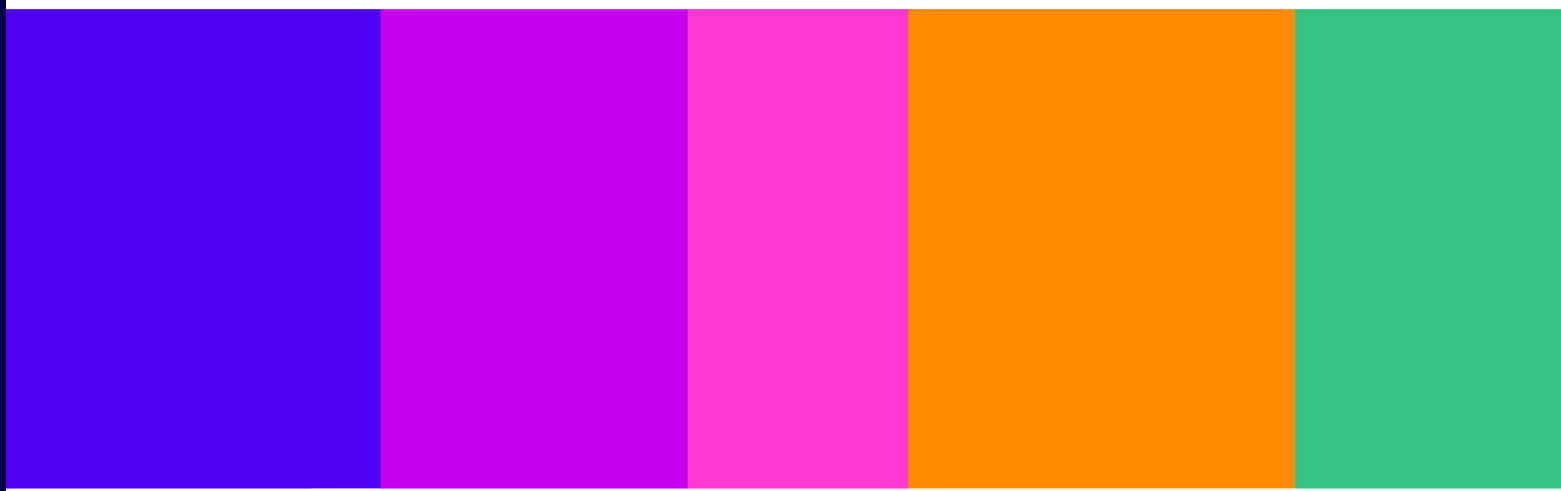


Licensing Priorities for Broadcast Radio

Statement

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1. Overview

- 1.1 Ofcom is the independent regulator for the UK communications sector, including broadcasting. We have a range of duties and powers relating to this sector, including those in the Broadcasting Act 1990 (the 'BA 1990'), Broadcasting Act 1996 (the 'BA 1996'), Communications Act 2003 (the 'CA 2003') and Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006 (the 'WTA 2006'). Our principal duty is to further the interests of citizens and consumers (where appropriate, by promoting competition). This includes securing a wide range of high-quality radio and TV services, ensuring plurality of providers, promoting optimal spectrum use and exercising our power to grant radio broadcast licences.
- 1.2 In February 2026 we published our [*Licensing Priorities for Broadcast Radio Consultation*](#) (the February 2026 Consultation), setting out Ofcom's proposed short-to-medium term strategic approach to broadcast radio licensing in the UK.
- 1.3 Following the conclusion of the small-scale DAB (SSDAB) licensing programme, we proposed licensing activities moving forward that support growth and maximise benefits to listeners. We also committed to maintain support for existing services as well as reduce our focus on new analogue and certain other licence types where audiences are declining or spectrum is limited.
- 1.4 We acknowledge that there are other longer-term developments in broadcast regulation and wider UK Government-led programmes of reform to consider.
- 1.5 We proposed not prioritising work on licence types with declining audiences, or little to no spectrum availability. These priorities were intended to support efficient use of finite spectrum and ensure the best outcomes for UK audiences.
- 1.6 We received 60 responses from a variety of stakeholders, including radio stations, infrastructure providers, multiplex operators, broadcasting companies and representative bodies, not for profit organisations, one MP and individual respondents.
- 1.7 We considered these responses together with the comments and evidence submitted through the consultation process and we have set out below our decisions on our short-to-medium broadcast licensing priorities.
- 1.8 This document is structured as follows:
 - Background and regulatory context
 - Responses to the consultation and Ofcom's decisions
 - Annex 1 – Legal duties and powers
 - Annex 2:
 - Impact assessment
 - Equality impact assessment
 - Welsh language impact assessment

What we have decided – in brief

Having considered the stakeholder responses, we will focus on the following licence priorities in the short-to-medium term:

- a) new opportunities for SSDAB multiplexes in unserved areas;

- b) applications from existing SSDAB multiplex licensees to improve or extend the coverage of their multiplex;
- c) a more flexible approach, where appropriate, in our application of the '40% ceiling' rule regarding SSDAB;
- d) consideration of applications for new FM community radio licences;
- e) consideration, in exceptional cases, of applications for new AM community radio licences;
- f) applications for renewals and extensions for commercial and community analogue licences;
- g) applications from existing commercial and community analogue licensees for technical changes;
- h) support for ongoing licensing programmes which are already being undertaken; and
- i) continuing to provide ongoing support for incumbent licensed services.

On reflection of some of the points raised in the consultation, we have made the following changes to the position proposed in the consultation.

a) **Expressions of Interest (Eoi) process for new FM community radio licences:** In a slight amendment to the original proposal, we have decided to formally request Eois for new FM community radio licences alongside this Statement before inviting applications. This will enable us to understand the levels of interest in new community radio services, prioritise the order of invitations based upon the order of priority set out in paragraph 3.41 and allow us to plan our resources to meet demand alongside other priorities set out in this Statement. In keeping with previous community radio licensing rounds, applications for licences will only be invited if Ofcom has received an Eoi for a licence in a specific area. If, for any reason, we are unable to invite an application in an area for which we received an Eoi, we will notify the relevant respondent(s).

b) **Eoi process for new AM community radio licences:** Ofcom will not generally license new services for broadcast on AM because we consider that, in most cases, audiences are most likely to be better served by FM or DAB services. However, we have decided there may be exceptional circumstances where it may be appropriate to grant an AM community radio licence. The interested party will need to set out additional information in the Eoi process that justifies the need for a new AM service. In reaching this decision, we have taken account of the sustainability challenges facing these services and will include additional questions in the Eoi document to enable us to assess whether there is a credible business plan and listener demand for such a service. We believe this will help us better assess whether there is a strong likelihood that the service will be launched and that it will be sustainable for the longer-term.

c) **Advertising new Local DAB multiplexes:** We have decided, following analysis of consultation responses, not to proceed with this as a licensing priority. We have made this change because of:

- i) the potential for launches of new Local DAB multiplexes to have a destabilising effect on the nascent SSDAB market;
- ii) the limited evidence of demand for new Local DAB multiplex licences from respondents;
- iii) the significant amount of work that would be needed to revise the licensing process for Local DAB multiplexes in light of the changes needed following the implementation of the Media Act 2024; and
- iv) the UK Government's Radio Review, published after our consultation, which may contain recommendations relating to Local DAB.

The overview section in this document is a simplified high-level summary only. The decisions we have taken and our reasoning are set out in the full document.

2. Background and regulatory context

Overview of radio broadcast licensing

- 2.1 As discussed in our February 2026 Consultation, Ofcom currently licenses broadcast radio services across both analogue (AM and FM) and Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB). For analogue services, licences cover both the content and AM/FM transmission, whereas for digital services Ofcom licences the radio services' content and the DAB multiplexes that carry radio services separately. Multiplexes are split into three types based on their level of geographic coverage – national, local and small-scale.
- 2.2 The table below outlines the different types of licensing¹:

Area	Licences	
	<u>Analogue</u>	<u>Digital</u>
National	AM/FM national services (AN)	National radio services (DN) National multiplexes (DM)
Local and regional	AM/FM local commercial services (AL) AM/FM community services (CR) Restricted services (RSL, including LRSL)	Local commercial services (DP) Community services (C-DSP) Local multiplexes (DL) Small-scale multiplexes (DS)

- 2.2 We also issue Restricted Service Licences (RSLs) for short-term events and very small areas e.g. hospital radio. New broadcast licences are awarded through a mix of competitive and non-competitive processes, in line with statutory requirements. Many applications must be assessed against a list of statutory criteria as set out in legislation. In addition, we consider changes to existing licences and may approve technical change requests, give consent to transfers of licences, grant renewals or extensions.
- 2.3 We carry out our work in this area in line with statutory requirements. Ofcom's records show there are currently c.1,000 stations licensed to broadcast on DAB across the UK. There are also 543 commercial and community radio services in total broadcasting on analogue (these figures exclude BBC Radio services). Online-only services are not currently required to hold a broadcast licence.
- 2.4 SSDAB offers a low-cost means of delivering digital radio to smaller areas, enabling both existing analogue stations and new entrants to broadcast on digital. Ofcom consulted on our approach to SSDAB licensing in 2019/20.² Following this, we prioritised SSDAB licensing over new analogue services as it allowed more services to reach more communities than

¹ The abbreviations in brackets in the table are the prefixes used by Ofcom to identify the licence types.

² Ofcom, 2020. [Statement: Licensing small-scale DAB – how Ofcom will exercise its new functions](#).

could be achieved through FM. Since then, we have not licensed any new FM analogue community radio services in the UK (other than in one exceptional case).³

Evolution of broadcast radio in the UK

Completion of SSDAB rollout

- 2.5 Over the past five years our core licensing focus has been on the award of SSDAB multiplex licences. During this period, we have completed eight rounds of licensing across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The final round concluded in June 2026.⁴ As part of the licensing programme, we also re-advertised areas where licences became available due to failure to launch, as well as areas that had previously attracted no applications.
- 2.6 To date, we have awarded 157 SSDAB licences (excluding those subsequently revoked for failing to launch), of which 112 multiplexes are now operational, carrying a diverse range of C-DSP and DSP radio services.⁵
- 2.7 As set out in our February 2026 Consultation, the current SSDAB licensing programme has now drawn to a close. We are now considering our strategic priorities for radio broadcast licensing over the short-to-medium term. We consider that a number of emerging factors will impact our future approach to radio licensing, and we have explored the implications of these when developing our strategy.

Audience trends

- 2.8 The way audiences listen to radio is changing. While radio remains popular and continues to play an important role across the UK, its audience overall is skewed towards an older demographic. However, these trends vary by type of station, broadcaster and brand.
- 2.9 Ofcom's 2025 *Audio Listening in the UK* report outlines the latest research into audio listening habits. For audiences aged 55+ music radio is the number one audio type used each week (64%), speech radio is the third most popular for the same age group (37%), while younger age groups use a mixture of online music services and music radio.⁶
- 2.10 According to RAJAR (the industry body responsible for measuring radio audiences in the UK), in the second quarter of 2026, 51.1 million adults or 87% of adults (15+) listened to the radio each week, with listeners spending an average of 20.3 hours listening to live radio per week.⁷
- 2.11 DAB remains the most used platform for listening accounting for 43% of consumption. AM/FM is still significant with a quarter of listeners turning to analogue platforms.
- 2.12 As highlighted by the most recent RAJAR report, commercial radio continues to hold a majority share of all radio listening hours, with the market remaining resilient in the face of increased competition from streaming and other audio services.⁸ Overall, around three quarters of radio listening is now through digital platforms, including DAB as well as an

³ [See the outcome of this round of licensing on the Ofcom website](#)

⁴ Ofcom, 2026. [Small-scale DAB nationwide roll out success.](#)

⁵ Ofcom, 2024. [Small-scale multiplex applications and awards.](#)

⁶ Ofcom, 2025. [Audio Listening in the UK 2025.](#) Base: All respondents (3,484). Percentages refer to average weekly reach of each audio type in each age group.

⁷ RAJAR, 2026. [Slide 1.](#)

⁸ RAJAR, 2026. [Slide 1.](#)

increase in the use of smart speakers, websites and apps.⁹ Commercial radio is also considering how it responds to wider challenges, such as the impacts the sector could face following the outcome of the UK Government's green paper on the strategic direction for UK media.¹⁰ The UK Government also announced its Radio Review in February 2026, focusing on future scenarios for the consumption of UK radio and audio content and the impact of these scenarios on current and future distribution strategies, with recommendations from the review expected by the end of 2026.¹¹

- 2.13 The community radio sector remains an important and well-established part of the UK broadcasting landscape, delivering locally focused programming and social gain to the communities served. The sector has continued to grow and evolve in recent years, supported by the rollout of small-scale DAB multiplexes, which have expanded opportunities for digital broadcasting, while FM services remain important for many stations and their audiences. Recent regulatory and legislative changes have sought to provide greater flexibility for the sector through Key Commitment simplification, the relaxation of most funding restrictions and licence extension opportunities for a further ten-year period. At the same time, stakeholders continue to highlight the ongoing challenges related to digital carriage costs, coverage, and the importance of analogue broadcasting.

Spectrum availability

- 2.14 Ofcom is responsible for managing the UK's radio frequency spectrum to ensure this finite national resource meets the needs of a wide variety of services, applications and users.
- 2.15 Spectrum usage and demand continues to increase, meaning the amount of clear spectrum has generally diminished over time and is therefore significantly limited in some locations. In the case of broadcast radio, there is no more capacity for additional national FM radio services, nor for wide area services in most areas. However, more localised opportunities may exist to allow for services to fit into 'gaps' between existing stations without a risk of causing interference.
- 2.16 DAB services face similar spectrum challenges, with no availability for additional national DAB multiplexes and limited opportunities for new local multiplexes. There is some spectrum available for SSDAB in areas where we have not previously advertised multiplexes. Some further opportunities may exist where licences have not been applied for, have not proceeded to launch, or where they provided less coverage than was anticipated when they were originally advertised.

Our proposed strategy

- 2.17 As set out in our February 2026 Consultation, we have considered the contextual factors above, our existing broadcast licensing work and the resourcing and capacity of both our licensing and spectrum engineering teams.

⁹ RAJAR, 2026. [Slide 1](#).

¹⁰ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/watch-this-space-a-new-strategic-direction-for-uk-media-green-paper-and-public-consultation/watch-this-space-a-new-strategic-direction-for-uk-media-green-paper-and-public-consultation>.

¹¹ UK Parliament, 2026. [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).

- 2.18 As part of our analysis, we have also thoroughly considered the impacts of our decisions on industry stakeholders, including through the responses received as part of our consultation process. In finalising our priorities, we have sought to minimise any potential negative impacts as far as possible while maximising the benefits for audiences.
- 2.19 We have also considered our duties and powers in relation to radio broadcast licensing, including the requirement to secure the optimal use of spectrum and the impact of our decisions, in Annexes 1 and 2.
- 2.20 Taken together, these considerations have enabled us to finalise our short-to-medium term priorities for broadcast radio licensing to meet the needs of audiences within our available resources. Our final decisions are set out in Section 3.

3. Responses to our consultation and Ofcom's decisions

- 3.1 In our February 2026 Consultation we outlined our proposed broadcast licensing priorities for the short-to-medium term. As noted above, we received 67 responses from a wide variety of stakeholders. The non-confidential versions of their responses have been published alongside this Statement.
- 3.2 Our February 2026 Consultation set out a number of broad questions on the prioritisation of our broadcast licensing activity. As a result, responses were similarly wide-ranging. We have therefore structured our response and decisions by theme, rather than by consultation question, to help explain our decisions.
- 3.3 In each section below, we summarise stakeholder views by theme and set out our responses and final decisions. In reaching these decisions, we have taken into account all responses and our relevant statutory duties as set out in Annex 1.

Analogue radio and our licensing approach

Platform variety/Broadcasting landscape

What we said

- 3.4 In our February 2026 Consultation we outlined the types of broadcast radio services licensed by Ofcom in the UK, including analogue services (FM and AM), DAB and RSLs.¹² We also outlined the evolving broadcast radio landscape, noting the expansion from traditional analogue and commercial services to online-only outlets, as well as the increasing consumption of regulated services via applications such as BBC Sounds and Radioplayer. This reflects the diverse range of platforms through which radio content is currently accessed.
- 3.5 We highlighted the significant growth of the community radio sector in recent years, with most services operating on FM, alongside a rising number broadcasting on DAB.
- 3.6 Ofcom noted the decline in AM radio stations and overall listening. We recognised that FM is performing more strongly than AM but also that listening figures are expected to decline over the longer term and DAB is more closely aligned with current and future developments in listening.

What respondents said

- 3.7 A large number of respondents agreed with our assessment of the broadcast licensing landscape,¹³ particularly in the context of digital radio being aligned with changing listening habits,¹⁴ decline in AM¹⁵ and increase in how audio content can be accessed due to the

¹² Ofcom, 2026. [Consultation on Ofcom's proposed strategic approach to broadcast radio licensing](#).

¹³ Rutford and Stamford Sound CIC, p.1-2; Muxnet Ltd, p.1; Muxnet UK, p.2; Radiocentre Ltd, p.3; MuxCo Ltd, p.1; 10 Radio, p.2; Phonic FM/ ExeDab, p.3; Bauer Media Audio UK, p.3.

¹⁴ Bristol Digital Radio CIC, p.1.

¹⁵ Lawrence Galkoff Associates Ltd, p.7.

expansion of DAB services and the convenience of listening to podcasts, music streaming services and other online content.¹⁶

- 3.8 A large number of respondents supported the continued provision of a range of platforms (including DAB, FM and online streaming) in order to maximise audience access.¹⁷ They noted that in certain underserved areas, or where coverage is limited, listeners may rely on FM and AM services due to a lack of access to DAB. In this context, maintaining multiple delivery platforms was considered necessary to ensure widespread availability.¹⁸
- 3.9 Others emphasised that “sufficient provision” for audiences should not be assessed solely by the number of platforms available.¹⁹ Instead, some respondents highlighted that the quality, reliability and overall value of radio services to local communities are more important than the quantity of platforms or the underlying technology. One respondent suggested that “Though it is good to increase the number of services overall, especially in poorly served rural areas, it is quality rather than quantity that matters.”²⁰
- 3.10 It was also noted by a small number of respondents that, while Ofcom’s analysis of licence types (set out in Annex A1 of the February 2026 Consultation) was accurate for the short-to-medium term, “provision must be made to adapt as new technology further changes the way broadcasting is delivered.”²¹ Several respondents noted that Ofcom should ensure its regulatory approach keeps pace with developments, [redacted]²² Bauer Media Audio UK suggested that Ofcom should provide ongoing assessment of the cumulative market impact, particularly on existing local and regional multiplexes.²³
- 3.11 A small number of respondents expressed concerns regarding [redacted]²⁴ [redacted]²⁵.

Our response

- 3.12 Ofcom notes the broad agreement with its assessment of the current broadcast landscape and the role of DAB as a platform aligned with evolving listening habits.
- 3.13 We also recognise the concerns raised by some respondents regarding the importance of maintaining a mix of delivery platforms, particularly in areas with limited coverage or in circumstances where access to digital services may be constrained. We note that our decision includes continuing to provide support for incumbent licensed services, across all platforms.
- 3.14 While our overall position remains that the long-term direction of travel is towards digital platforms, we consider it important that any future proposals continue to take account of coverage, resilience and audience needs.

¹⁶ J Peter Wilson, p.3.

¹⁷ SWU.FM, p.2-3; Local DAB Association, p.4; Trossachs Radio CIC, p.1; Coast Community Radio and Media CIC, p.4-5.

¹⁸ Trossachs Radio CIC, p.2; SWU.FM, p.2; Alicia Kearns MP, p.2; Coast Community Radio and Media CIC, p.2 and 5.

¹⁹ Affinity Media NE CIC, p.3.

²⁰ Lucinda Guy, p.1.

²¹ Phonic FM/ ExeDab, p.2.

²² [redacted]

²³ Bauer Media Audio UK, p.1.

²⁴ [redacted]

²⁵ [redacted]

- 3.15 We will therefore continue to monitor developments in technology, listening behaviour and access and will keep our regulatory approach under review to ensure it remains appropriate and proportionate.

Community FM

What we said

- 3.16 In our February 2026 Consultation we proposed to prioritise applications for renewals and extensions for community analogue licences as well as applications from existing community analogue licensees for technical changes, including coverage improvements and extensions.
- 3.17 We also explained that community radio accounts for the largest number of individual FM licences. These services are required by statute to provide tangible benefits to the communities they serve through the provision of social gain and therefore play an important role in providing a voice to local communities across the UK.²⁶ However, the availability of these services on DAB is, in some cases, a challenge due to the lack of a local SSDAB multiplex or because carriage on local commercial multiplexes is financially unviable. We also noted that rural areas are also less likely to be served with fast broadband connectivity.
- 3.18 Given the technological and financial challenges, particularly in relation to DAB in rural areas and notwithstanding the changes in audience habits, analogue services are clearly still valued by certain population groups and communities. We therefore proposed the following in our February 2026 Consultation:
- a) that we would consider inviting applications for new community radio FM licences; and
 - b) that we would provide continued support of incumbent analogue community radio licensees through the ongoing consideration of applications for:
 - i. “duration” extensions to licences; and
 - ii. technical changes including coverage improvements and extensions to services in order to better serve audiences within their locality.

What respondents said

- 3.19 A significant majority of respondents welcomed Ofcom’s proposals,²⁷ particularly considerations for a new round of FM community radio licensing,²⁸ [redacted]²⁹ Respondents pointed to rural areas,³⁰ towns/[redacted]³¹ with patchy DAB or mobile coverage and

²⁶ Ofcom, 2026. [Consultation on Ofcom’s proposed strategic approach to broadcast radio licensing](#) p.9.

²⁷ Boom Radio Ltd, p.6; [redacted]; [redacted]; Phonic FM/ExeDab, p.2; Red Army Group Ltd, p.1; MuxCo, p.1; Muxnet, p.1 ; Dee Radio Group, p.1; Local DAB Association appendix, p.1 ; MuxNet, p.1; Tyneside Community Digital, Northumberland Community Digital CIC, Durham Digital, p.1; Station House Media Unit, p.1; 10 Radio p1; Bauer Media, p.1; Paul Groves, p.1; Caithness FM, p.2; East London Radio, p.2; U.DAB, p.1; Better Media, p.1; [redacted]

²⁸ [redacted]; Community Media Association, pp.1, 5; [redacted]; Lawrence Galkoff Associates, p.1; Rutland and Stamford Sound CIC, p.1; Hot Radio, p.1; UK Community Media Network (UKCRN), p.1; Soundz FM, p.3; Radio Utsav, p.1; Alicia Kearns MP, p.1; Coast Community Radio and Media CIC, p.2; SWU.FM, p.2; Peter Wilson, p.2; [redacted]

²⁹ [redacted]

³⁰ Alicia Kearns MP, p.1; Coast Community Radio and Media CIC, p.2.

³¹ Soundz FM, p.2.

communities that rely on older radios or older vehicles as examples where FM may still deliver clear audience benefit.

- 3.20 Mixed views were received in relation to community analogue improvements and extensions. Some agreed with supporting services in this respect, noting the importance that “coverage particularly in rural areas remains at a minimum the same but where possible improved”³² and [§<]³³ Others asserted that improvements and extensions should not be prioritised in areas with strong DAB coverage,³⁴ particularly “given the declining relevance of analogue platforms from an audience perspective.”³⁵ Nation Broadcasting stated, “we do not believe that existing community services should be allowed to expand so substantially that their coverage area meaningfully mirrors licenced areas of commercial services.”³⁶
- 3.21 It was highlighted that “as frequencies become more and more congested it is pertinent to look at opportunities for the roll out, redistribution and or increased allocations in this area”.³⁷ Meanwhile, [§<]³⁸ [§<]³⁹
- 3.22 A range of reasons were offered in support for priorities in relation to Community FM. These included the social gain benefits,⁴⁰ and [§<]⁴¹ One stakeholder asserted that ongoing support for FM is crucial for its longevity and sustainability of incumbent services.⁴²
- 3.23 Some stakeholders explained that the availability of new licences will benefit communities in areas that are underserved by SSDAB and where local topography restricts coverage.⁴³ Trossachs Radio CIC noted, “It is very refreshing to hear Ofcom very much wanting to help not-for-profit organisations such as ourselves with the prospect of reaching our target audiences with valuable local information.”⁴⁴ Challenges in relation to digital access were also echoed by respondents like SWU who emphasised “the continued importance of maintaining a viable pathway for community FM licensing” as it “remains a critical access point for local audiences, particularly those who are underserved by digital platforms”.⁴⁵
- 3.24 A number of stakeholders further suggested that support is needed to better serve linguistic minorities and that licences should take minority language provision into account.⁴⁶ Radio Utsav suggested that Ofcom should engage further with RAJAR to “prevent undercounting of minority-language listeners”, further noting that older audiences rely on FM for accessibility and affordability purposes. More broadly, Radio Utsav expressed support for additional community radio FM licensing, noting that SSDAB

³² 10 Radio, p.1.

³³ [§<]

³⁴ Lawrence Gallkoff Associates Ltd, p.1.

³⁵ Hot Radio, p.2.

³⁶ Nation Broadcasting, p.1.

³⁷ Radio Sangam, p.1.

³⁸ [§<]

³⁹ DAEPAC; p.1.

⁴⁰ Soundz FM, p.3; [§<]

⁴¹ [§<]

⁴² UK Community Radio Network, p.3.

⁴³ [§<]; Trossachs Radio CIC, p.1; Coast Community Radio and Media CIC, p.1;

⁴⁴ Trossachs Radio CIC, p.2.

⁴⁵ SWU.FM., p.1.

⁴⁶ [§<]; Radio Utsav, p.1.

multiplex coverage does not always align with the geographic areas where minority language communities are concentrated.⁴⁷

- 3.25 It was suggested that [redacted]⁴⁸ and other stakeholders also suggested a similar approach.⁴⁹ However, one stakeholder felt that reapplying for a surrendered FM licence should not be permitted without first determining whether sustainable carriage on a small-scale multiplex to promote its commercial stability.⁵⁰ Additional suggestions for prioritisation included areas where demand for new services has been expressed,⁵¹ is unserved so in need of local provision;⁵² or tactically where digital is not viable.⁵³ There was also opposition to prioritising rural areas⁵⁴ and those well-served by small-scale.⁵⁵
- 3.26 Radiocentre requested that Ofcom consider the impact of overlapping community radio services competing with small commercial radio services, stating “Ofcom should continue to give consideration to a report commissioned by Radiocentre in 2018 that highlighted how some of the smallest commercial radio stations can be placed at real risk when less dutiful, or unduly competitive, community stations are launched in their areas”.⁵⁶
- 3.27 However, while we received overwhelming support for inviting applications for new FM community radio licensing as set out in paragraph 3.19, we also received a range of suggestions from stakeholders surrounding the process Ofcom would follow. These included: establishing a policy for the revocation of services that have been off-air to allow their re-advertisement;⁵⁷ ad-hoc and on demand licensing as opposed to application rounds;⁵⁸ spectrum assessment⁵⁹ [redacted];⁶⁰ and transparency in relation to timetables, criteria and regulatory expectations.⁶¹ It was further suggested that: the licensing and ongoing regulation of services should be responsive to “technological advances and the way broadcasting is delivered”⁶² and [redacted];⁶³ any Invitation to Apply (ITA) should enable licensed areas to exceed five kilometres to encompass urban areas;⁶⁴ and financial implications of technical change requests on community radio services should be considered.⁶⁵
- 3.28 While supporting Ofcom’s general position, the Community Media Association also called for more regulatory intervention to support community radio service providers in the face of significant challenges. For example, they called for Ofcom to: intervene in the prices being charged for community radio operators from PRS/PPL; offer more opportunities for

⁴⁷ Radio Utsav, p.3.

⁴⁸ [redacted]

⁴⁹ UK Community Radio Network, p.2; [redacted]; Better Media, p.6-7; Radio Caroline, p.1

⁵⁰ Leicester Digital Partnership CIC, p.8.

⁵¹ [redacted]; UK Community Radio Network, p.2; Affinity Media NE CIC, p.8.

⁵² Affinity Media NE CIC, p.8.

⁵³ Muxnet UK, p.2; MuxCo, p.1.

⁵⁴ Maxxwave, p.7.

⁵⁵ Lawrence Galkoff Associates Ltd, p.1; Hot Radio, p.1.

⁵⁶ Radiocentre Ltd, p.2.

⁵⁷ [redacted]; Maxxwave Ltd, appendix; Better Media, p.8.

⁵⁸ Lucinda Guy, p.1; UK Community Radio Network, p.2; Community Media Association, p.4; Better Media, p.1.

⁵⁹ Maxxwave Ltd, appendix; Better Media, p.3; Leicester Digital Partnership CIC, p.10.

⁶⁰ [redacted]; [redacted]

⁶¹ Affinity Media NE CIC, p.2; Maxxwave Ltd, appendix; Better Media, p.1; Radio Utsav, p.5; [redacted]

⁶² Phonic FM/ExeDab, p.1.

⁶³ [redacted]

⁶⁴ [redacted]

⁶⁵ 10 Radio, p.1.

RSLs on FM to test the market; simplify licensing processes; and provide more certainty and financial support for the sector (also echoed by Radio Sangam). Additional areas of focus and alternative approaches proposed by other respondents included [redacted]⁶⁶ and commissioning of independent research into listenership⁶⁷ and what ‘community’ means.⁶⁸

3.29 [redacted]⁶⁹

3.30 [redacted]⁷⁰

3.31 Some respondents raised issues regarding Ofcom’s approach to licensing RSLs. Infocus Digital Media Ltd, on behalf of a range of organisations, and an individual suggested that FM RSLs should only be issued in areas without an available SSDAB multiplex.⁷¹ The individual argued that FM RSLs are a highly inefficient use of spectrum and that ending them could make more spectrum available for community FM. Infocus Digital Media Ltd also suggested that restricting RSL licensing in areas served by SSDAB would support SSDAB sustainability. Conversely, it was noted in the responses to the Community Media Association survey that more RSLs should be offered to allow community radio stations to test the market.⁷²

Our response

3.32 We recognise the strength of stakeholder interest in new FM community radio licensing, noting the importance of community radio and the range of benefits these services bring to the communities they serve across geographic areas, cultural and minority language groups and in rural communities. We also recognise that, for some communities, FM remains the simplest and most reliable way to receive a local service, especially where DAB, mobile or broadband coverage is limited or where listeners continue to use FM radios in homes and vehicles. We have therefore concluded that completing a further round of FM community radio licensing is likely to have considerable benefit to audiences.

3.33 Ofcom’s proposal to complete more FM community radio licensing was supported by the significant majority of stakeholders who engaged with this specific consultation question.

3.34 We are cognisant of the responses which called on Ofcom to avoid treating FM as a legacy platform for community radio and to recognise that local listening patterns can differ from national listening trends. We also acknowledge the role that minority language provision enabled by FM licensing plays in supporting communities to access radio broadcasting in their preferred language and the social cohesion benefits of this availability.

3.35 As a result, we intend to continue with the proposals set out in the consultation and will complete an FM community radio licensing process within our short-to-medium-term priorities.

3.36 Having considered the responses provided, we have decided that rather than proceed to invite applications for FM community radio licences alongside this Statement as indicated in our consultation, we will instead publish a call for formal Expressions of Interest (EoI) alongside this Statement to allow stakeholders to indicate their interest in applying for a FM

⁶⁶ Maxxwave, p.11.

⁶⁷ UK Community Radio Network, p.4.

⁶⁸ Radio Sangam, p.2.

⁶⁹ [redacted]

⁷⁰ [redacted]

⁷¹ Infocus Digital Media Ltd, p.1; Prof Paul Groves, p.1.

⁷² Community Media Association Confidential Appendices, p.8.

community radio licence before inviting applications. As with previous community radio licensing rounds, applications for licences in a given area will only be invited if Ofcom has received an Eol for a licence in that area.

- 3.37 The Eol process will enable Ofcom to gauge the levels of demand for FM community radio licences, the audience benefits of prioritising application invitations in certain areas and allow us to plan our resources and the invitation process to ensure we can appropriately meet demand alongside our other priorities set out in this Statement.
- 3.38 We do not envisage that any technical analysis focused on the availability of spectrum will be completed at this stage. So that Ofcom can manage its resources as efficiently as possible and not waste resources carrying out analysis for areas in which applications have not been received, technical analysis will only be completed once we have received the formal applications following the ITA⁷³ process to determine whether a suitable frequency exists.
- 3.39 Should Ofcom decide to invite an application for a FM licence following the receipt of an Eol, it does not automatically guarantee that a licence will be granted; as mentioned above Ofcom will still need to determine whether a suitable frequency exists and assess the full application against the statutory criteria for community radio licences as set out in the Community Radio Order 2025 and other relevant legislation.
- 3.40 The Eol process will be open for a period of six weeks, and we have published the formal Call for expressions of interest on the Ofcom website today alongside this Statement.⁷⁴ Following this, we will review the Eol received and publish an ITA in due course. The ITA will include detailed information regarding the process we will follow in the licensing rounds, including information about timeframes and how we envisage prioritising applications.
- 3.41 Ofcom is not restricting the submission of an Eol based on the location of the proposed service. However, we will prioritise our assessment of applications taking into account the following criteria:
- a) areas unserved⁷⁵ by both an existing analogue community radio licence and by the coverage of a SSDAB multiplex;
 - b) areas where existing analogue community radio exists, but is unserved by a SSDAB multiplex;
 - c) areas where a suitable frequency is likely to exist; and
 - d) previously surrendered licensed areas.
- 3.42 For the avoidance of doubt, Ofcom will be managing the round of licensing in line with our processes and procedures set out both in legislation and in our guidance notes. The

⁷³ An Invitation to Apply is the formal document published by Ofcom that opens a community radio licensing round and invites applications for licences in specified areas. It sets out the areas for which applications are being accepted, the application requirements and timetable and other relevant information for prospective applicants.

⁷⁴ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/analogue-radio/ofcoms-proposed-strategic-approach-to-broadcast-radio-licensing>

⁷⁵ In this context (and for the remaining criteria in subsequent bullet points), we will assess ‘unserved’ from the perspective of whether the proposed transmitter location for the new community radio licence would be within the coverage of either a) an existing community radio licence, and b) within the coverage of a SSDAB multiplex coverage area, or proposed coverage of a SSDAB multiplex which is due to launch when the community radio licence is advertised.

guidance notes have been updated following the implementation of the 2025 Community Radio Order and will be published alongside this Statement.

- 3.43 We note that some respondents called on Ofcom to not limit itself to a one-off round of FM licensing. Instead, respondents called on Ofcom to complete a continuous or ‘on-demand’ process to license FM community radio services where there is demand. One respondent referenced the previous localised round of community radio licensing completed by Ofcom in Northampton in 2020 to demonstrate that this approach is possible.⁷⁶
- 3.44 Others called for Ofcom to have a process of revocation of licences which have not been broadcasting for a period of time and immediately readvertise them outside of the licensing round.⁷⁷ We do not agree that this should be a priority for Ofcom in the short-medium term. The purpose of running rounds of licensing as opposed to a continuous or ad hoc licensing process is, in part, to ensure Ofcom can plan and manage the demand alongside its available resources, other priorities and spectrum planning responsibilities. It takes a significant amount of resource to complete an isolated round of licensing. Planning rounds allows us to plan and dedicate resources to deliver the required outcome, which would be much less efficient with a continuous or ad hoc process. We therefore do not agree that Ofcom should depart from its proposal to run a round of analogue licensing, rather than committing to ad hoc licensing rounds following the revocation of the licence. More detail regarding our plans to complete rounds will be published alongside an ITA once we have completed the EoI phase.
- 3.45 The licensing process in Northampton, referenced above, was carried out in exceptional circumstances, specifically because the delay to the planned roll-out of SSDAB multiplex licensing caused by the global pandemic freed up Ofcom resources to manage this specific round. We do not envisage having resourcing capacity in the future to manage ad-hoc licensing rounds alongside other work priorities. For this reason, our conclusion is that we are committed to running opportunities for FM community radio licences within the confines of a targeted licensing round and we will not be readvertising licences in the short-to-medium term which are either surrendered or revoked. As such, while we will consider EoIs submitted in response to the invitation published alongside this Statement for frequencies which have previously been surrendered or revoked to date, we do not envisage completing ad hoc licensing rounds to replace licences which have been surrendered or revoked in future (i.e. once the current round has concluded).
- 3.46 For services which have been off-air for a period of time, we will continue with our existing approach to liaise with the relevant licensee and take appropriate action. If appropriate, we can take enforcement action in line with our General Procedures for investigating breaches of broadcast licences,⁷⁸ including the administrative priorities set out in the procedures. If appropriate, we can also revoke licences in line with the procedure set out in the Procedures for the consideration of a statutory sanction in breaches of broadcast licences.⁷⁹ One individual commented that Ofcom’s regulatory approach was too rigid and that community radio operators should be provided with opportunities to migrate or transfer to a small commercial radio licence. However, the licensing frameworks for analogue

⁷⁶ Maxxwave, p.6.

⁷⁷ Community Media Association, pp. 15-16; Better Media, pp.8-9.

⁷⁸ Ofcom’s [General procedures for investigating breaches of broadcast licences](#), published June 2025.

⁷⁹ [Procedures for the consideration of statutory sanctions in breaches of broadcast licences](#).

community and commercial licences are completely separate and there is no legislative process to allow for such a transfer of the licence.

- 3.47 The process we have decided to follow will prioritise applications for community radio licences based on where we consider there is likely to be most benefit to audiences. We consider this is in areas which currently have no access to community radio services either via the provision of analogue services or via SSDAB multiplexes. However, we will not necessarily discount applications for FM licences in more urban areas, but do note that these will be a lesser priority within the licensing round.
- 3.48 Further, the prioritisation exercise Ofcom will complete following the publication of this Statement will allow Ofcom to understand the levels of interest in each proposed area of work and determine the invitation of specific applications based on the availability of resources based on demand.
- 3.49 We acknowledge that having an analogue community radio licence offers providers more clarity and independence, given their ability to manage their own transmission sites when compared to broadcasting on a digital multiplex.
- 3.50 Some respondents commented on the future licensing of RSLs. Some suggested that FM RSLs should not be licensed where an SSDAB multiplex is available, either to preserve spectrum for community FM licensing or to support the sustainability of SSDAB. Another respondent suggested that more RSL opportunities should be available to allow community services to test audience demand. While RSL licensing was not within the scope of this consultation, we noted in our proposed 2026/27 workplan that we intend to continue issuing, managing and maintaining these licences. We also consulted on our approach to restricted service licensing in 2022.⁸⁰ Having considered the points raised, we do not currently consider that there is sufficient evidence to justify revisiting that approach. We continue to consider that FM RSLs can be appropriate where a service is intended for a very small area or a short-term use. This may include community-based services, such as hospital radio, where the wider coverage area offered by SSDAB may not be suitable.
- 3.51 One respondent called on Ofcom to be more flexible in relation to C-DSP licensees being able to access reserved capacity within the ‘first adjacent’ SSDAB multiplex to their existing multiplex. We note that, unlike analogue community radio, an entity can hold multiple C-DSP licences. In this scenario, a C-DSP licensee can apply to Ofcom for a secondary C-DSP licence to simulcast the content being broadcast in their ‘home’ area, so long as they can demonstrate the extension of social gain initiatives would apply (which has been applied by a number of existing services).
- 3.52 Some responses called on Ofcom to ensure that small commercial radio providers were protected from competition from prospective community radio applications seeking to overlap with these services. Previously, Ofcom was required by the Community Radio Order 2004 to assess the economic effect of prospective overlapping community radio operators on any other local service when considering applications. However, the Community Radio Order 2025 (“CRO25”) removed this specific requirement and instead focuses on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria and characteristics of a community radio service.⁸¹ As with previous rounds of analogue community radio licensing, we intend to

⁸⁰ Ofcom, 2022. [Statement: Restricted services – proposals to increase available spectrum and simplify our approach to licensing.](#)

⁸¹ [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2025/9780348266900/The Community Radio Order 2025](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2025/9780348266900/The%20Community%20Radio%20Order%202025)

publish redacted versions of each application on the Ofcom website to allow interested stakeholders to make their representations.

- 3.53 The CRO25 does, however, require Ofcom to continue to implement updated funding restrictions on proposed community radio services which overlap with a relevant local commercial radio licence.⁸²
- 3.54 In response to the concerns raised that coverage extensions for community radio could resulting in coverage areas comparable to that of commercial radio services, we would like to remind stakeholders that Ofcom can authorise an extension to a licensed area into an adjoining area or locality only if it would not result in a significant increase in the licensed area, or if Ofcom considers that the increase in the licensed area is justifiable in the exceptional circumstances of the case.⁸³ When applying this test, Ofcom takes into account a range of factors, including the original licensed position of the service, whether the extension can be considered as significant and the potential impact on neighbouring services. All applications are published and stakeholders are also given the opportunity to provide comments on proposals.
- 3.55 In relation to some responses suggesting that Ofcom should go further than we proposed in the consultation (such as creating new community radio licensing which allow for wider coverage and creating a pathway for community radio licences to transition to commercial radio licences or allowing amateur radio licensees to broadcast community radio services), these suggestions would require legislative amendments and as such, are matters for Government. We consider that the short-to-medium term prioritisation proposals set out in this Statement will allow Ofcom to facilitate the provision of sufficient radio services to ensure audiences are adequately served through a plurality of radio services. However, we will note, with interest, the outcome of the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (“DCMS”)’s Radio Review and ensure our longer-term processes and priorities are aligned with that Review as appropriate.
- 3.56 We also note that some responses called on Ofcom to complete more research (on topics such as the affordability of radio receivers, community radio listenership and research into the definition of what a community is) to support licensing decisions. We consider additional research is not necessary at this stage in order to determine our short-to-medium term priorities. We have passed these ideas to Ofcom’s research team for consideration. Another response suggested that Ofcom should modernise its systems/database to allow a ‘live’ interrogation of data via the Ofcom website. Ofcom is undertaking system development work, though this is likely to take time to build and roll-out to cover licence types included in this section.
- 3.57 We note the concern from some stakeholders reflecting the commercial pressures faced by community radio services, especially when existing equipment reaches end of life and capital investment is required either to maintain existing coverage or because the service wishes to expand to meet audience demand. Commercial decisions of this nature are matters for stakeholders to consider and decide the best way in order to maximise its revenue to support capital expenditure. However, stakeholders may wish to review

⁸² Community Radio Order 2025 (SI 2025/160), Article 5 and Schedule 1, which modify section 105 of the Broadcasting Act 1990. Section 105(2), as modified, requires Ofcom to include licence conditions relating to advertising and sponsorship income where a community radio service overlaps with a "relevant local licence".

⁸³ Sections 106(4) – (5) BA 1990

Ofcom's updated guidance notes for the Community Radio Fund⁸⁴ which sets out the changes Ofcom has implemented for the next round of community radio funding. This includes opportunities for analogue community radio licensees which have been broadcasting for 10 years or more to apply for new equipment, which has previously been out of scope. Applications are subject to eligibility criteria and funds must be spent in accordance with the relevant grant agreement.

- 3.58 In our February 2026 Consultation we did not specify every way we currently support existing analogue community radio licences, such as continuing to consider applications for Key Commitment variations and other licensing administrations tasks. For the avoidance of doubt, we will continue to respond to these requests in accordance with existing practices and on a case-by-case basis.
- 3.59 The same is true for RSLs; we will continue to accept applications for Establishment and Event Restricted Service Licences in line with our existing policy and guidance notes.
- 3.60 We note some stakeholders' concerns around the inability to meet the needs of some under-served communities, including the suggestion that Ofcom engages with RAJAR on this issue. However, RAJAR is an independent industry-run audience measurement body and Ofcom has no role in its survey design. Therefore, any concerns about how audiences are reflected in RAJAR data are best raised directly with RAJAR, including through subscription with RAJAR and the potential for inclusion in their survey.

Community AM

What we said

- 3.61 In our February 2026 Consultation we did not include the provision of new opportunities for AM community radio licensing in our list of proposed priorities, given the challenges faced by AM broadcasters (such as the high operating costs associated with maintaining the AM transmission infrastructure).
- 3.62 For existing AM licences, we said that we would continue to accept and prioritise applications for duration extensions and technical changes.

What respondents said

- 3.63 Ofcom received no consultation responses supporting our proposed approach to no longer license new AM radio services.
- 3.64 Radio Caroline, an existing AM community radio licensee, expressed an interest in making an application for a technical change, supported by a response from Kevin Davies.⁸⁵
- 3.65 Radio Caroline's response challenged some of the positions we set out regarding AM in the consultation. Specifically, Radio Caroline said "we firmly believe that it [a sunset date for AM broadcasting] should be for the listeners to decide which technology is to be used, not the whim of a government or industry pressure group".⁸⁶ Their response also set out its response to high energy consumption of AM transmission, explaining their use of solar power to increase energy efficiency with their broadcasts, while also setting out that their "audience is continuously growing".⁸⁷ Radio Caroline also called on Ofcom to consider

⁸⁴ Ofcom, 2026. [Community Radio Fund](#).

⁸⁵ Radio Caroline, p.4; Kevin Davis, p.1.

⁸⁶ Radio Caroline, p.1.

⁸⁷ Radio Caroline, p.1.

creating new “class” of community radio licence, such as a regional licence offering which would allow a licensee to broadcast to a wider audience.⁸⁸

3.66 Cornwall Radio called on Ofcom to continue to license AM services where there is a need for AM in comparison to DAB or FM, providing correspondence to explain why the use of AM in the area of Cornwall was required due to topographical and atmospheric conditions.⁸⁹

3.67 While stakeholder interest in this area was significantly lower than for FM, a number of respondents argued that Ofcom should not unnecessarily restrict access to AM spectrum and it should not be switched off. Several highlighted AM’s ability to reach dispersed communities and questioned whether unused spectrum should remain unavailable where credible demand exists.⁹⁰ Some respondents also emphasised resilience and public-value arguments, suggesting that any discussion focused on the switch-off of AM services to be premature.

Our response

3.68 Evidence continues to demonstrate declining AM listening and significant infrastructure challenges. However, as set out in the section above, some stakeholders suggested that there may still be circumstances where an AM service could provide public value and audience benefits.

3.69 Ofcom will not generally prioritise the licensing of new services to broadcast on AM because we consider that, in general, audiences would be best served by FM or DAB services. We will, however, consider whether there may be exceptional circumstances in which it may be appropriate to grant an AM community radio licence as part of the EoI process outlined in section 1 above. An EoI for a new AM service will require the stakeholder to set out additional information to make the case for a new licence broadcasting on AM. In reaching this decision, we have taken account of the challenges facing the sustainability of AM services.

3.70 The additional information to be provided by prospective AM community radio applicants when they submit an EoI to Ofcom is as follows:

- a) A detailed business plan, providing sufficient information to explain how the stakeholder will manage the financial challenges surrounding AM transmission (such as the high operating costs as referenced in paragraph 3.61). This business plan should also include evidence of engagement with technical consultants and/or transmitter sites to enable Ofcom to assess whether the proposal would likely be financially viable.
- a) A detailed explanation of why the stakeholder would prefer AM over DAB and/or FM. This should specifically detail the reasons (either technological or topographical, for example) why audiences would be better served using AM technology over more reliable and cost-effective options.

3.71 Stakeholders should note that, following the receipt of EoIs, Ofcom will only consider inviting applications for AM services in exceptional circumstances, should we consider that the justifications provided in the EoI are well-founded. We will not seek to engage in significant clarifications as part of the EoI process, so prospective AM licensees should

⁸⁸ Radio Caroline, p.5.

⁸⁹ Cornwall Radio, via email.

⁹⁰ Better Media, p.5; Lucinda Guy, pp.2 -3; Radio Utsav, p.4; Ray Anderson/UKGM, p.2; Trossachs Radio CIC, p.1; [3<]; Maxxwave, pp.14-15.

endeavour to provide Ofcom with as much information as possible to allow us to consider the proposed justification. Additionally, should Ofcom decide to invite an application for an AM licence based on the information provided at the EoI stage of the process, it does not guarantee that a licence will be granted; Ofcom will still need to carry out technical analysis to see if there is available spectrum and assess the full application against the statutory criteria for community radio licences as set out in the Community Radio Order 2025 and other relevant legislation.

- 3.72 As set out in paragraphs 3.70 and 3.71, we would only consider licensing a new AM service if there is sufficient justification provided through the EoI process to demonstrate why AM is the only feasible option available, specifically focussed on how this would be a better option for audiences. Ofcom will not consider advertising an opportunity for an AM service as an alternative option in either a competition (i.e. two prospective applicants applying for one FM frequency in a specific location) or offering an AM frequency where there is no FM frequency available.
- 3.73 Some respondents raised concerns about a potential AM switch off, following reference in the last Digital Radio and Audio Review completed by the UK Government in October 2021. Any decision on analogue switch-off will be made by the Government and not by Ofcom.⁹¹
- 3.74 Ofcom recognises that services broadcasting on other platforms will have different experiences of popularity and effectiveness of platforms based on their own performance and delivery. The statistics regarding AM usage included in our consultation were intended to provide an overall snapshot of some of the challenges faced more generally by AM service providers rather than intending to demonstrate that this was the experience of all AM licensees. We note the suggestions presented by Radio Caroline that the current framework for community radio licences restricts how far analogue services can expand to meet audience demand.⁹² We note that changes to the definition and characteristics of community radio are a legislative matter for Parliament, which means that Ofcom is unable to create a new licence ‘class’ within the confines of community radio to allow certain broadcasters to expand their coverage.
- 3.75 With respect to AM community radio licences therefore, in the short-to-medium term, we have decided that we will continue to consider applications for technical changes for existing licences and consider licensing new AM services only in exceptional circumstances.

Commercial

What we said

- 3.76 In our February 2026 Consultation, we proposed to continue to support current licences but not provide any licensing opportunities for new local or national commercial radio services on FM or AM.
- 3.77 Commercial radio stations continue to account for the majority of live radio listening (55% of weekly hours).⁹³ However, in our February 2026 Consultation we acknowledged that a proportion of listeners continue to consume commercial radio via AM/FM radios and recognised that some opportunities for new commercial licences exist in more sparsely populated areas where demand has been lower. We also noted that financial viability may,

⁹¹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2026. [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament.](#)

⁹² Radio Caroline p.5.

⁹³ [Ofcom, Media Nations 2026.](#) p.73.

as a consequence of the rural locations where opportunities exist, be more challenging. Constraints on the amount of spectrum available may also make coverage of any new commercial FM services limited and result in interference to existing services. We also explained that we do not consider there has been significant audience demand for new commercial radio licences since Ofcom completed the last round of competitively awarded commercial radio licences in 2008. Finally, we anticipated that designing and consulting on a new licensing framework for commercial radio licences would take a significant amount of time.

- 3.78 In our February 2026 Consultation we therefore proposed not to include the offer of new local commercial analogue licences in our licensing priorities. We said that we are unable to make available any further new national broadcast licences in relation to FM services given the lack of spectrum availability and that new opportunities for national AM licences should not be a priority, predominantly because of declining audience listening figures on AM. Finally, we anticipated that designing and consulting on a new licensing framework for commercial radio licences would take a significant amount of time.
- 3.79 We considered there to be sufficient justification for Ofcom to continue to support incumbent analogue commercial radio licensees and proposed the ongoing consideration of applications for:
- a) “duration” renewals to licences; and
 - b) technical changes including coverage improvements and extensions to services in order to better serve audiences within their locality.

What respondents said

- 3.80 Ofcom received broad support for the proposals focused on commercial radio analogue licensing.
- 3.81 In its response, Radiocentre “agree in principle with Ofcom’s proposals”⁹⁴ [3<] and, similar to MuxCo Limited,⁹⁵ that the licensing priorities should also be considered alongside the outcome of the UK Government’s ongoing Radio Review.
- 3.82 Bauer Radio supported our proposal not to provide further opportunities for analogue commercial radio licences, stating that “there is no practical scope for additional commercial FM”. It also stated that there remains a need for continued licence stability and renewal options for commercial FM, a point reiterated by two confidential respondents. Similarly, Dee Radio Group confirmed support stating that “we would encourage Ofcom to consider FM coverage improvements for local commercial broadcasters alongside community broadcasters”.⁹⁶
- 3.83 Ofcom received two responses which argued that our consultation proposals did not go far enough to address the need for more analogue commercial radio licences in the UK.
- 3.84 Nation Broadcasting’s response suggested that the “licensing priorities ... do not provide sufficient audience provision and fail to acknowledge the future challenges the radio sector may face at National and Regional level given interdependency with DTT transmission sites”.⁹⁷ The response also suggested Ofcom plans spectrum in advance, reviewing market

⁹⁴ Radiocentre Ltd, p. 1.

⁹⁵ MuxCo Limited, p.1.

⁹⁶ Dee Radio Group, p.1

⁹⁷ Nation Broadcasting, p.2.

needs to determine whether additional spectrum would be available to license more FM commercial radio stations and support the sector by completing an audit of all spectrum opportunities to allow operators to identify viable future services.

- 3.85 A confidential respondent suggested that the Media Act simplified commercial licensing and that Ofcom should, where AM frequencies demonstrate availability exceeding demand, invite applications for commercial radio licences on demand and on a first-come first-served basis.⁹⁸

Our response

- 3.86 Ofcom points out that, as set out in paragraph 3.73, any analogue switch off is a matter for the UK Government and not Ofcom. As explained in the Overview section, this decision is about setting Ofcom’s radio licensing priorities in the current legislative framework and broadcasting context. DCMS confirmed in February 2026 that it was embarking on a Radio Review, which will engage with key industry organisations to form part of the review.⁹⁹ The focus of the Review is “to consider the impact of changes in listener behaviour and audio markets over the past five years and assess the future challenges the BBC and commercial radio are likely to face in the coming years in order to support continued investment in radio.” Ofcom has been mindful of the Review while setting out these short-to medium term licensing priorities for broadcast radio. Following the publication of the UK Government’s report (expected by the end of 2026), Ofcom will engage with DCMS to ensure our priorities continue to align with the outcome of the Review.

- 3.87 As set out above, in our February 2026 Consultation we explained that demand for new commercial radio licences has been significantly limited since we last completed analogue licensing in 2008, though we acknowledged that licensing FM or AM services may increase the plurality of radio services in the UK. We are also aware that analogue listening continues to decline as compared to listening habits on other platforms. Given this continued trend, we do not consider that investing time to design a new licensing framework to enable Ofcom to license new analogue commercial radio licences should be an immediate priority, particularly when the UK Government is currently assessing the challenges faced by the sector in its Review and while we have a number of competing priorities and limited resources to deliver them.

- 3.88 We have therefore decided to proceed with the position set out in our February 2026 Consultation, which is to continue to support incumbent licensees who apply to extend the duration of their licence and/or for technical changes, including coverage improvements or extensions.¹⁰⁰ We have no plans to devise a revised licensing framework to enable Ofcom to provide any new opportunities to apply for an analogue commercial radio licence (local or national).

Long Wave

What we said

- 3.89 In our February 2026 Consultation we did not consider or include the possibility of new Long Wave licensing in our priorities.

⁹⁸ [X]

⁹⁹ Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2025. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministers-kick-off-review-to-safeguard-radios-future>.

¹⁰⁰ Ofcom, 2022. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/analogue-radio/commercial-coverage-improvements-and-extensions>.

What respondents said

- 3.90 Since the BBC announced that it was closing down BBC Radio 4 operations on the Long Wave frequency, Ofcom received response requesting opportunities to utilise this frequency.¹⁰¹ This response explained that a specific service can run the 198kHz frequency more economically with a revised transmitter which would run “more energy efficient operating costs”.¹⁰² This response also explained that there remains audience demand for a service targeting the older audience demographic (it cited that BBC Radio 4 continued to receive listening figures of over 100,000 on Long Wave alone, but the document itself provided no citation of a BBC document confirming this figure). It also said that research the response cited (but did not specifically provide a copy of) would demonstrate that there remain 60 million older radio receivers which would be capable of picking up the 198kHz frequency.¹⁰³

Our response

- 3.91 The frequency being discussed by stakeholders for Long Wave licensing is 198kHz, which has always been used by the BBC for the broadcast of Radio 4 and has never been used commercially. In other words, neither Ofcom nor its predecessors¹⁰⁴ has ever had to advertise licences to use this specific piece of spectrum for broadcasting. We are mindful of the clear audience shift to access radio primarily across FM, DAB and online (as referenced above), alongside the high costs of providing such a service to what would likely be a very limited audience. We therefore do not consider that designing a new licensing framework to provide opportunities to apply for a licence for broadcasting on 198kHz should be a priority for Ofcom to deliver in the short-to-medium term.
- 3.92 As outlined above, according to RAJAR, analogue listening continues to decline with audiences consuming more audio content on DAB and online.¹⁰⁵
- 3.93 We do not currently consider that licensing a new national Long Wave service is the most effective way of using our resources to help to meet the needs and interests of audiences across the UK in the short-to-medium term. While we acknowledge that the confidential respondent asserts that the operating costs they are considering would be more economical,¹⁰⁶ we are also aware that the maintenance costs for Long Wave transmitters are likely to be significant. However, no authoritative public estimate has been identified for the cost of maintaining and operating Long Wave transmitters such as those which were used to carry BBC Radio 4. Public reporting on the closure of the BBC Radio 4 Long Wave service has instead focused on the ageing nature of the transmission infrastructure, the increasing difficulty of maintaining the equipment and the continued migration of audiences to other platforms such as FM and DAB digital platforms.¹⁰⁷ Ofcom considers that these all remain relevant factors to indicate that it is likely to be incredibly challenging to

¹⁰¹ Ray Anderson,

¹⁰² Ray Anderson, appendix, p.2

¹⁰³ Ray Anderson, appendix.

¹⁰⁴ From a radio perspective, Ofcom’s predecessors were The Radio Authority (1991 to 2003) and The Independent Broadcasting Authority (1973 to 1991).

¹⁰⁵ [Ofcom Media Nations 2026](#), pp.73 - 74.

¹⁰⁶ Ray Anderson, Appendix, p.2.

¹⁰⁷ BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/reception/work-warning/news/radio4lwhttps://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/articles/2026/radio-4-broadcasts-on-long-wave-to-end>

provide a credible business model to demonstrate that any prospective stakeholder would be able to sustain such a service.

- 3.94 Further, Ofcom would need to determine an effective process for licensing this piece of spectrum and then consult on a new licensing framework, similar to the process we are confirming we will not be completing for local commercial radio (see above). Any work in this area would consequentially use significant resources and impact Ofcom’s ability to respond to the other areas of our licensing priorities as set out in our February 2026 Consultation.
- 3.95 We also note that, other than the one response received to the Consultation and a very limited amount of correspondence Ofcom has received outside of the Consultation relating to potential uses of the BBC Long Wave frequency, there has not been any further interest or demand shown in this area or support for these services from an audience perspective.

¹⁰⁸

DAB digital radio priorities

Further development of the small-scale DAB sector

What we said

- 3.96 In our February 2026 Consultation we stated that SSDAB is proving to be an effective means of delivering digital radio services inexpensively to relatively small geographic areas. As of 01 September 2026, 112 SSDAB multiplexes were on the air, between them transmitting over a thousand programme services, providing a pathway for new entrants to broadcast radio, as well as enabling existing FM community services to broadcast on DAB for the first time.
- 3.97 Following the completion of the eight planned rounds of SSDAB licensing, we proposed channelling our resources towards applications from existing SSDAB multiplex licensees to improve and extend their coverage. This could help improve contiguous coverage for listeners (particularly those in cars) and help support the sustainability of the sector through enabling multiplex licensees, where desired, to cover larger populations. Applicants would be expected to apply using the process Ofcom has already established for coverage improvement requests within a licensee’s existing coverage area.
- 3.98 We also proposed to prioritise – where appropriate and where spectrum remains available – requests to advertise further SSDAB multiplex areas. We suggested that this should be done on an ad-hoc basis, rather than through structured rounds of planned licensing. As SSDAB multiplex applications are relatively time-consuming to assess, we also proposed that, in the submission of expressions of interest, we would require clear and robust evidence of demand for new multiplexes from potential programme service providers.

What respondents said

- 3.99 There was broad support for our proposals to allow SSDAB multiplexes the opportunity to improve and extend their coverage, and to advertise new SSDAB multiplex areas.
- 3.100 Muxnet UK stated that SSDAB “has proven capable of delivering a high-quality experience to listeners, opening up significantly more variety of radio (and data) services, and crucially, supporting local media providers when many larger groups are withdrawing from the

¹⁰⁸ Ray Anderson, appendix.

market. As audiences migrate from analogue to digital listening, SSDAB is preventing the disenfranchisement of many listeners from their radio services.”¹⁰⁹

- 3.101 Similarly, the Dee Radio Group noted that SSDAB “has become an important and affordable digital platform for a broad range of services, including many smaller commercial operators, as well as community broadcasters. It has lowered barriers to entry, supported plurality, and provided a realistic digital route to market for services that could not otherwise access local DAB carriage at traditional cost levels.”¹¹⁰
- 3.102 On the advertisement of further licences, Maxxwave, remarked that the consultation did not define what constitutes “clear and robust evidence of demand” for a new small-scale multiplex, or how Ofcom would deal with competing expressions of interest for overlapping areas.¹¹¹ U.DAB Ltd said that: “Criteria for financial viability, and proposer's statements of demand and services to be carried, should all be judged critically. Near-empty multiplexes reduce available coverage and financial viability of multiplexes in adjacent and second-adjacent areas just as much as if their capacity was actually used.”¹¹²
- 3.103 Further, it was suggested that there could also be tensions between a request to extend an existing licence into a particular geographical area and a request to advertise a new multiplex for the same area.¹¹³
- 3.104 While still supporting our proposal to advertise new SSDAB multiplex areas, some respondents suggested that, in terms of Ofcom’s immediate priorities, it should rank below the proposed work on improving and extending the coverage of existing multiplexes. Lawrence Galkoff Associates Ltd, for example, noted that “Most potential opportunities were made available by Ofcom in Rounds One to Eight and if not awarded, there were either no suitable candidates, or the polygon was judged to be not viable.”¹¹⁴ In a survey of its members of this issue, the Community Media Association reported that, while 45% of its members felt that new SSDAB multiplexes should be a “consideration” for Ofcom, only 20% believed it should be a “priority.”¹¹⁵

Our response

- 3.105 In view of the broad support from respondents, and in line with the reasoning summarised in paragraphs 3.96 and 3.98 above, we see no reason to depart from our February 2026 Consultation proposals to prioritise applications from existing SSDAB multiplex licensees to improve and extend coverage areas and to advertise new SSDAB multiplex areas on an ad-hoc basis in the short-to-medium term.
- 3.106 However, we do agree with the point made by some respondents that the advertisement of new SSDAB multiplex licence areas should be a lesser priority than our work on improving or extending the coverage of the SSDAB multiplexes which are already licensed. Having only just completed an eight-round licensing programme, we think it appropriate that our immediate resource focus should be on helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of

¹⁰⁹ Muxnet UK, p.1.

¹¹⁰ Dee Radio Group, p.2.

¹¹¹ Maxxwave Ltd, p.3.

¹¹² U.DAB Ltd, p.1.

¹¹³ Maxxwave Ltd, p.3.

¹¹⁴ Lawrence Galkoff Associates Ltd, p.1.

¹¹⁵ Community Media Association, p.12.

the sector by giving top priority to the assessment of coverage improvement and extension requests.

- 3.107 It should also be noted that, while the SSDAB multiplex licensing programme was still ongoing, we were only able to consider relatively minor coverage improvement requests from existing multiplexes, and not more substantial coverage extension requests into adjoining areas. Therefore, many multiplex licensees have been waiting for a considerable length of time to be able to submit such requests to Ofcom.
- 3.108 The prioritisation of coverage improvement work ahead of the advertisement of new multiplex licences would also remove any potential conflicts arising between an existing multiplex operator wishing to apply to extend its coverage area, and the desire for a separate new licence to be advertised in the same area. Our view is that it is generally likely to be more efficient and economically viable for an existing SSDAB multiplex operator to extend its coverage into a currently unserved area rather than to advertise a new, and potentially very small, licence area.
- 3.109 We agree that it would be helpful to provide more details on the requirement for evidence of demand from potential service providers before a new multiplex area can be advertised. We will do this by means of a forthcoming update to the [SSDAB Guidance Notes](#), the publication of which will be publicised in [Ofcom's Monthly Radio Broadcast Update](#). The updated Guidance Notes will also provide more detail on the application process for coverage extensions.

Application of the 40% ceiling for small-scale DAB multiplexes

What we said

- 3.110 We explained in our February 2026 Consultation that, when inviting applications for SSDAB multiplex licences, we are currently required to have regard to the “desirability” of ensuring that the population covered by a small-scale radio multiplex service does not overlap with more than 40% of the population in the licensed area of an existing local radio multiplex service (the “40% ceiling”). In practice, Ofcom has taken the approach that this reflects an intention in the legislation to limit the overlap accordingly in awarded licences.¹¹⁶ Therefore, following a consultation¹¹⁷ on how we would exercise our powers in this new area, we decided in 2020 that we would “apply the 40% overlap threshold in all cases” (emphasis added) on the basis that “applying the 40% limit strictly provides the advantage of clarity for stakeholders as to what is and is not acceptable.”
- 3.111 However, in our February 2026 Consultation we proposed that, in assessing any post-launch coverage improvement or extension requests, and noting the discretion the legislation gives us, we would be more flexible than we have previously been in our application of the 40% ceiling. We said that we planned to introduce this flexibility for post-launch coverage improvement or extension requests (though not for new licence applications) to avoid perverse outcomes whereby, for example, a significantly beneficial coverage improvement is rejected because the overlap with a local DAB multiplex increases slightly above 40%.
- 3.112 However, we also stated that it would not be our intention to abandon the 40% target, given that the 40% ceiling reflects a legislative intent from the UK Parliament that, where

¹¹⁶ This is reflected in the [DCMS statement](#) on its 2018 consultation preceding the passage of the Small-Scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019 through Parliament.

¹¹⁷ [Licensing small-scale DAB: How Ofcom would exercise new functions proposed by Government](#)

there is overlap with a local radio multiplex, the small-scale multiplex should only serve a clear minority of the population in the licensed area of the existing local radio multiplex.

What respondents said

- ^{3.113} Overall, there was widespread support for our proposal to be more flexible in our application of the 40% ceiling when considering improvements or extensions to the coverage areas of existing SSDAB multiplex licensees.
- 3.114 However, these responses were very much divided between those who felt our proposed discretion should be relatively limited in scope (as proposed in our February 2026 Consultation) and those who believed that our proposals were too cautious and that we should be considerably more flexible in exercising our discretion on the 40% ceiling. Some respondents also felt that we should publish clearly defined criteria on how we would exercise our discretion.
- 3.115 A small minority of respondents were opposed to any change at all in our application of the 40% threshold, generally on the basis that it could lead to the advent of larger multiplex areas which would not suit the needs (and budgets) of community radio services wishing to serve discrete geographical areas. For example, Belfast DAB Plus Limited said that “We do not agree with the change as the risk is SSDAB operators combining areas to challenge larger operators and thus veer away from the community model.”¹¹⁸
- 3.116 Lucinda Guy said that she “would urge caution on lessening any restrictions on SSDAB without sufficient evidence that it is providing genuine choice and plurality of content and good quality access to participation [...] the 40% rule stands as a protection against a commercially driven SSDAB that competes with the larger multiplexes”.¹¹⁹
- 3.117 Among those who supported our proposal to apply a limited amount of discretion to the 40% ceiling, Boom Radio said: “We are supportive of rule relaxations which allow for greater coverage for individual multiplexes, even at the risk of greater overlap [with local radio multiplexes]. We are mindful of the risks to existing commercial operators though and appreciate Ofcom would only use any powers in exceptional circumstances.”¹²⁰
- 3.118 Sunrise Radio Yorkshire said it recognised that “a strictly rigid application of the 40% ceiling may prevent modest but meaningful coverage improvements that deliver clear public benefit, particularly in areas with fragmented DAB coverage or underserved communities.”¹²¹ However, it suggested that any flexibility should be clearly defined, as “Without a defined upper limit, there is a significant risk of regulatory uncertainty and inconsistent decision-making, which could lead to a gradual erosion of the legislative intent behind the ceiling.”
- 3.119 While it was not opposed in principle to Ofcom taking a more flexible approach to the 40% ceiling, Radiocentre also raised concerns that “any flexibility remains genuinely exceptional, is applied transparently, and is supported by clear published criteria.”¹²² It added that where exceedance of the 40% ceiling is proposed, “Ofcom should carry out a full impact assessment on neighbouring commercial stations, giving affected providers and existing

¹¹⁸ Belfast DAB Plus Ltd, p.1.

¹¹⁹ Lucinda Guy, pp.1-2.

¹²⁰ Boom Radio Ltd, p.1.

¹²¹ Bradford City Radio Ltd T/A Sunrise Radio (Yorkshire), p.1.

¹²² Radiocentre, pp.2-3.

multiplex operators the opportunity to comment.¹²³ This should take into consideration the extent to which services provided on SSDAB are distinct from other local services and the potential impact on advertising revenue.”¹²⁴

- 3.120 However, as already noted, a significant number of respondents felt that Ofcom’s proposed flexibility on the 40% ceiling did not go nearly far enough to deliver any tangible benefits for either the industry or listeners, with many believing that the main reason for the legislative cap was simply to protect existing local radio multiplexes from new competition. Further, several respondents argued that, even if original concerns about local radio multiplex viability were legitimate at the time the SSDAB legislation was made (in 2019), local multiplexes are currently thriving and there is no evidence that the advent of small-scale DAB has damaged their businesses.
- 3.121 A response submitted on behalf of Manchester DAB CIC, City West Digital CIC and South of the River Digital Radio suggested that: “A case can be made to abolish the 40% ceiling policy altogether because it is an anachronism...preventing meaningful extension or improvement of SSDAB coverage, does nothing to serve the interests of consumers. In effect, it prevents best value for audiences.”¹²⁵ He said that Ofcom can consider exceeding the 40% ceiling criterion “routinely” and to approve requests which exceed the ceiling by any amount.¹²⁶
- 3.122 The Local DAB Association also argued that Ofcom’s final policy on the 40% ceiling should “allow scope for exceedance beyond merely marginal levels where the audience benefit is clear and the technical change is strong.”¹²⁷ It explained that “In many places, the issue is not a tiny marginal anomaly. It is that current SSDAB coverage is too weak, too fragmented or too constrained to provide a reliable service across an intended area. In some cases, a meaningful coverage improvement may require more than a slight increase above 40%. If Ofcom allows flexibility only in cases of very limited experience, the most important deficiencies will almost certainly remain unresolved.”¹²⁸
- 3.123 The Local DAB Association added that, in the context of carrying out the technical assessments of overlapping coverage between multiplexes, we should “review whether the current indoor coverage assumptions remain fit for purpose.” For further details on this point, see paragraph 3.167.¹²⁹

Our response

- 3.124 Given the broad support for our proposal to be more flexible in our application of the 40% ceiling, and for the reasons set out in our consultation and below we will adopt our proposed policy position on this.
- 3.125 While we acknowledge – for the reasons they state – the desires of some SSDAB multiplex operators to be able to overlap local multiplexes by considerably more than 40% (and potentially up to 100%), in our view Ofcom’s policy needs to continue to reflect the legislative intent of parliament, that it is “desirable” that the overlap between a small-scale DAB multiplex and a local radio multiplex should not exceed 40%.

¹²³ Radiocentre, pp.2-3.

¹²⁴ Radiocentre, pp.2-3.

¹²⁵ Manchester DAB CIC, City West Digital CIC and South of the River Digital Radio, appendix, pp.3-4.

¹²⁶ Manchester DAB CIC, City West Digital CIC and South of the River Digital Radio, appendix, pp.3-4.

¹²⁷ The Local DAB Association appendix, p.4.

¹²⁸ The Local DAB Association appendix, p.4.

¹²⁹ The Local DAB Association appendix, p.5.

- 3.126 However, as we set out in our February 2026 Consultation, when we assess requests for coverage extensions and improvements (although not applications for new multiplex licences), we believe that it would be sensible for us to exercise a limited degree of discretion, as the legislation permits, where significant public benefit could be achieved through minimal exceedance of the 40% level.
- 3.127 Given that we consider that exceeding the cap should be limited to a few exceptional circumstances, in order for Ofcom to maintain flexibility on this issue, and to be able to make sensible and practical decisions on a case-by-case basis, we do not intend to publish fixed criteria for agreeing coverage change requests above the 40% ceiling, as some respondents have requested. However, in keeping with the spirit of the SSDAB Order, we confirm that the presumption would remain against an overlap of more than 40% and that we are extremely unlikely to approve any request which enabled a small-scale multiplex to cover a majority (i.e. over 50%) of a local multiplex's adult population.
- 3.128 It should be noted that the SSDAB legislation requires Ofcom to consult on any coverage change request from a multiplex licensee which would materially extend its licensed coverage area into an 'adjoining' area (i.e. an area not previously served by the multiplex). In these cases, the public consultation would provide an opportunity for stakeholders to raise any concerns in cases where, in our preliminary view, we have suggested that we are prepared to permit an overlap with a local DAB multiplex of more than 40%.¹³⁰
- 3.129 In the longer term, Ofcom considers that it would be a matter for the UK Government and Parliament if it wished to amend the SSDAB Order to allow small-scale multiplexes a consistently greater overlap with local radio multiplexes.

Requests to advertise further local DAB multiplex licences

What we said

- 3.130 There are currently 58 local radio multiplexes broadcasting which, between them, cover 92% of the UK population. The most recent (for Morecambe Bay) launched on 21 December 2021. Since that time, Ofcom's focus has been on the roll-out of SSDAB multiplexes.
- 3.131 In our February 2026 Consultation we proposed to prioritise, where appropriate, requests to advertise further local DAB multiplex licences in areas where there is both obvious demand (i.e. existing local multiplexes are at full capacity, or the area is unserved), and where frequencies remain available.
- 3.132 It should be noted that now that the SSDAB licensing programme is complete, an updated spectrum analysis would need to be conducted to see where, geographically, the potential opportunities would be for new local radio multiplexes. These opportunities could be more, or less, than those previously identified in our '[Licensing SSDAB' consultation](#)'¹³¹

What respondents said

- 3.133 The proposal to license additional local DAB multiplex areas elicited very mixed responses.

¹³⁰ Note that some coverage improvement requests which breach the 40% overlap ceiling will not require a consultation if Ofcom considers that they do not materially extend coverage of the multiplex into an adjoining area.

¹³¹ The areas previously identified were most of Scotland (except the south west); Northern Ireland; Tyneside & Teesside; and Devon & Cornwall.

- 3.134 Those in favour emphasised the need for greater competition in the local radio multiplex market, which would in turn stimulate the development of new commercial radio services and benefit audiences.¹³²
- 3.135 Nation Broadcasting, for example, argued that “priority should be given to licensing spectrum that delivers the greatest market impact and benefits the greatest number of listeners. In practice, this means prioritising the release of new, additional local DAB multiplexes in urban areas that can provide new [programme] services and increase competition in meaningful markets.”¹³³
- 3.136 However, a significant number of respondents were against the proposal, most commonly on the basis of concern for the viability of the nascent small-scale DAB sector in areas where new local multiplexes might be licensed. For example, the Community Media Association said that “There is a distinct possibility that the financially stronger SSDAB stations, likely to be commercial, will look to migrate to local DAB [multiplexes] where they can reach a larger audience. This will see the SSDAB multiplexes losing their best paying stations which will damage them financially and could risk their financial viability and see some of them closing. The result of this would leave communities without their local community radio station and listeners with less choice.”¹³⁴ It also noted they noted that the proposed expansion of DAB “could have a detrimental impact on both community radio stations on SSDAB multiplexes as well as the SSDAB multiplexes themselves”.¹³⁵
- 3.137 Similarly, Dee Radio Group argued that “existing SSDAB multiplexes must be given a fair opportunity to achieve technically effective and sustainable coverage, and that spectrum should not be allocated to new overlapping local DAB multiplexes without [Ofcom] first considering whether it could deliver greater public benefit through SSDAB improvement.”¹³⁶
- 3.138 Bauer Media Audio UK said it believed “SSDAB adds sufficient capacity to negate the need for further local DAB multiplexes, except perhaps in areas where there is currently no local DAB multiplex (such as the Scottish Borders)”.¹³⁷
- 3.139 One confidential respondent stated that the use of spectrum for local DAB was less efficient than for SSDAB, and that each unit of spectrum can accommodate more small-scale multiplexes than local multiplexes.¹³⁸

Our response

- 3.140 We recognise that the question of whether to undertake further local multiplex licensing has proved to be one of the most divisive issues in this consultation. Those favouring the licensing of new local multiplexes believe it would promote greater competition and listener choice, while those against such a move fear it could reduce listener choice because it may render recently launched SSDAB multiplexes economically unviable.

¹³² Aside from Greater London and Central Scotland, listeners are generally only served by one local radio multiplex.

¹³³ Nation Broadcasting, p.1.

¹³⁴ Community Media Association, p.1.

¹³⁵ Community Media Association, p.3.

¹³⁶ The Dee Radio Group, p.2.

¹³⁷ Bauer Media Audio UK, p.3.

¹³⁸ [3<]

3.141 On balance, having taken into account the consultation responses, we have concluded that, at this point in time, further local radio multiplex licensing should not be a licensing priority for Ofcom in the short-to-medium term. The reasons for this are as follows:

- a) We agree with those respondents who have suggested that licensing new local radio multiplexes could have a destabilising effect on the development of SSDAB, particularly while some SSDAB multiplexes are yet to launch and others are likely to imminently be seeking coverage improvements or extensions. We recognise the potential concerns about the effect of the destabilisation of SSDAB on rural and minority communities as discussed in the EIA. We also recognise that a finite spectrum resource is available for DAB services in the UK. This could mean potentially competing demands on the spectrum if we were to license new local multiplexes at the same time as developing small-scale DAB (although we note that in many cases small-scale multiplexes use dedicated spectrum which is not currently used for local multiplexes).
- b) We note that there were few consultation responses received from respondents who expressed an interest in applying for new local radio multiplexes, should they be advertised by Ofcom.
- c) As noted in our February 2026 Consultation, in order to be able to advertise new local radio multiplexes, we would need to consult on a revised licensing process. As a result of the Media Act 2024, some of the statutory criteria previously used by Ofcom for taking licence award decisions for new local radio multiplexes would no longer be relevant. In particular, we can no longer take account of the programme services a multiplex applicant plans to broadcast (or the level of demand and support from listeners for those services). This is because Ofcom no longer has the power to approve or refuse multiplex line-up changes, even at the initial licence grant stage.

3.142 The UK Government announced its Radio Review in February 2026 which focussed on considering future scenarios for how listeners consume UK radio and audio content and how these may impact on future distribution strategies for the UK radio industry. When it launched the Review, [the UK Government stated](#) that, among other things, the review will consider “Whether there should be a managed transition away from FM in the 2030s and, if so, over what timescale, and on the availability of UK radio services on all platforms.” Rather than embarking on a new programme of licensing further local radio multiplexes at this stage, we think it would be prudent to await the outcome of the Review, and then to work with the UK Government and wider industry on implementing the recommendations.

Spectrum and technical considerations

What we said

- 3.143 Our February 2026 Consultation set out the spectrum considerations which are relevant to our proposed broadcast licensing strategy. As the regulator with responsibilities for managing the UK’s civil radio spectrum bands, Ofcom must carefully manage potentially competing demands and uses for spectrum to ensure that this finite resource is used efficiently, and that interference is appropriately controlled.
- 3.144 In particular, our Consultation described the current broad pattern of spectrum availability for different broadcast radio platforms and bands.
- 3.145 We said that there is no more capacity for any additional national FM radio or national DAB services, nor for additional wide area FM coverage services in most areas. Some FM

opportunities do exist in more sparsely populated areas where demand has historically been lower, although the coverage of any new FM stations may be very limited.

- 3.146 The available spectrum could also potentially support some limited opportunities for new local (commercial) DAB multiplexes in some areas.
- 3.147 Finally, we also said that there are also likely to be spectrum opportunities for new or enhanced small-scale DAB multiplexes in areas which were not advertised as part of the SSDAB licensing programme, in areas where licences were not applied for (or did not proceed to launch after a licence was awarded), or where multiplexes cover more limited geographical areas than when originally advertised.

What respondents said

- 3.148 A number of respondents raised general concerns about the current coverage of SSDAB services, variously citing ‘patchy’ reception, in-car reception difficulties, intermittent in-home reception coverage and a lack of contiguous coverage for different small-scale multiplexes or the communities they serve.
- 3.149 A confidential respondent [redacted].¹³⁹
- 3.150 Nine respondents (including one confidential respondent raised broadly similar points and concerns about the technical threshold used by Ofcom to predict the indoor coverage (and therefore to define the licensed area) of SSDAB multiplexes.¹⁴⁰ All respondents who raised concerns about the coverage planning threshold did so in the context of our consultation question on the 40% local multiplex overlap limit (see paragraphs 3.120 to 3.123). Respondents questioned the current and future use of this threshold for the reasons summarised below.
- 3.151 Specifically, the Local DAB Association, Dee Radio Group and Station House Media Unit raised related concerns regarding the field strength threshold value (63 dBµV/m) which is used for predicting indoor SSDAB coverage.¹⁴¹ The Local DAB Association and Dee Radio Group suggested that “modelled coverage overstates reception of the ground”, potentially “delivering poorer audience outcomes than intended in practice”.¹⁴² Bristol Digital Radio CIC, U.DAB and Manchester DAB CIC said that the current value of 63dBµV/m is at odds with international planning standards in the case of dense urban environments.¹⁴³ Hot Radio and Lawrence Galkoff Associates said that 63 dBµV/m may not deliver reliable indoor reception in some environments, with Muxnet UK referring to clutter loss affecting coverage.¹⁴⁴
- 3.152 High Peak One Digital, Professor Paul Groves and Maxxwave suggested that Ofcom should review or allocate additional spectrum resources to small-scale DAB.¹⁴⁵ These respondents suggested, for example, that frequencies could be re-allocated from current business radio or Programme Making and Special Events (PMSE) uses either permanently or in response to exceptional circumstances for DAB use.

¹³⁹ [redacted]

¹⁴⁰ [redacted]

¹⁴¹ Local DAB Association p.4; Dee Radio Group, p.3; Station House Media Unit p.1.

¹⁴² Dee Radio Group, p.3.

¹⁴³ Bristol Digital Radio CIC, p.2; U.DAB Ltd pp.1-2; Manchester DAB CIC / City West Digital CIC / South of the River Digital pp.6-7.

¹⁴⁴ Hot Radio, p.3, Lawrence Galkoff Associates, pp.3-4; Muxnet UK p.1.

¹⁴⁵ High Peak One Digital, pp.3-4; Prof. Paul Groves, pp.2-3; Maxxwave Ltd, pp.18-19.

- 3.153 Lawrence Galkoff Associates Ltd suggested that following the final round of the SSDAB licensing programme there is an opportunity for re-examining the overall frequency plan for SSDAB to minimise interference from neighbouring polygons, potentially improving opportunities for new or expanded small-scale multiplexes.¹⁴⁶
- 3.154 Regarding future spectrum management and licensing, Better Media said that Ofcom should undertake a “structured review of the spectrum-management assumptions that continue to favour historical large-area coverage patterns”. It also suggested Ofcom’s consultation, licensing and spectrum management systems should be modernised to permit initiatives such as live data being made available and, in the longer term, on-demand licensing.¹⁴⁷
- 3.155 Nation Broadcasting said that Ofcom should publish a full audit of “all existing and potential spectrum opportunities (FM and DAB), including trade-offs, which could support commercial radio development”. It said this “would allow operators to identify viable future services”. Nation Broadcasting also suggested that a “comprehensive replan of community radio spectrum could free significant capacity for new FM licences”.¹⁴⁸
- 3.156 One confidential respondent [X], Maxxwave, Boom Radio and Radiocentre raised concerns about the utilisation of capacity on DAB multiplexes and other matters regarding the technical management of multiplexes.¹⁴⁹ One respondent noted that some small-scale multiplexes carry a low number of programme services. They said that this represents a sub-optimal use of spectrum and cited Ofcom’s spectrum management duties. They also suggested that Ofcom should monitor occupancy and engage with relevant multiplex operators and encourage marketing of this capacity.¹⁵⁰
- 3.157 Boom Radio also raised concerns about a lack of national DAB capacity as well as differential coverage between the second national DAB multiplex (SDL) and the first national multiplex (D1), suggesting that Ofcom could strongly encourage a conversion to DAB+, and also suggested that the BBC may separately be asked to convert their national DAB multiplex to DAB+, potentially freeing up capacity for new national commercial services.¹⁵¹ Radiocentre and Nation Broadcasting made similar points about national DAB capacity and the BBC’s national multiplex.¹⁵²
- 3.158 [X]¹⁵³
- 3.159 Bauer Media Audio UK stated that SSDAB multiplex licensees are subject to less rigorous standards than local commercial DAB multiplexes in terms of the requirements on them to rectify interference caused by adjacent channel interference (or ‘ACI’: this is a problem which can sometimes affect reception of existing multiplexes when new transmitters are brought into service). They cited a 2012 Memorandum of Understanding which required Bauer Digital Radio and CE Digital to build a number of filler transmitters during previous network expansions.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ Lawrence Galkoff Associates Ltd, pp.6-7.

¹⁴⁷ Better Media, p.3, p.7.

¹⁴⁸ Nation Broadcasting Ltd, pp.3-4.

¹⁴⁹ Maxxwave, p.20; [X]; Boom Radio pp.1-4; Radiocentre p.2.

¹⁵⁰ Maxxwave, p.20.

¹⁵¹ Boom Radio Ltd, pp.1-3.

¹⁵² Radiocentre, p.2; Nation Broadcasting, p.2.

¹⁵³ [X]

¹⁵⁴ Bauer Media Audio UK, pp.2-3.

- 3.160 Maxxwave said that Ofcom’s FM frequency planning criteria should be reviewed, specifically the co-channel protection ratio for stereo services, and that acceptable coverage is achievable at protection ratios substantially lower than the current 45dB (potentially 20-25dB lower).¹⁵⁵ This respondent states that the 45dB figure derives from ITU Recommendation BS.412, is not mandatory, and cites third party analysis which has demonstrated that FM frequency re-use in the UK is amongst the lowest in the EU.¹⁵⁶
- 3.161 Maxxwave said that any AM frequencies surrendered by broadcasters must not sit unused, and that a permanent framework for alternative uses should be developed if these frequencies are not being used for broadcasting.¹⁵⁷ The respondent stated that it is inconsistent with Ofcom's spectrum efficiency duties not to pursue either broadcasting uses or alternative uses for AM frequencies.¹⁵⁸
- 3.162 Alternative delivery platforms for radio services: Some respondents raised points about the delivery of radio services via non-broadcast networks. Belfast DAB Plus and the Community Media Association said that mobile networks now represent a viable alternative means of distributing radio, questioning the need for SSDAB.¹⁵⁹ They cited the UK Government-funded mobile network expansion into rural areas and the integration of internet radio platforms in vehicles as factors favouring mobile network delivery.
- 3.163 Phonic FM / ExeDab said that our proposed licensing priorities are predicated on the assumptions about the available technology and noted that the current speed of technological change means that provision to adapt is needed to account for further future changes in the way broadcasting services are delivered.¹⁶⁰
- 3.164 Conversely, Radio Caroline questioned the resilience of internet delivery of radio services, saying that uncertain future geopolitical developments mean that reliance on online connectivity (and associated ‘gatekeeper’ companies) for broadcasting services should be avoided.¹⁶¹

Our response

- 3.165 Comments related to SSDAB transmitter power and coverage concerns are most relevant to our decision to introduce flexibility on the 40% local multiplex overlap limit, which is dealt with in paragraphs 3.124 to 3.129 above.
- 3.166 Regarding low-power filler transmitters, our existing post-launch coverage change request process (which is set out in Section 7 Ofcom’s Guidance Notes for small-scale multiplex licensees) provides details on the circumstances in which we can consider new transmitter requests.¹⁶² Proposals for low-power transmitters that are solely intended to fill ‘gaps’ in a multiplex’s existing coverage area (and which do not materially extend the coverage area of the multiplex) are likely to be approved without needing public consultation, though we

¹⁵⁵ Maxxwave, p.12.

¹⁵⁶ Maxxwave, p.12.

¹⁵⁷ Maxxwave, p.2.

¹⁵⁸ Maxxwave, p.2.

¹⁵⁹ Belfast DAB Plus, p.2; Community Media Association (Confidential Appendix) pp.10-11.

¹⁶⁰ Phonic FM/ ExeDab, p.1.

¹⁶¹ Radio Caroline, pp.4-5.

¹⁶² Ofcom, 2025. [Small-scale radio multiplex licences - Guidance notes for applicants and licensees](#).

assess every coverage change request received on its own merits and consider its potential impacts on other stakeholders.¹⁶³

- 3.167 As set out in our 2019 consultation and subsequent Statement on licensing SSDAB, a field strength of 63 dB μ V/m has been used consistently by Ofcom throughout the planning of commercial (and latterly small-scale) DAB services in the UK as representing the level at which satisfactory indoor reception is possible in most locations.¹⁶⁴ For reasons set out in that Statement it is not possible for us to limit interference from other SSDAB areas to a sufficiently low level to protect outdoor mobile reception at 54 dBuV/m within the limited frequency resource which is available for small-scale DAB services.
- 3.168 We acknowledge that using a uniform field strength value for defining predicted coverage cannot account for the effects of all types of ‘clutter’ such as where there are densely packed tall buildings which can affect radio signal reception in city centre areas. However, moving to an arrangement where different thresholds apply in different areas is complex and will require further consideration. It is therefore impractical for us to present an alternative planning threshold within the scope of this Statement concluding our consultation which focused on our priorities for licensing broadcast radio.
- 3.169 While we therefore do not propose to change the planning threshold, in many situations multiplex operators can seek to implement coverage improvements to deliver higher field strengths within their licensed areas via the normal post-launch coverage change request route. The additional flexibility on overlaps with local commercial multiplexes which we are introducing (as set out in paragraph 3.124 to 3.129) will also increase the scope for coverage improvements in cases where we deem that adhering rigidly to the 40% ceiling would result in a disproportionate constraint on the small-scale multiplex.
- 3.170 Going forward, we will monitor whether the increased flexibility in relation to the 40% ceiling provides sufficient latitude for licensees to increase signal levels in those environments that would benefit from stronger signals.
- 3.171 We recognise some respondents’ calls for more spectrum to be allocated to DAB, noting that six additional frequency blocks were made available specifically for use by SSDAB when the licensing programme for these multiplexes began in 2020.¹⁶⁵ However, we are not aware of any compelling current evidence (from either a spectrum demand or spectrum scarcity perspective) that additional VHF spectrum should be allocated to DAB services. We also consider that the licensing priorities which we have decided upon for DAB can be met from existing spectrum allocations (noting that spectrum availability is one of several constraints on our ability to license new DAB multiplexes). Our position on prioritisation of additional local DAB multiplex licensing specifically is set out in paragraphs 3.140 to 3.142 of this Statement. Similarly, we do not currently propose to permit exceptional uses of PMSE spectrum for DAB services for the reasons set out above
- 3.172 We will, however, keep all DAB spectrum use and emerging demand under review and, as always, Ofcom retains the ability to pursue spectrum reallocations if there is compelling

¹⁶³ We consider the extent to which a proposed modification to a multiplex’s technical plan would result in any changes in the level of interference to, and the coverage overlap with, other multiplexes, as well as the impact that areas of gained or lost coverage might have on listeners.

¹⁶⁴ Ofcom, 2019. [Statement: Licensing small-scale DAB – how Ofcom will exercise its new functions](#).

¹⁶⁵ Frequency blocks 7D, 8A, 8B, 9A, 9B, & 9C from VHF Band III, sub-band 2. Ofcom, 2020. [Statement: Licensing small-scale DAB – how Ofcom will exercise its new functions](#).

evidence that they are needed. In doing so we would take into account any benefits of reallocation as well as the costs (such as the need for existing spectrum users to move to new frequencies if sharing is not possible). Any future reallocation of spectrum currently used by other services would be subject to separate public consultation.

- 3.173 In respect to modifying the overall SSDAB frequency plan, we acknowledge that it may be technically possible to improve the efficiency of spectrum usage for existing and yet-to-launch SSDAB services by re-planning the frequencies allocated to some multiplexes. However, we believe that such efficiencies would be small compared to the cost and disruption which would be faced by existing operators should Ofcom require frequency changes. We do, however, keep frequency allocations under review and, as reflected in our decision, will endeavour to allocate frequencies for new small-scale multiplexes which represent the most efficient use, and which maximise opportunities within the overall spectrum plan.
- 3.174 Matters relating to changes to Ofcom's licensing and spectrum management systems fall outside the scope of this consultation. However, all of Ofcom's coverage technical planning criteria for broadcast radio services are publicly available and we do not agree that our spectrum management assumptions favour particular types of stations over others. In response to Nation Broadcasting's request for a full spectrum audit, spectrum availability for a new FM or DAB service is highly dependent on the characteristics of that proposed service. For example, at a given location it may well be possible to identify spectrum to accommodate a low-power Community Radio Station or a SSDAB multiplex, whereas a higher-power station or DAB network would cause unacceptable interference at the same location. Given the very high number of scenarios which would need to be modelled, we do not believe that the benefits of a comprehensive spectrum audit would justify the significant resources needed to carry it out.
- 3.175 We have noted the points raised by respondents around DAB multiplex capacity, occupancy and technical quality. Ofcom does not have any current plans to introduce additional regulation in the area of multiplex bitrates, technical formats for service encoding or distribution links, or the general quality of SSDAB services (and here we note that the legislation which enabled Ofcom to license SSDAB services specifically requires the signals carrying those services to achieve 'a reasonable standard of technical quality': this is in contrast to national and local DAB services which are required to achieve 'high standards' of technical quality).
- 3.176 Because multiplex operators must not act in a way which inhibits fair and effective competition, if stakeholders believe that a specific multiplex operator is engaging in anticompetitive practices such as artificially holding back multiplex capacity from the market Ofcom could consider any formal complaint raised with us on these matters.
- 3.177 We acknowledge comments related to DAB Adjacent Channel Interference ('ACI') and note that both small-scale and commercial DAB licensees are in fact subject to the same requirements on the management and mitigation of ACI issues. The 2012 MoU referred to by Bauer was superseded by the Framework Agreement for Local DAB Expansion which set out obligations on various parties to expand coverage of local DAB multiplexes to achieve equivalence with commercial radio FM coverage.¹⁶⁶ The Framework Agreement mentions ACI as being one of the issues that should be addressed by a Technical Group established to

¹⁶⁶ GOV.UK, 2015. [Local DAB network expansion 2015-16 - GOV.UK.](#)

support the programme and this was done in a manner consistent with the approach agreed within industry at the time.

- 3.178 Ofcom's policy on ACI has been refined over time with consultation at each point of change. The policy applies equally to all DAB licensees and is set out in our technical policy guidance for DAB multiplex licensees.¹⁶⁷
- 3.179 [✂]¹⁶⁸
- 3.180 Ofcom's position on our priorities for the AM band is dealt with in paragraphs 3.68 to 3.75 of this Statement. Our consultation itself was specifically related to these broadcast radio licensing priorities and therefore the question of re-allocating AM radio frequencies for other uses is outside the scope of the current process. However, before permitting non-broadcasting uses for AM spectrum Ofcom would need to determine an effective process for licensing of the spectrum and then put a suitable framework in place. Any work in this area would consequentially impact Ofcom's ability to respond to the other areas of our spectrum work. While Ofcom is in general open to considering alternative uses of spectrum, we have to date only received interest from a single stakeholder. Therefore, we do not currently consider that pursuing a frequency re-allocation within the AM bands would constitute an effective approach to our spectrum management priorities.
- 3.181 We note the views set out by respondents regarding alternative delivery platforms for radio services. However, these matters are outside the scope of the current review, although as set out in paragraph 3.199 we consider it important that any future transition to alternative platforms takes account of coverage, resilience and audience needs.
- 3.182 More generally, as set out above, the UK Government's current Radio Review is considering future scenarios for how listeners consume UK radio and audio content and how these may impact on future distribution strategies for the UK radio industry and on the availability of UK radio services on all platforms.

Policy clarity and framework

What we said

- 3.183 In our consultation we proposed to prioritise a range of licensing activities. We set out that we would publish a statement setting out our final decision about the licensing activities we would prioritise. We did not provide any specific details of the timescales for the different types of work or processes.

What respondents said

- 3.184 Respondents asked Ofcom to provide greater clarity on implementation, prioritisation and review.¹⁶⁹ Several respondents stressed the need for transparency and predictability so that broadcasters and multiplex operators can plan investment and upgrades with confidence.¹⁷⁰
- 3.185 Bauer asked Ofcom to publish clear standards and timelines for processing licence variations and DAB technical changes, noting that this would help it and others plan

¹⁶⁷ Ofcom, 2023. [Technical policy guidance for DAB multiplex licensees](#).

¹⁶⁸ [✂]

¹⁶⁹ Bauer Media Audio UK, p.4; Radiocentre, p.3; Dee Radio Group, p.5; Sangam Radio, p.1.

¹⁷⁰ Leicester Digital Partnership, p.13; High Peak One Digital, p.1; Dee Radio Group, p.5.

upgrades.¹⁷¹ Radiocentre made a similar point, saying Ofcom should publish clear service standards and timelines for licence variations and DAB technical changes.¹⁷² Dee Radio Group also said the final version should more clearly acknowledge the need for timely and transparent implementation,¹⁷³ while Radio Sangam Communities Together queried the timescales for implementation.¹⁷⁴

- 3.186 Leicester Digital Partnership asked for a clearer and more time-limited process for SSDAB technical change requests specifically and said that Ofcom should publish a decision-making framework for such requests.¹⁷⁵ High Peak One Digital also requested that Ofcom should process SSDAB technical change requests with greater urgency, “particularly where viability is at stake”. It explained that if requests are not processed promptly there was a risk that services may fail.¹⁷⁶
- 3.187 Some respondents asked for greater clarity about how Ofcom would prioritise between different licensing options.¹⁷⁷ Dee Radio said further clarification was needed on how Ofcom would prioritise between extending existing SSDAB areas, creating new SSDAB areas, or licensing new local DAB services.¹⁷⁸ It said Ofcom should favour options that improve coverage, support plurality and aid smaller operators.¹⁷⁹ Leicester Digital Partnership suggested Ofcom should publish criteria regarding how we decide whether ‘an unserved or under-served area is better addressed through extension of an existing SSDAB multiplex, the advertisement of a new SSDAB multiplex, or the advertisement of a Local DAB multiplex.’¹⁸⁰
- 3.188 Several respondents commented on the need for ongoing monitoring and updating of priorities as the market continues to develop. Leicester Digital Partnership said Ofcom should review the strategy over time to ensure it does not harm the sustainability of the small-scale DAB sector.¹⁸¹ Maxxwave commented that Ofcom’s affordability analysis for DAB is outdated and should be refreshed to reflect current cost-of-living pressures.¹⁸² Phonic FM commented that the priorities seemed appropriate for the short-to-medium term but must adapt as new technology emerges.¹⁸³ Radiocentre noted that Ofcom should keep its licensing approach under review, guard against unintended outcomes that could undermine growth, remain aligned with the DCMS Digital Radio and Audio Review.¹⁸⁴ Arqiva also noted the need to consider the outcomes of the DCMS Audio and Radio Review.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷¹ Bauer Media Audio UK, p.4.

¹⁷² Radiocentre, p.3.

¹⁷³ Dee Radio Group, p.5.

¹⁷⁴ Sangam Radio, p.1.

¹⁷⁵ Leicester Digital Partnership, p.13.

¹⁷⁶ High Peak One Digital, p.1.

¹⁷⁷ Maxxwave Ltd, p.3; Dee Radio Group, p.5; Leicester Digital Partnership CIC, p.5.

¹⁷⁸ Dee Radio Group, p.5.

¹⁷⁹ Dee Radio Group, p.5.

¹⁸⁰ Leicester Digital Partnership CIC, p.5.

¹⁸¹ Leicester Digital Partnership CIC, p.12.

¹⁸² Maxxwave Ltd, p.11.

¹⁸³ Phonic FM, p.1.

¹⁸⁴ Radiocentre, pp.3-4.

¹⁸⁵ Arqiva, p.3.

- 3.189 Arqiva also highlighted that the consultation does not explicitly reference coverage improvements or extensions for national and local DAB multiplexes.¹⁸⁶ While they noted that these activities may be implicitly covered by our proposal to continue to provide support for ongoing broadcast licensing programmes, “the absence of an explicit reference creates some uncertainty - particularly given that other licence types (notably analogue) are specifically [mentioned].”¹⁸⁷
- 3.190 Another respondent highlighted the need for Ofcom’s evidence base and policy approach to remain up to date.¹⁸⁸ Better Media said Ofcom should improve its capacity and refresh its evidence base, particularly to understand local and equality impacts.¹⁸⁹ Better Media also noted that ‘Ofcom’s analysis would also benefit from paying greater attention to interaction between platforms. It said that ‘a licence-type table that treats each route in isolation risks understating those interactions’.¹⁹⁰

Our response

- 3.191 We note respondents’ comments regarding the need to set out clear implementation timelines. We have set out above the process for each of our priorities and some initial timescales. However, in order to provide more detail in some areas, such as community analogue licensing, we will need to better understand the scale of demand. We will then be able to set out more detailed timelines.
- 3.192 Respondents asked for clarity regarding how we will prioritise between different options. As set out above, alongside our ongoing licensing work, we will prioritise:
- a) consideration of licensing rounds for community analogue radio (and an EOI will be published alongside this Statement); and
 - b) consideration of requests to improve or extend the coverage of the SSDAB multiplexes.
- We also set out in detail how we propose to prioritise rounds of community analogue radio licensing.
- 3.193 On SSDAB technical change requests, Ofcom is always mindful of the circumstances of each request, and we aim to process applications as quickly as possible, particularly where the viability of a service is in question. However, we are required by legislation to publicly consult on some technical change requests, which can significantly extend the timescales. Our Guidance Notes¹⁹¹ for small-scale multiplex licensees sets out our procedure and decision-making processes for SSDAB technical change requests.
- 3.194 Respondents noted that this policy would need to be reviewed and updated in light of the changing market and, in particular, the DCMS Radio Review. This Statement sets out how we will manage our licensing priorities in the short-to-medium term. We recognise changes in the market and the development of UK Government policy is likely to impact on our work in the future, hence we have not considered anything that is longer term. However, we will continue to review the appropriateness of our priorities in light of any changes.
- 3.195 Regarding national and local DAB coverage changes, the operators of these multiplexes are free to extend or improve their networks within their existing licensed areas at any time

¹⁸⁶ Arqiva, p.2.

¹⁸⁷ Arqiva, p.2.

¹⁸⁸ Better Media, p.6.

¹⁸⁹ Better Media, p.7.

¹⁹⁰ Better Media, p.7.

¹⁹¹ Ofcom, 2025. [Small-scale radio multiplex licences - Guidance notes for applicants and licensees.](#)

subject to routine technical approval processes (including international frequency coordination and the normal Adjacent Channel Interference management process). Therefore, such network improvements do not need explicit approval from Ofcom from a Broadcasting Act licensing perspective, and we can confirm that these existing arrangements will continue.

- 3.196 Respondents emphasised the importance of monitoring the impact of our priorities on the market. Ofcom will continue to monitor the audio market, where appropriate, through our research and also through monitoring licensing demand. Ofcom continuously reviews the information it collects in order to inform our decisions and will continue to do this.

Responses outside of the scope of our proposals

- 3.197 Several respondents shared suggestions, views and raised concerns that addressed issues outside of the scope of the consultation proposals.
- 3.198 We received a number of specific licence change requests. While we are not able to respond directly to those requests as part of this Statement, we urge respondents to refer to our responses focused on specific licensing activity in the relevant sections of this Statement. Any existing licensees who wish to apply for a change to their licence should do so via the relevant published guidance notes.
- 3.199 A number of respondents shared their views on what they presented as the “UK Government’s 2030 switch off” proposal for FM radio.¹⁹² There are in fact no current plans for withdrawal of FM radio broadcasting, although the UK Government’s Radio Review is considering (amongst other things) whether there should be a managed transition away from FM in the 2030s and, if so, over what timescale. While this is outside the scope of this consultation, we acknowledge the strength of feeling in this area and understand the potential implications the respondents believe this could have on radio broadcasting. However, this is ongoing work being undertaken by DCMS and as such, we will await the publication of that Review before commenting on outcomes that might arise from that work, where appropriate.
- 3.200 Lewis Cropley stated that amateur radio and television broadcasting licences should be issued for various frequency bands to allow information to be transmitted in times of disaster or national emergency.¹⁹³ These proposals fall outside the scope of this consultation process, and our current licensing framework. However, the current legislative and regulatory framework for radio broadcasting services includes clear eligibility requirements for the holding of broadcasting licences, as well as service continuity requirements. While the UK Government’s current Review of Radio and its Green Paper, [Watch this space: a new strategic direction for UK media](#), may result in amendments to broadcasting legislation, it is not appropriate for Ofcom to suggest what the scope of those changes might include at this stage.

¹⁹² Lawrence Galkoff Associations Ltd, p.6; [3<]; Nation Broadcasting, p.2; Caithness FM, p.1; [3<]

¹⁹³ Lewis Cropley (DAEPAC), pp.1-2.

A1. Legal duties and powers

- A1.1 Ofcom's principal duty in carrying out its functions is to further the interests of citizens and consumers (where appropriate by promoting competition). In particular, we are required to secure the availability throughout the United Kingdom of a wide range of television and radio services which (taken as a whole) are both of high quality and calculated to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests, the maintenance of a sufficient plurality of providers of different television and radio services and the optimal use of spectrum.¹⁹⁴
- A1.2 When carrying out our duties, including those relating to radio licensing, we must have regard as relevant, among other things, to: the desirability of encouraging investment and innovation; the different needs and interests of all persons who may wish to make use of spectrum; the needs of persons with disabilities, of the elderly and of those on low incomes; the opinions of consumers in relevant markets and of members of the public generally; and the different interests of persons in the different parts of the UK, of the different ethnic communities within the UK and of persons living in rural and in urban areas.
- A1.3 In addition, we are also required, when performing our duty to further the interests of consumers, to have regard, in particular, to the interests of those consumers in respect of choice, price, quality of service and value for money.¹⁹⁵
- A1.4 Where it appears to us that any of our general duties conflict with each other in a particular case, we must secure that the conflict is resolved in the manner we think is best in the circumstances.¹⁹⁶
- A1.5 In performing our duties, we are required to have regard in all cases to the principles under which regulatory activities should be transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted only at cases in which action is needed, and any other principles appearing to Ofcom to represent best regulatory practice.¹⁹⁷
- A1.6 In carrying out our spectrum functions, we have a duty under section 3 of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006 to have regard in particular to: (i) the extent to which the spectrum is available for use or further use for wireless telegraphy, (ii) the demand for use of that spectrum for wireless telegraphy and (iii) the demand that is likely to arise in future for the use of that spectrum for wireless telegraphy. We also have a duty to have regard, in particular, to the desirability of promoting: (i) the efficient management and use of the spectrum for wireless telegraphy, (ii) the economic and other benefits that may arise from the use of wireless telegraphy, (iii) the development of innovative services and (iv) competition in the provision of electronic communications services.
- A1.7 Also, in accordance with section 108 of the Deregulation Act 2015, we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting economic growth when exercising our regulatory functions. In order to consider the promotion of economic growth, Ofcom will exercise its regulatory functions in a way that ensures that: a) regulatory action is taken only when it is

¹⁹⁴ Section 3 of the Communications Act 2003 (the "CA 2003").

¹⁹⁵ Section 3(5) of the CA 2003.

¹⁹⁶ Section 3(7) of the CA 2003.

¹⁹⁷ Section 3(3) of the CA 2003.

needed; and b) any action taken is proportionate. The UK Government's statutory guidance on this duty recognises drivers of economic growth to include innovation and competition.

A2. Impact assessments

Assessing the impact of our decisions

- A2.1 Section 7 of the CA 2003 requires us to carry out and publish an assessment of the likely impact of implementing proposals which would be likely to have a significant impact on businesses or the general public, or when there is a major change in Ofcom's activities.
- A2.2 More generally, impact assessments form part of good policy making and we therefore expect to carry them out in relation to a large majority of our proposals. We use impact assessments to help us understand and assess the potential impact of our policy decisions before we make them. They also help us explain the policy decisions we have decided to take and why we consider those decisions best fulfil our applicable duties and objectives in the least intrusive way. Our [impact assessment guidance](#) sets out our general approach to how we assess and present the impact of our proposed decisions.
- A2.3 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the '2010 Act') imposes a duty on Ofcom, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct related to the following protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation. The 2010 Act also requires Ofcom to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share specified protected characteristics and persons who do not.
- A2.4 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the '1998 Act') imposes a separate duty on Ofcom, when carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the 1998 Act. Ofcom's [Revised Northern Ireland Equality Scheme](#) explains how we comply with our statutory duties under the 1998 Act.
- A2.5 To help us comply with our duties under the 2010 Act and the 1998 Act, we assess the impact of our proposals on persons sharing protected characteristics and, in particular, whether they may discriminate against such persons or impact on equality of opportunity or good relations. When thinking about equality we think more broadly than persons that share protected characteristics identified in equalities legislation and think about potential impacts on various groups of persons (see paragraph 4.7 of our impact assessment guidance).
- A2.6 In particular, section 3(4) of the CA 2003 also requires us to have regard to the needs and interests of specific groups of persons when performing our duties, as appear to us to be relevant in the circumstances. These include:
- a) the vulnerability of children and of others whose circumstances appear to us to put them in need of special protection;
 - b) the needs of persons with disabilities, older persons and persons on low incomes; and
 - c) the different interests of persons in the different parts of the UK, of the different ethnic communities within the UK and of persons living in rural and in urban areas.

Impact assessments

What we said

- A2.7 In our consultation we set out a number of key principles that we had identified when proposing our strategic approach to broadcast radio licensing in the short-to-medium term, setting them in the context of a rapidly evolving radio landscape and finite spectrum resources. As outlined above, we proposed to prioritise licensing activities going forward that support growth and provide maximum benefits to listeners. We also wanted to maintain support for existing services and maintain appropriate flexibility within our regulatory requirements. We signalled a reduced focus on new analogue and certain other licence types where audiences are declining or spectrum is limited.
- A2.8 We integrated our provisional assessment of the likely impact of our proposals in sections 3 and 4 of our February 2026 consultation. In particular, in section 3 of our consultation document we set out our considerations regarding: our existing commitments (as noted in our [Plan of Work 2025/26](#) and [Proposed Plan of Work 2026/27](#)); the changing landscape for broadcast radio in the UK; audience trends; spectrum availability; changes in the legal framework (following the implementation of the Media Act 2024); and considerations regarding the 40% ceiling policy. We fed these considerations into the proposed strategic approach and rationale which we outlined in section 4 of our consultation document.
- A2.9 We took all these factors into account when considering our proposals to assess the likelihood that they would promote growth and bring social, cultural and economic benefits to communities while ensuring sustainability across the sector and the impact on industry stakeholders. Although we identified some potential negative impacts (regarding the sectors and licensing types we were not proposing to prioritise), we considered that these were minimised by the design of our proposals and outweighed by the benefits.

What respondents told us

- A2.10 A number of stakeholders broadly supported our assessment on the impact of our proposed broadcast licensing priorities,¹⁹⁸ with [3<] suggesting the proposed priorities will have a positive impact on the broadcasting sector and audiences, strengthening diversity and promoting social cohesion.¹⁹⁹
- A2.11 However, while respondents generally supported our impact assessment and acknowledged the potential benefits for communities, they also identified a number of additional considerations around implementation. These included the need for further consideration around the potential effects further local DAB licensing may have on SSDAB sustainability²⁰⁰ and for “timely and transparent implementation”.²⁰¹
- A2.12 Affinity Media said the move to a more “streamlined and prioritised licensing approach” could have the potential to risk a reduced focus on analogue and smaller scale services which could impact local provision. It was also noted that the assessment might not capture regional variations²⁰² and that there was a need to consider where SSDAB

¹⁹⁸ [3<], p.3; Dee Radio Group, p.5; Local DAB Association, p.5; MuxCo Ltd, p.2; Affinity Media NE CIC, p.6; SWU.FM, p.2.; [3<]

¹⁹⁹ [3<]

²⁰⁰ Dee Radio Group, p.5; Local DAB Association, p.5; MuxCo, p.2.

²⁰¹ Local DAB Association, p.5.

²⁰² Affinity Media NE CIC, p.7.

expansion could potentially erode listening and revenue for existing local radio multiplexes.²⁰³

- A2.13 AS set out in paragraph 3.26 Radiocentre requested that Ofcom consider the impact of overlapping community radio services competing with small commercial radio services.²⁰⁴
- A2.14 Specifically, Leicester Digital Partnership said that the analysis does not reflect the commercial interaction between local DAB and SSDAB sufficiently and an expansion of local DAB could undermine existing SSDAB multiplexes. They suggested this could “increase pressure on carriage rates” for other services.²⁰⁵
- A2.15 Station House Media Unit also noted that regulatory constraints on SSDAB, in particular the 40% rule, would prevent the benefits identified in our analysis from being realised.²⁰⁶
- A2.16 Meanwhile, UK Community Radio Network noted that the “impact assessment failed to make the case for longevity of FM”, which they believe is there.
- A2.17 Better Media considered the impact assessment to be overly favourable to Ofcom’s proposals.²⁰⁷ It argued that the assessment did not adequately consider Ofcom’s institutional capability, noting that licensing priorities appeared to be driven by resource and administrative constraints. In its view, regulatory capacity should be improved through systems reform rather than informing more conservative licensing priorities.²⁰⁸

Our response

- A2.18 Having reviewed our priorities and considered the consultation responses received from stakeholders we have decided to confirm the majority of the priorities we set out in our February 2026 consultation for the reasons set out in the document above.
- A2.19 However, we have made some changes to our consultation proposals in response to stakeholder feedback, including deciding to:
- a) publish an EOI for further analogue community radio licensing; and
 - b) not prioritise the advertisement of new local DAB multiplex licences.
- A2.20 We set out our final assessment of the impacts of these specific changes, as well as the broader priorities we have agreed on, in the sections below.
- A2.21 Overall, having considered the impact our proposed priorities may have on the industry, and based on our consideration of the impacts as set out in section 3, we consider that our approach would promote growth in the sector and bring social, cultural and economic benefits to communities, while ensuring sustainability across the sector and will have an overall neutral or positive impact. We have sought to minimise any potential negative impacts. This approach is therefore consistent with our duties, including encouraging investment and innovation, promoting economic growth and ensuring that spectrum is used efficiently. Assessment of our decisions
- A2.22 Analogue Radio

²⁰³ MuxCo Ltd, p.2.

²⁰⁴ Radiocentre Ltd, p.2.

²⁰⁵ Leicester Digital Partnership CIC, p.12.

²⁰⁶ Station House Media Ltd, p.3.

²⁰⁷ Better Media, p.8.

²⁰⁸ Better Media, p.8.

- A2.23 Our decision to continue to prioritise applications from existing community analogue licensees for technical changes, including coverage improvements and extensions, and to grant new analogue community radio licences will have a positive impact on audiences and existing (and new) community radio licensees as set out in paragraphs 3.32 to 3.35. We recognise that there may be some cases where there may be a negative impact on local commercial licensees as a result of increased competition for audiences in areas where new licences or coverage extensions are granted. However, we consider that in general this will be outweighed by the overall likely benefit to audiences of the availability of new or extended community radio services. As set out in paragraphs 3.52 to 3.54, we will publish redacted versions of applications prior to issuing new licences or extensions so that existing licensees can raise specific relevant comments at this stage if they wish. There are also funding limitations and extension limits which apply to community radio services which overlap with relevant commercial radio licences.
- A2.24 As set out in paragraph 3.48, the publication of a call for formal EoI for further analogue community radio licensing, rather than immediately issuing an Invitation to Apply or having a rolling open ad hoc licensing process, will enable Ofcom to assess demand for community radio licences before commencing a formal licensing round. This is likely to have a positive impact as it will allow us to target activity where there is demonstrable interest from stakeholders, support the management of finite AM and FM spectrum and meet our duty to ensure our priorities are proportionate, targeted and efficient.
- A2.25 In a broader sense, we consider that supporting analogue community radio stations promotes innovation and competition and helps secure the continued availability of radio services across the UK. They also promote growth – for example, coverage extensions help existing radio stations to grow, while new licensing, where sustainable, helps new enterprises to launch and local businesses to use them to market themselves. Meanwhile, supporting community radio helps to develop a pool of talent to help the sector grow as a whole.
- A2.26 Given the low level of demand for new analogue commercial radio services and the decline in analogue listening, as set out in paragraph 3.87, we consider that our decision to continue to support current commercial licences but not provide any licensing opportunities for new local or national commercial radio services on FM or AM in the short-to-medium term will have a neutral impact as an extension of the status quo.
- A2.27 We consider that these decisions remain consistent with our duties, including encouraging investment and innovation, promoting economic growth and ensuring that spectrum is used efficiently and will have an overall neutral or positive impact.

DAB digital radio priorities

- A2.28 For the reasons set out in paragraphs 3.97, 3.98 and 3.105 to 3.109, we consider that our decision to facilitate further development of the SSDAB sector through enabling coverage improvements and extensions and, where appropriate, advertising new multiplex licences, is likely to have a positive impact. This is because we believe it will be likely to help: promote economic growth; ensure efficient use of the spectrum; promote competition within the broadcast radio sector; encourage a plurality of service providers; and provide more choice of radio services for listeners.
- A2.29 On our decision to be more flexible in our interpretation of the ‘40% ceiling’ explained in paragraphs 3.124 to 3.129, we believe that this change in policy will help the growth and sustainability of the SSDAB sector while clearly preserving the current distinction between the local and small-scale DAB layers. The latter will continue to provide opportunities for

grass-roots stations to broadcast to smaller geographical areas at affordable carriage fees, which has generally not proven to be the case with multiplexes serving considerably larger areas. We recognise that there is potential for a small negative impact on local multiplexes as a result of increased competition for audiences in a small number of areas where coverage extensions over 40% may be granted. However, we consider that in general this will be outweighed by the overall likely benefit to audiences of the availability of new or extended services. We also note at paragraph 3.128 above that licensees will have an opportunity to raise concerns before extensions are granted.

- A2.30 In respect of our decision not to prioritise the advertisement of new local DAB multiplex licences, outlined in paragraphs 3.140 to 3.142 above, we recognise that advertising new local multiplexes could potentially stimulate competition and growth within the commercial radio sector, albeit that the number of areas in which such multiplexes could be advertised would be limited due to spectrum constraints. However, mindful of the consultation responses we received, we have concluded that licensing new local DAB multiplexes at this particular point in time risks undermining the sustainability and potential growth of the nascent SSDAB sector and therefore the benefits it has the potential to provide.
- A2.31 We note the suggestion that our February 2026 Consultation included a strong focus on time, workload and queueing pressures which could be improved by systems reform. We recognise that some systems reforms may be beneficial in the longer term. However, these may not be practical for immediate action via a suite of proposed priorities which are intended to address issues only in the short-to-medium term. Our finalised priorities have therefore been agreed in the context of the current administrative systems being retained, although we note the suggestion for improvement over a longer timescale.
- A2.32 Overall, we conclude that any potential impacts of our decisions on which broadcast radio licensing activity to prioritise in the short-to-medium term would be likely to be neutral or positive. We consider the revised priorities will be positive for growth and that they are consistent with our duties to support the radio sector and enable growth, investment and innovation.

Equality impact assessment

- A2.33 Section 149 of the 2010 Act imposes a duty on Ofcom, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct related to protected characteristics under the 2010 Act. The 2010 Act also requires Ofcom to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share specified protected characteristics and persons who do not.
- A2.34 Ofcom has separate but complementary duties under Northern Ireland's equality legislation, set out in the 1998 Act. This requires Ofcom to screen policies for their impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations in each of the nine equality categories identified for Northern Ireland.
- A2.35 When thinking about equality we think more broadly than persons that share protected characteristics identified in equalities legislation and consider potential impacts on various groups of persons (see paragraph 4.7 of our impact assessment guidance).
- A2.36 We carried out an equality impact assessment of our proposed priorities in our February 2026 Consultation and have given careful consideration to whether the decisions we set

out in this Statement will have a particular impact on persons with protected characteristics and depending on a person's personal circumstances.

Our position at consultation

- A2.37 In our February 2026 Consultation we set out how we had taken into account factors such as audience trends and needs in proposing our broadcast licensing priorities and the potential impact our proposed policies would be likely to have on individuals, depending on their circumstances.
- A2.38 We did not consider that the proposed policy approach would have any negative impact on persons sharing protected characteristics or on any other groups of persons, nor that it would discriminate against such persons or impact on equality of opportunity or good relations. In fact, we considered it may have substantial positive impacts.
- A2.39 We acknowledged that community radio provides important social, cultural and economic benefits by serving underrepresented, minority and geographically dispersed communities.
- A2.40 Our proposals supported both SSDAB and analogue radio as we understand that there are benefits that each of these can bring to specific groups. In particular, analogue radio can bring benefits to specific minority communities, such as the elderly, lower economic groups and some rural communities.

What respondents said

- A2.41 A number of stakeholders broadly agreed with our impact assessments more generally.²⁰⁹ However, some asked us to further consider the potential impacts of our proposals on minority language, rural listeners and underserved communities.
- A2.42 The Community Media Association raised concerns about the proposed expansion of local DAB as they noted that "this could have a detrimental impact on both community radio stations on SSDAB multiplexes as well as the SSDAB multiplexes themselves".²¹⁰ High Peak One Digital also raised concerns around the risk to SSDAB operators. They suggested that the impact assessment should consider the impact of "regulatory inaction on existing operators".²¹¹
- A2.43 One confidential respondent [X].
- A2.44 One respondent questioned whether the impact assessment underestimated the challenges of serving communities in more difficult terrain and called for more up-to-date evidence and analysis to support its assumptions.²¹² Some raised issues including whether the analysis underestimated the role of FM radio, the need for long term support in rural areas, for older audiences and ethnic minority and faith communities²¹³ and the need to ensure fair access to spectrum across Wales. These stakeholders urged Ofcom to adopt a more flexible approach to rural coverage to better reflect these constraints.
- A2.45 Radio Utsav accepted Ofcom's acknowledgment that community radio services support and benefit minority communities.²¹⁴ However, they suggested that a fuller equality impact

²⁰⁹ Station House Media Unit, p.3; MuxCo, p.2; 10 Radio, p.1; Bauer Media, p.3; Affinity Media NE CIC, p.6.

²¹⁰ Community Media Association, p.3.

²¹¹ High Peak One Digital, p.3.

²¹² Coast Community Radio and Media CIC, p.4.

²¹³ UK Community Radio Network, pp.2-3, p.4.

²¹⁴ Radio Utsav, pp.4-5.

assessment “specifically addressing linguistic minority communities served by SSDAB stations, would be appropriate before the final statement is published.”²¹⁵

- A2.46 Better Media suggested that the implications of spectrum constraints also needed to be considered further. Where there are affordability assessments they queried the age of the data, suggesting that Ofcom relies on outdated systems, data and assumptions and should improve its capacity and refresh its evidence, especially to understand local and equality impacts.²¹⁶
- A2.47 Affinity Media noted that our impact assessment might not capture regional variations.²¹⁷
- A2.48 Maxxwave said that if FM spectrum availability is defined in a binary manner as being either available or not available then “without collaborative problem-solving, communities in areas with constrained spectrum (often urban, often diverse) may be disproportionately unable to secure licences. The process design itself has equality implications”.²¹⁸ They also suggested updating the affordability analysis for DAB receivers to better “reflect the current cost-of-living landscape”.²¹⁹

Our final assessment

- A2.49 As set out in this Statement, we have considered stakeholder feedback in response to the consultation. We acknowledge that while many stakeholders were in broad agreement with our equality impact assessment, some stakeholders asked Ofcom to further consider the impact of our proposals, specifically for underserved groups including rural and minority communities.
- A2.50 As set out above, community radio provides important social, cultural and economic benefits by serving underrepresented, minority and geographically dispersed communities. Our research in 2025 on Measuring the Social Gain of Community Radio concluded that:
- “community radio stations play an important role in providing a voice to local communities across the UK. They serve as an important platform for underrepresented groups, encouraging local identity, culture, and social engagement. These stations are driven largely by volunteers and offer a unique mix of locally produced content that reflects the diverse interests and needs of their communities. Beyond entertainment, community radio contributes to social inclusion, education, civic participation, and local economic development.”*
- A2.51 We also recognise that analogue radio can bring benefits to specific minority communities, such as the elderly, lower socio-economic groups and some rural communities. This is reflected in our finalised priorities, as we have set out that we will consider inviting applications for new community FM radio licences in areas where DAB coverage is limited and there is insufficient choice of alternative analogue services.
- A2.52 The use of SSDAB multiplexes also allows for a greater number of radio stations to reach more communities across the UK.
- A2.53 We therefore consider that our decision to provide new community radio licensing opportunities and consider more improvements to coverage going forward will be beneficial for these groups, including groups in both rural and more urban areas. However,

²¹⁵ Radio Utsav, pp.4-5.

²¹⁶ Better Media, p.8.

²¹⁷ Affinity Media NE CIC, p.7.

²¹⁸ Maxxwave, pp.10-11.

²¹⁹ Maxxwave, p.11.

as set out above, following analysis of consultation responses received we have refined our proposals to specifically include a decision to publish a call for EoI, alongside this Statement, which will allow stakeholders to indicate their interest in applying for a FM community radio licence before we open a round of licensing inviting applications. This will enable Ofcom to gauge the levels of demand for FM community radio licences, the audience benefits of prioritising application invitations in certain areas and allow us to plan our resources and the invitation process to ensure we can meet demand alongside our other priorities set out in the Statement. As some respondents to our consultation highlighted that there may still be circumstances where an AM service could provide public value and audience benefits, we have also decided to consider exceptional circumstances for an AM community radio licence through the Expression of Interest process. The intention is to provide new community analogue radio licences in areas where it could bring significant benefits (including to underserved communities). As such, we believe it could have an overall positive impact on underserved groups.

- A2.54 We know that local and events-based services provided by RSLs also bring communities together based on shared experience. We have also taken this into account when formulating our final policy position.
- A2.55 A concern expressed by many respondents was the potential impact upon the sustainability of SSDAB, and therefore the wider community radio sector that serves rural and minority communities, if we were to license further local DAB multiplexes as proposed in our consultation. In light of these concerns, as well as other considerations outlined in paragraph 3.141, we have decided that further local DAB multiplex licensing will not be a priority for Ofcom at this particular point in time, meaning there will not be any potential for negative impact on these groups in this respect.
- A2.56 In relation to our decision to enable coverage improvements and extensions through the development of the SSDAB sector, we consider that the impacts on the groups identified are likely to be neutral.
- A2.57 Our decision to be more flexible in our interpretation of the 40% ceiling, outlined above at paragraph 3.124, may provide further opportunities for services covering smaller geographic areas, which may have a positive impact on under-served communities.
- A2.58 A number of stakeholders suggested that we gather more evidence in relation to the provision of services to rural and underserved groups and on topics such as the affordability of radio receivers, community radio listenership and research into the definition of what a community is. We consider additional research is not necessary at this stage in order to determine the impact of our short-to-medium term priorities on groups sharing protected characteristics and the other groups listed in paragraph 4.7 of our impact assessment guidance. We recently carried out our [*Research into the measurement of social gain*](#), as referenced above. We also carry out annual surveys of audio listening through our Audio and Podcast Surveys and Media Nations report, as well as having access to data from RAJAR. We collect data on rural connectivity through our annual Connected Nations reports. We have relied on this data as appropriate and as set out throughout this Statement.
- A2.59 Therefore, in summary we do not consider that the finalised policy positions set out in this Statement would have any negative impact on persons sharing protected characteristics or on any other groups of persons, nor that they would discriminate against such persons or impact on equality of opportunity or good relations. In fact, as outlined above, we consider they may have substantial positive and neutral impacts on communities and individuals as

they are intended to increase opportunities for radio services and improve the ability of such services to serve a wider range of audiences

Welsh language

- A2.60 The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 made the Welsh language an officially recognised language in Wales. This legislation also led to the establishment of the office of the Welsh Language Commissioner who regulates and monitors our work. Ofcom is required to take Welsh language considerations into account when formulating, reviewing or revising policies which are relevant to Wales (including proposals which are not targeted at Wales specifically but are of interest across the UK).
- A2.61 Where the Welsh Language Standards are engaged, we consider the potential impact of a policy proposal on: (i) opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language; and (ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. We also consider how a proposal could be formulated so as to have, or increase, a positive impact, or not to have adverse effects or to decrease any adverse effects.

Our position at consultation

- A2.62 As noted in our February 2026 Consultation, a number of community radio services (both analogue and digital) have commitments to broadcast content in Welsh and we acknowledged the challenges of coverage levels for DAB in Wales, which remain lower than in England.

What respondents said

- A2.63 There were no comments directly responding to Ofcom's impact assessment of Welsh Language considerations, however the importance of Welsh language broadcasting was highlighted by Coast Community Radio and Media CIC who said, "across many parts of Wales including Conwy County, there is a need to serve Welsh-speaking communities, many of whom live on the fringes of larger population centres or in rural heartlands".²²⁰

Our final position

- A2.64 As set out in our February 2026 consultation, we recognise that a number of community radio services (both analogue and digital) have commitments to broadcast content in Welsh. Indeed, as outlined in paragraph 3.14 of our February 2026 consultation²²¹, coverage levels for DAB in Wales remain lower than in England, hence our proposal to continue with analogue community radio licensing could help provide increased provision. We have decided to confirm our proposal to continue with analogue community radio licensing, this could help provide increased Welsh language provision, providing a positive outcome for Welsh language communities.
- A2.65 Outside of this, we do not consider there are any additional measures we could take that would increase positive effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language. Nor do we consider that our confirmed proposals would have any adverse effect on the Welsh language or treat the Welsh language less favourably than the English language.

²²⁰ Coast Community Radio and Media CIC, p.2.

²²¹ [Consultation on Ofcom's proposed strategic approach to broadcast radio licensing](#)