

## Your response

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<p><b>Question 1:</b> Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Work Plan for 2026/27?</p>	<p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>For the last two years I have submitted responses to your workplan consultation calling for Ofcom to allow further FM radio licencing to give access to FM frequencies for stations such as Banbury FM. This is something I have been asking for since 2019.</p> <p>Ofcom have continually kicked the issue into the long grass.</p> <p>In response to last year’s workplan consultation we were given hope Ofcom may finally be listening. Sadly this was false hope – something which is extremely frustrating.</p> <p>I do wonder why Ofcom consult on their planned workplan because, certainly in the area of the work of the Broadcast Licencing Team, suggestions and requests are simply batted aside and any timescale commitments noted appear to be made with a laissez-faire attitude.</p> <p>I wrote to Dame Melanie Dawes on July 9 in relation to further FM radio licencing and specifically on the detail set out in “Ofcom Plan of Work 2025/26: Summary of consultation responses”.</p> <p>On page 19 it says:</p> <p><b>“we do recognise there is some demand for more analogue licensing, particularly in unserved and/or rural areas where SSDAB coverage is harder to achieve in a sustainable way. In our SSDAB progress report published in October 2024, we acknowledged this demand and confirmed that our priorities remain to focus on the final rounds of the SSDAB programme before considering what comes next in line with our duties and functions, as well as market conditions. We will engage stakeholders in this process through a consultation and the timeline for this work will be communicated after we have received the applications for Round 7.”</b></p>

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	<p>The deadline for applications for SSDAB Round 7 was Tuesday 29 April 2025 and had passed by over two months at the time of my enquiry.</p> <p>In a reply from the Ofcom Broadcast Licensing Team on July 11, 2025, which was copied to Banbury's MP, Sean Woodcock, and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Lisa Nandy, it was stated:</p> <p><b>“Following the reference to the consultation and timeline as articulated in Ofcom's Plan of Work consultation process, we published a short update &lt;<a href="https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/digital-radio/small-scale-dab-licences-awarded-for-five-more-areas">https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/digital-radio/small-scale-dab-licences-awarded-for-five-more-areas</a>&gt; alongside the notification confirming that the last multiplexes included in Round 6 of SSDAB multiplex licensing had been awarded. In this, we confirmed that we will be consulting later this year on our licensing priorities to enable us to seek views from a range of stakeholders on which aspects of work we should prioritise following the conclusion of Round 8 of SSDAB licensing.</b></p> <p><b>“Part of this work will include, but is not limited to, the consideration of more analogue community radio licences.”</b></p> <p>It is clear from this response The Broadcast Licencing Team are using delaying tactics. This is not acceptable.</p> <p>Furthermore the response clearly states <b>“we will be consulting later this year”</b> – another deadline which has now been missed.</p> <p>The impression given is that The Broadcast Licencing Team have little regard for any commitment made and are prepared to carry on with a “we know best” attitude, treating public consultations simply as a box ticking exercise of little value.</p> <p>It is this attitude that has led to vast amounts of time (and public money) being wasted delivering Small Scale DAB across the country – a project that has shown itself to be technically flawed and cost prohibitive in all but the largest of population centres.</p> <p>Despite the scale of Ofcom resource ploughed into the Small Scale DAB project RAJAR provides the clear evidence it has failed. Total weekly DAB listening hours in</p>

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	<p>Q3/2021 were 435million. By Q4/2025, with much of the Small Scale DAB project having been rolled out, total weekly DAB listening hours were 424million. Practically the same.</p> <p>At the same time radio stations like Banbury FM, which have been crying out for more FM licencing (and for clarity on demand analogue licences as you already offer with digital C-DSP and DSP licences) have been ignored.</p> <p>The result is that as the radio landscape changes and the groups consolidate their national brands, and because Ofcom refuse to allow new local choices on the platform people want, radio listening is in decline: in 2018 around 90 percent of the population listened to the radio each week; in 2025 that has fallen to 86 percent. Ofcom may feel a 4 percent fall is small, but 4 percent of the population is a huge number of people no longer turning on the radio. Even worse the trend is clearly downwards.</p> <p>We are told FM is end-of-life. But I firmly believe the decline of FM listening is associated with the lack of services now available and the loss of local output, for which Ofcom is responsible.</p> <p>Why is Ofcom not seeking to maximise the capacity available on FM? Why is Ofcom not considering reorganising the FM band? (If Radio 2 can cover the whole country on 88-91 FM surely Heart, Greatest Hits, Capital could do the same – they aren't local stations, they are national brands. There would then be plenty of capacity for others.)</p> <p>I urge Ofcom to firmly commit to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- work to allow on demand applications for both commercial and community analogue radio stations as early as possible in the 2026-27 year</li> <li>- begin a project to consolidate the FM waveband to make the most use of the capacity available</li> <li>- cease wasting any further time on the Small Scale DAB project</li> <li>- ensure the Broadcast Licencing Team adhere to promised timescales and are held accountable for failing to do so.</li> </ul>

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	The above commitments would clearly fit within your desire to “ <b>assess what changes are needed to ensure regulation supports audiences wherever they watch or listen, while enabling innovation and growth</b> ”.

Please complete this form in full and return to [planofwork@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:planofwork@ofcom.org.uk)