether or not to submit an application. We recommend that any such applicants consider seeking expert frequency planning advice. In particular, it should be noted that doing a live frequency scan at a particular site (or listening for a quiet spot on the frequency dial) does not constitute proper frequency planning, and does not indicate that there is a frequency available from a site. This is because such a frequency scan does not guarantee that a coverage area can be achieved in the face of incoming interference, nor does it take into account whether a service would cause interference elsewhere to other services on air. (Please note, if the chosen transmission site is not appropriate for the proposed service area, or there is no suitable FM frequency to support the service, the application will be rejected and we will not take the application forward for consideration against the selection criteria set out in the legislation. **The application fee is non-refundable under these circumstances.** See also paragraph 2.7.)

Transmission arrangements

- 2.3 In the application form (section 25) we require applicants to provide details of the transmission site they intend to use, and (in section 3) a description of the geographical area intended to be served from this site. It is our usual policy to license community radio services utilising only one transmission site; all applications should therefore be based on the use of a single site only. Any information about further transmission sites will not be considered at this stage.
- 2.4 On receipt of an application, we will use the proposed transmission site to check whether there is a suitable frequency available, and whether the proposed service area can be adequately served from the chosen site. **Applicants should therefore note the importance of identifying a transmission site that is suitable for the area they wish to serve** (see guidance on choosing a transmission site in paragraph 2.11 below).
- 2.5 We will use our standard community radio planning criteria to ascertain whether a proposed site is capable of delivering the required coverage. We will be looking to see if, at a power level of 25 watts erp (per plane), a service of around a 5km radius at 54 dB microV/m, is achievable from the

transmission site identified in the application, and that this area is what the applicant has described in section 3 of the application as the proposed coverage area for the service. (Please note that this does not necessarily mean, should a licence be awarded, that the power will be limited to 25 watts per plane and a 5km radius, but this is the power generally used for initial coverage assessment.)

- 2.6 If we conclude that an applicant's chosen transmission site is suitable to deliver the proposed coverage, we will then determine whether there is an FM frequency available for the proposed service area from that site. Our frequency planning will be based on internationally agreed frequency planning approaches. For further details, please refer to Ofcom's [analogue radio coverage policy](#), which is on our website.
- 2.7 We anticipate that some applications are likely to be rejected at this stage of the process. In other words, if the chosen transmission site is not appropriate for the proposed service area, or there is no suitable FM frequency to support the service, the application will be rejected and we will not take the application forward for consideration against the selection criteria set out in the legislation. **The application fee is non-refundable under these circumstances**, so we strongly recommend that applicants seek expert frequency planning advice and take particular care when selecting their transmission site.
- 2.8 Typically Ofcom will award a coverage radius to around 5km for a community station and an effective radiated power (e.r.p.) of 25 watts in the vertical plane. This may typically be supplemented by an additional 25 watts in the horizontal plane, if required by the applicant and if local circumstances permit. We will consider applications for wider areas where applicants can demonstrate that the proposed coverage area will better serve the target community, and where such wider coverage is technically feasible. We would advise applicants to be realistic with their declared coverage aspiration. If you ask for too wide a coverage area that extends beyond your target community or is technically unachievable, then there is a risk that Ofcom may need to reject the application if the proposed transmitter site cannot realise the declared coverage aspiration, for example.
- 2.9 We are not able to enter into correspondence about transmission arrangements. The only exception to this is if we need to seek clarification from you about your transmission arrangements. However, if we reject an application, we will provide feedback to each applicant on our decision, including a predicted coverage map and a frequency availability assessment (from the frequency planning study), if appropriate.
- 2.10 It should be clear from the above that transmission site selection is of crucial importance. Furthermore, a licence award will be made on the basis of the transmission site included in the application (and on which the assessment of coverage suitability and frequency availability will have been based). Therefore, Ofcom is unlikely to agree to any request to change a transmission site once a licence has been awarded, unless the change is as a result of circumstances beyond the prospective licensee's control.
- 2.11 Applicants should note that that **there is a shortage of suitable FM frequencies in some areas, and this is particularly acute most in urban and suburban areas. 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.**

Guidance on choosing an FM transmission site

2.12 We advise applicants to seek professional technical advice on transmission issues, including where to site the transmitter. However, here are some general points you will need to consider for FM transmitters:

- 'Height is might'; as a general rule, the higher the transmitter is in relation to the desired coverage area, the better in terms of likely coverage (if your antenna is surrounded by taller buildings, coverage will be adversely affected).
- In simple terms FM coverage is usually by 'line of sight' - What you see from where the antenna is planned is what you are likely to cover (although incoming interference and other factors may affect the signal too).
- Is the site secure? Would access be difficult?
- Will it be cost effective and affordable over the duration of the licence? Is planning permission required? Listed buildings can be particularly problematic.
- What would be required for the transmitter to be linked to the studio site?
- Are there health and safety implications?
- Is there an available electricity supply?
- How easy would it be to install the antenna and equipment or would there be cost implications?
- Are there other users or local residents to be borne in mind?

3. Funding rules

The restrictions on income from on-air commercial revenues

- 3.1 In March 2015, the Community Radio (Amendment) Order 2015 changed the funding rules for community radio services. In summary:
- every station is allowed a ‘fixed revenue allowance’ of £15,000 per financial year from paid for on-air advertising and sponsorship;
 - in addition, some stations are also allowed to obtain up to 50% of their total relevant income per financial year (i.e. disregarding the ‘fixed revenue allowance’) from paid-for on-air advertising and sponsorship.
- 3.2 In deciding to whom (and on what terms) to grant a community radio licence, Ofcom must have regard to a number of matters set out in legislation, including the need to ensure that any service provided under that licence does not prejudice unduly the economic viability of any other local service¹ (by virtue of section 105 of the 1990 Act, as modified by the Community Radio Order 2004 and further modified by the Community Radio (Amendment) Orders 2010 and 2015).
- 3.3 Without prejudice to the generality of this economic impact requirement, Ofcom is required to impose conditions in community radio licences to secure the following statutory requirements:
- each community radio station may obtain up to £15,000 per financial year from the sale of on-air advertising and sponsorship. This is known as the ‘fixed revenue allowance’;
 - a community radio station whose coverage overlaps with that of a small local commercial radio service (defined as one whose MCA² population is 150,000 adults (aged 15+) or fewer) may not obtain any income from the sale of on-air advertising and sponsorship over and above the fixed revenue allowance. However, if the small local commercial radio service’s Format allows it to provide its locally-made programmes from a location outside its own licensed area, this restriction does not apply (and the applicable requirements are those set out below);
 - a community radio station whose coverage – (i) overlaps with that of any other local commercial radio service (defined as those with an MCA population of 150,000 adults or more); (ii) does not overlap with that of a local commercial radio service at all; or (iii) overlaps with a small local commercial radio service whose Format allows it to provide its locally-made programmes from a location outside its licensed area – may obtain up to 50% of its income over and above the fixed revenue allowance from the sale of on-air advertising and sponsorship.
- 3.4 For the avoidance of doubt, programme sponsorship includes station or channel sponsorship, and commercial communications.
- 3.5 Details of the local commercial radio services in the UK with a measured coverage area which contains a population of 150,000 adults (aged 15+) or fewer, and whose licences have not at any

¹ For the purpose of this economic impact assessment, this concept refers to local services other than community radio services.

² Measured Coverage Area – the area covered by a local commercial radio service, as defined by the area within which signals of a specified strength are received.

time been varied pursuant to section 106(1A)(e) BA 1990 (i.e. their Format does not include a studio co-location agreement) are contained in Annex 2 (A2). You can check whether the area you want to broadcast to falls within the Measured Coverage Area of any of these services by looking at the [commercial radio coverage maps](#) on our website.

- 3.6 Applicants should also note that the obligation upon Ofcom to include conditions in community radio licences to limit on-air paid-for advertising and sponsorship of programmes to just a fixed revenue allowance in certain circumstances is a continuing obligation. Should the circumstances in relation to a particular community radio service change (such as the size of the population in an overlapping commercial radio station's measured coverage area), the applicable funding conditions in the relevant community radio licences may need to be changed.
- 3.7 There are currently no planned launches of new small-scale local commercial radio services in the areas identified in Annex 1 (A1). Ofcom nonetheless reserves the right to advertise licences for such services in the future, if we consider it appropriate to do so (and applicants should note that any community radio licences awarded as a result of this round of licence applications will be awarded on the basis that conditions relating to funding restrictions may need to be changed in future).
- 3.8 These restrictions are additional to other rules that apply to community radio services. More information is contained in the notes of guidance, and statement of general information Ofcom has produced for applicants (see section 5 of this document).

4. Assessment of applications

- 4.1 The assessment of an application for a community radio licence will be based primarily on the proposals presented in the completed application. In the course of assessing an application, Ofcom may seek clarification and or/amplification of proposals from an applicant.
- 4.2 Our objective is to consider all applications within six months of submission, although this is subject to, among other things, the number of applications submitted.
- 4.3 As detailed in section 2, we will check whether an applicant's desired coverage is achievable from its proposed transmission site, and whether there is a suitable FM frequency available. If the site is not appropriate for the proposed service area or there is no suitable FM frequency to support the service, the application will be rejected at this stage.
- 4.4 We will then assess those applications for which there is an available frequency and a suitable transmission site. In determining the most suitable applicant for the award of a community radio licence, Ofcom is obliged to have regard to the special requirements set out in Section 105(1) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (as amended by the Communications Act 2003 and modified by the Community Radio Order 2004). These seven 'selection criteria' are detailed in our ['Notes of guidance for community radio licence applicants and licensees'](#).
- 4.5 All applications will be assessed in relation to each of the selection criteria in Section 105(1), as well as the community radio 'characteristics of service' and other statutory requirements. These are all detailed in our ['Notes of guidance for community radio licence applicants and licensees'](#).
- 4.6 Applicants should note that following the Ofcom consultation: ['Review of the approach to community radio key commitments'](#) we decided to streamline and simplify community radio Key Commitments. As a result, the draft key commitments section of the application form was revised in March 2016 to reflect this.
- 4.7 Applicants may also find it useful to read ['10 years of community radio licensing: Advice for licence applicants'](#).

5. Guidelines and procedures for submission of applications

- 5.1 The application form and other relevant documentation for applicants is on the Ofcom website: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/manage-your-licence/radio-broadcast-licensing/apply-for-a-radio-broadcast-licence>. It comprises:
- an application form (please ensure you complete and submit an up-to-date copy of the form, i.e. published in December 2018);
 - ‘Notes of guidance for community radio licence applicants and licensees’ (an updated version was published in May 2017).
- 5.2 If you have any queries, please contact us by email at cr.applications@ofcom.org.uk, or by post: Broadcast Licensing, Ofcom, Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA.
- 5.3 The completed application form should be submitted by email, in either Word (.doc) or RTF format, to cr.applications@ofcom.org.uk. We do not require a paper copy of the completed document (although if any of the permissible supporting documentation is only available as paper copies, these should be sent to the address given in 5.2 above).
- 5.4 One electronic copy of a completed application form, and any paper copies of the permissible supporting documentation, must be received by Ofcom no later than the closing-date specified in Section 1 of this Notice. Applications received after the specified date will not normally be accepted. Applicants will receive an auto-reply from the mailbox above, acknowledging receipt of the application. If no auto-reply is received, the applicant should contact Ofcom immediately and ask to speak to a member of the Broadcast Licensing team to check that the submission has been received.
- 5.5 In connection with the electronic submission of documents, applicants should be aware that email is not an instant means of communication, especially when there are large attachments. If you have a number of large documents to submit, you may need to send them by separate emails (or as compressed files). Applicants are strongly advised to submit email applications at least 48 hours in advance of the closing date, so that urgent steps can be taken by the applicant if no acknowledgement from Ofcom is received.
- 5.6 No material amendments to the application may be made by the applicant after the closing date without the agreement of Ofcom. If any amendments need to be made by any applicant through circumstances outside its control, then Ofcom should be informed immediately. Ofcom will not agree to any such amendment which it considers would be unfair to any other applicant applying for a community radio licence in that round.
- 5.7 Payment of the application fee must also be received by the closing-date specified in Section 1 of this Notice. Applicants may submit their payment by any of the following methods:
- 5.8 Payment by BACS into the Ofcom bank account (sort code: 30-97-90, account number: 00782415, account name: Ofcom). Please note that any payments made using this method will take at least three working days to reach the Ofcom account. In the mandate reference field of your payment, please write 'CR' followed by the applicant's company name or proposed station name.

- 5.9 Payment by CHAPS into the Ofcom bank account (details as above). Please note that although this is a 'same day' payment method, applicants intending to submit their payment on the closing-date itself should confirm with their bank the deadline for ensuring that it is received by Ofcom on that date. In the mandate reference field of your payment, please write 'CR' followed by the applicant's company name or proposed station name.
- 5.10 Payment by cheque. Cheques must be made payable to 'Ofcom', and posted to the address given in 5.2 above. If an applicant wishes to submit a cheque without an accompanying paper copy of the application, the cheque must be accompanied by a note detailing the applicant's company name or proposed station name. Any cheques must be sent to Ofcom in such time that Ofcom will be in possession of cleared funds by the application closing date.
- 5.11 Failure to comply with any of the above guidelines is likely to result in the disqualification of the application.

A1. Areas for which applications are invited

There is an acute shortage of suitable FM frequencies in many areas. Ofcom cannot guarantee the availability of suitable frequency resources to meet the needs of any applicant group. Prospective applicants should note that applications are made entirely at their own risk.

Some of the places listed cover a wide area (some are the result of more than one expression of interest in adjacent areas, for example). Applications can be considered for a location or locations within the area described, though applicants are encouraged to read our [Coverage & planning policy for analogue radio](#) for guidance on coverage area policy (section 4). (Generally, there is likely to be greater scope for larger coverage areas in rural locations, where there may be a greater availability of suitable FM frequencies.)

Area description (taken from one or more expressions of interest)	Nation
Albrighton and Cosford (Shropshire)	England
Amersham and Chesham and the surrounding area (Buckinghamshire)	England
Borough of Scarborough (North Yorkshire)	England
Burghclere (Hampshire)	England
Carlisle (Cumbria)	England
Chesterfield (North Derbyshire)	England
Maryport, Workington, Whitehaven, Egremont (Cumbria)	England
Clowne, Bolsover and Barlborough (Derbyshire)	England
Dover (Kent)	England
Durham (County Durham)	England
Eastleigh, Hampshire	England
Faversham (Kent)	England
Ferndown, Wimborne Minster, Corfe Mullen and Holt (Dorset)	England
Hastings (East Sussex)	England
Grimsby, Mablethorpe, Trusthorpe, Sutton-on-Sea, Chapel St Leonards, Ingoldmells, Skegness (Lincolnshire)	England
Lowestoft and north east Suffolk	England
Lutterworth (Leicestershire)	England
Melksham (Wiltshire)	England
North Somerset	England
Northwich, Middlewich and Winsford (central Cheshire)	England
Portishead (Somerset)	England
Ryedale (North Yorkshire)	England
Shaftesbury and Gillingham (Dorset) and Semley (Wiltshire)	England
South Bucks District (Beaconsfield, Denham, Gerrards Cross, Iver, Stoke Poges, Chalfont St Giles and Chalfont St Peter)	England

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South east London/Borough of Croydon	England
Thornbury and district (Gloucestershire)	England
Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells (Kent)	England
Wallingford (Oxfordshire)	England
Wigan (Greater Manchester)	England
Ayr (South Ayrshire)	Scotland
Dundee	Scotland
Dunfermline (Fife)	Scotland
Edinburgh	Scotland
Hamilton, Larkhall, Stonehouse (South Lanarkshire)	Scotland
Kinross-shire	Scotland
Livingston, Bathgate and Linlithgow (West Lothian)	Scotland
Shotts (North Lanarkshire)	Scotland
Ballymena (County Antrim)	Northern Ireland
Enniskillen (County Fermanagh)	Northern Ireland
Newtownabbey (County Antrim)	Northern Ireland
Omagh (County Tyrone)	Northern Ireland
Merthyr Tydfil (Mid Glamorgan)	Wales
Locations within the Vale of Clwyd; Kinmel Bay, Abergele	Wales

A2. Small-scale commercial radio services

Listed below are local commercial radio services in the UK which have a measured coverage area which contains a population of 150,000 adults (aged 15+) or fewer, and whose licences do not have a studio co-location agreement. See section 3 for further information about how an overlap with one of these stations may affect a community radio service licence.

Licence area	Station name
Arbroath	RNA FM
Aylesbury	Mix 96
Borders	Radio Borders
Buxton	High Peak Radio/Ashbourne Radio
Chester	Dee 106.3
Cheltenham	The Breeze
Dumfries & Galloway	Westsound FM
Exeter	Radio Exe
Inverurie	NECR
Isle of Wight	Isle of Wight Radio
Kendal & Windermere	Smooth Radio
King's Lynn	KLFM
Kintyre, Islay & Jura	Argyll FM
Ludlow	& South Shropshire Sunshine Radio
Mansfield	Mansfield 103.2
Oban	Oban FM
Peterhead & Fraserburgh	Waves Radio Peterhead
Rutland	Rutland Radio
Salisbury	Spire FM
Shetland	SIBC
Skye & Lochalsh	Cuillin FM
Warwick	Touch FM
Western Isles	Isles FM
Weymouth & Dorchester	Wessex FM

You can check whether the area you want to broadcast to falls within the Measured Coverage Area of any of these services by looking at the [commercial radio coverage maps on our website](#).

This list is subject to change in the event that Ofcom agrees to a request to change to a station's Format in relation to studio co-location arrangements.