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ADVICE NOTE
5 December 2016

Community Radio Licensing
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OFCOM
Riverside House
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Response to Ofcom Consultation:

“Community Radio: Future Licensing and Technical Policy”

Q1. Ofcom would like to run a short, focused community radio licensing round. Ofcom's preferred option is to invite applications in areas where there is evidence of demand, after checking that there is a suitable frequency. Do you agree with this approach? If not, tell us why and what your preferred option would be.

A. That is precisely what we have been requesting now for some months. Ofcom's current request for Letters of Intent should provide evidence of those organisations ready to submit an Application.

The "area" aspect of this question is irrelevant. There is no value in announcing an area and inviting others there to apply. Those with intent will have already made their presence felt. The matter of spectrum availability must not be allowed to cloud the issue and Ofcom should be continually pressured to work more objectively in this matter

Q2. a) New community radio stations: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposed revised coverage policy in relation to new community radio services? If not, please give your reasons.

A. Ofcom has stated that perhaps this would be an opportunity to revise its "typically a 5km radius" premise - which we don't read as a "revised coverage policy". Ofcom's overall policy should be that 5km is a guide and it the responsibility of the Applicant to present a convincing case otherwise.

Q2. b) Improvements to coverage for existing services: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to consider requests to improve coverage within the licensed area for existing licensed services? If not, please give your reasons.

A. Yes - that option has always been available but Ofcom has been increasingly allocating lower priority to such requests. Clearly again strong representation is bringing about a welcome and overdue change of policy

Q2. c) Extensions to coverage for existing services: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to consider requests to extend the existing licensed area of a community radio service into an adjoining area or locality? Ofcom will consider such requests against statutory criteria, and proposes to use six core considerations to help the Regulator decide whether or not to agree to a request. Do you agree with the core considerations Ofcom proposes to use? If not, please give your comments.

A. Yes. Our experience with a considerable number of forward-thinking Licensees regularly brings up situations where there is a clear audience demand for the service over an enlarged or additional area but Ofcom's current imposed restrictions prevent consideration of expansion. There appear to be a profound reluctance to license a station to serve more than one arbitrarily-determined "community". Requests to provide an additional or linked service to an adjacent area should be addressed positively and on an individual merit basis rather than falling back on to the proposed six core criteria.

Q3. Do you agree with Ofcom's proposals regarding its community radio work priorities? If not, please give your comments.

A. Of course with limited resources Ofcom has to assign priorities, but these should be reviewed on a monthly basis on evidence of demand and published to Stakeholders.