

Analogue Commercial Radio Licence: Format Change Request Form

Date of request:	14 th December 2018
Station Name:	Smooth Radio North East
Licensed area and licence number:	North East England Licence Number: AL000311BA/3
Licensee:	Smooth Radio NE Limited
Contact name:	Colin Everitt

Details of requested change(s) to Format

Character of Service <i>Complete this section if you are requesting a change to this part of your Format</i>	Existing Character of Service:
	Proposed new Character of Service:
Programme sharing and/or co-location arrangements <i>Complete this section if you are requesting a change to this part of your Format</i>	Current arrangements:
	Proposed new arrangements:
Locally-made hours and/or local news bulletins <i>Complete this section if you are requesting a change to this part of your Format</i>	Current obligations: Locally-made hours: At least 7 hours a day during daytime weekdays (must include breakfast). At least 4 hours daytime Saturdays and Sundays. Local News bulletins: At least hourly during daytime weekdays and peak-time weekends. At other times, UK-wide, nations and international news should feature.

	<p>Proposed new obligations:</p> <p>Locally-made hours: At least 3 hours a day during daytime weekdays.</p> <p>Local news bulletins: No change.</p>
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The holder of an analogue local commercial radio licence may apply to Ofcom to have the station's Format amended. Any application should be made using the layout shown on this form, and should be in accordance with Ofcom's published procedures for Format changes.¹

Under section 106(1A) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (as amended), Ofcom may consent to a change of a Format only if it is satisfied that *at least* one of the following five statutory criteria is satisfied:

- (a) *that the departure would not substantially alter the character of the service;*
- (b) *that the departure would not narrow the range of programmes available by way of relevant independent radio services to persons living the area or locality for which the service is licensed to be provided;*
- (c) *that the departure would be conducive to the maintenance or promotion of fair and effective competition*
- (d) *that there is evidence that, amongst persons living in that area or locality, there is a significant demand for, or significant support for, the change that would result from the departure; or*
- (e) *that (i) the departure would result from programmes included in the licensed service ceasing to be made at premises in the area or locality for which the service is provided, but (ii) those programmes would continue to be made wholly or partly at premises within the approved area (as defined in section 314 of the Communications Act 2003 (local content and character of services)).*

Only one of these five criteria need be satisfied in order for Ofcom to consent to the proposed change. However, even if Ofcom is of the opinion that the proposed change satisfies one or more of the statutory criteria, there may be reasons (depending on the particular circumstances of the case) why Ofcom may not consent to the proposed change. The additional criteria to which Ofcom will have regard when exercising this discretion can be found on our website.²

Applicants should note that, under section 106ZA of the same Act (as amended), a proposed change that *does not* satisfy the first or last of these criteria (i.e. a change that Ofcom considers *would* or *could* substantially alter the character of the service, or does not relate to the origin of locally-made programmes) must, if it is to be considered further under any of the other three criteria, be consulted upon.

In the event that Ofcom receives a request for Format change and considers that criterion (a) or (e) is *not* satisfied, it will seek confirmation from the applicant as to whether it wishes

¹ Available at https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/87405/The-regulation-of-Format-changes.pdf

² At https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/87405/The-regulation-of-Format-changes.pdf

to proceed with the request (and, if so, whether it wishes to amend or replace its submission in light of the necessity to make it public).#

Please set out the statutory criterion, or criteria, set out in section 106(1A) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 that you believe is/are satisfied in relation to this Format change request, and the reasons for this.

(a) that the departure would not substantially alter the character of the service;

Please provide any additional information and/or evidence in support of the proposed change(s) below. In particular, the applicant may wish to outline how they see that the proposed change fits within Ofcom's published Format change request policy³ and also Ofcom's Localness guidance, which includes our co-location and programme sharing policy.⁴

The changes being requested are consistent with Ofcom's latest published localness guidelines.

Notes

Ofcom may approve a change under any of criteria (b) to (d) without consultation, or after a consultation of less than 28 days, if Ofcom considers that to hold a consultation at all, or for 28 days or more, would result in a delay that would be likely to prejudice the interests of the licensee. Ofcom may also remove for the purposes of consultation any confidential information submitted by the licensee.

Data Protection

We require the information requested in this form in order to carry out our licensing duties under the Broadcasting Act 1990, Broadcasting Act 1996 and Communications Act 2003. Please see Ofcom's General Privacy Statement www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/foi-dp/general-privacy-statement for further information about how Ofcom handles your personal information and your corresponding rights

³ Available at https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/87405/The-regulation-of-Format-changes.pdf

⁴ Available at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/radio/localness/>

Ofcom notes on the request

Statutory requirements

This request relates to the FM licence for North East England held by Smooth Radio NE Limited, currently broadcasting as Smooth Radio North East.

Parent company Communicorp has requested the following change to the Format of this licence:

- To reduce the required number of locally-made programming hours on weekdays from seven to three, and from four to none on weekend days.

This request would change the character of service as set out in the Format of the licence, and accordingly can be agreed only if Ofcom is satisfied in regard to one of the statutory criteria set out in section 106(1A) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (as set out in the request, above).

If we are satisfied in relation to one of the statutory criteria, we are then able to decide whether or not to approve the request, taking account of our published policy criteria.

Assessment

In assessing Communicorp's request against the statutory criteria, we were satisfied in relation to section 106(1A)(a) of the Broadcasting Act 1990 – that the reduction in the number of locally-produced hours would not substantially alter the character of the service. This is because, as set out in our recently amended localness guidelines⁵, we would continue to expect the licensee to provide a local service that includes, as well as the level of news specified in its Format, sufficient other local material to deliver the character of service, regardless of where the content is being broadcast from.

We also noted that the request was consistent with Ofcom's policy on locally -produced hours, as published in the localness guidelines.

Decision

Ofcom decided to approve this Format change request from Smooth Radio North East because we were satisfied in relation to one of the relevant statutory criteria, and for the policy reason outlined above.

In agreeing this request, we are not taking a position on the control of these licences and, in particular, whether the amount of locally-made programming which will be provided by the licensee confers control on the licensee.

February 2019

⁵ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/information-for-industry/radio-broadcasters/localness>