

Small-scale DAB coverage change: Torbay

Decision on request to vary the licensed area of the Torbay small-scale radio multiplex

Statement

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1. Overview

- 1.1 A radio multiplex service is the means by which DAB digital radio stations are broadcast. This document sets out Ofcom’s decision on a request to change the area to be served by the Torbay small-scale radio multiplex service.
- 1.2 Ofcom is required to consult before deciding whether to agree to such a request. We did so in a consultation that closed on 08 April 2026.

What we have decided – in brief

We have decided to exercise our discretion under section 54A(2) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as modified by the Small-scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019) to approve an application from TorDab Limited to vary the small-scale radio multiplex licence for Torbay so as to change the area within which the service is required to be available.

2. Process for changing a radio multiplex licensing area

- 2.1 Small-scale radio multiplex licences are granted by Ofcom principally to enable the provision of community and local digital sound programme services on the DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting) platform. The statutory basis for licensing small-scale radio multiplexes is the Broadcasting Act 1996, as modified by the Small-scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019 (the “Broadcasting Act”).
- 2.2 The holder of a small-scale radio multiplex licence is responsible for, among other things, delivering its service in accordance with a technical plan agreed by Ofcom prior to grant of the licence. The technical plan contains details of the transmitter site(s) from which the multiplex service is broadcast, and other technical details such as power levels and aerial patterns etc.
- 2.3 For small-scale radio multiplexes, the technical plan effectively defines the licensed area of the service. Ofcom publishes coverage maps showing the coverage and therefore extent of the licensed areas for such services. It should be noted these are indicative only, based on computer models rather than actual measurement, and on a defined predicted signal level deemed sufficient to qualify as “receivable”. They are subject to some variation due to possible interference from other services and seek to estimate in-building coverage only. Nevertheless, such models provide a reasonable estimate of the coverage achieved by the technical plan appended to a licence.

Statutory framework for variations

- 2.4 Under section 54A(2) of the Broadcasting Act, Ofcom is able to vary a small-scale radio multiplex licence by—
 - a) varying the frequency on which the licensed service is required to be provided,
 - b) reducing the area or locality in which the licensed service is required to be available, or
 - c) extending that area or locality to include an adjoining area or locality.
- 2.5 Section 54A(3) and (4) further specify that Ofcom must have received an application for the variation from the licence holder, and that this application must include a technical plan relating to the service proposed to be provided under the licence indicating, in particular—
 - a) the area or locality which would be within the coverage area of the service,
 - b) the timetable in accordance with which that coverage would be achieved, and
 - c) the technical means by which it would be achieved.
- 2.6 Under section 54(5), before deciding whether to grant the application, OFCOM must publish a notice specifying—
 - a) the proposed variation of the licence, and
 - b) a period in which representations may be made to OFCOM about the proposal.
- 2.7 Finally, section 54(7) states that Ofcom may vary a licence in accordance with an application, “only if they are satisfied that doing so would not unacceptably reduce the number of community or local digital sound programme services available to persons living

in the area or locality for which, before the proposed variation, the small-scale radio multiplex service is required to be available.”

Policy framework for variations

- 2.8 Whilst the above sets out the statutory framework for variations, section 54A(2) provides Ofcom with a discretionary power. That is, we can give approval if the statutory conditions are met but we are not required to do so.
- 2.9 We first assess whether a requested change in transmission arrangements constitutes a frequency change, a reduction in the licensed area, or an extension of the licensed area to an adjoining area.
- 2.10 Where a request, if approved, would result in a change of frequency or a decrease in overall coverage of the multiplex service (as measured by adult population coverage), Ofcom will generally consider these to fall within the scope of section 54A and thus will need to be consulted upon before Ofcom can reach a decision.
- 2.11 Where a request, if approved, would result in an overall increase in coverage for the multiplex service (as measured by adult population coverage), Ofcom will determine whether it constitutes an extension of the area in which the licensed service is required to be available to include an adjoining area. We interpret ‘adjoining area’ in this context to mean an area of new coverage outside the existing licensed area which, whether measured in terms of the specific location(s), geographical size(s) or population coverage(s), could reasonably be considered to be material – we recognise there is a difference between overspill coverage that is unavoidable and intentional extra coverage. We will also take account of whether that adjoining area is, or will potentially be, served by another small-scale radio multiplex service, and whether it was or wasn’t part of the original area advertised by Ofcom.
- 2.12 If we determine that the proposed change in transmission arrangements would result in an extension of the licensed area to an adjoining area, the request will need to be consulted upon before Ofcom can reach a decision.
- 2.13 In circumstances where a change would result in an overall increase in coverage for the multiplex service but not constitute an extension of the licensed area to an adjoining area, we will nevertheless also consider whether any coverage which is lost as a result of the changes is of sufficient magnitude and/or significance such that a consultation would still be appropriate. In reaching this view, we will have regard to the extent of any coverage losses both in terms of the absolute numbers of people who are predicted to lose coverage of the multiplex service, but also in terms of the geographical location(s) where coverage is predicted to be lost. We are likely to attach greater weight to coverage losses in the core population centre(s) of the licensed area than to losses at the periphery of the licensed area, or where losses are dispersed across sparsely-populated areas.
- 2.14 For all requests to change transmission arrangements, Ofcom will not give its approval unless it is satisfied in relation to all the following technical requirements:
- 2.15 Overlap with any relevant local multiplex(es) remains not greater than 40% (in line with the policy intention of section 50(2A)(c) of the BA1996 to limit such overlaps).
- b. Any international constraints are adhered to.
 - c. There is no significant increase in the level of interference to multiplexes elsewhere.¹

2.16 Ofcom will also consider:

- a) Whether the reason(s) for making the change is adequately supported by evidence. In particular, we would not normally approve a reduction in coverage unless continuing with the current technical plan is demonstrably not feasible, and feasibility cannot reasonably be achieved through less impactful means.
- b) Whether there is evidence the licensee has taken reasonable steps to minimise any adverse impacts from changes to its coverage, and that any changes in coverage involving coverage reduction or extension into the coverage area of neighbouring small-scale multiplexes are unavoidable. This should include an indication of all other sites that were investigated and any reasons for selecting a preferred site.
- c) Whether any increase of overlap (or new overlaps) with the coverage of other small-scale radio multiplex services is excessive. Whilst some overlap between small-scale multiplexes is inevitable, and changes to transmission arrangements may alter this overlap, in general we would consider this should represent no more than a small proportion of the other multiplex's coverage (if on-air) or polygon (if not yet launched, or yet to be advertised), and extending coverage to a material extent into a key population centre served by a launched or planned small scale multiplex service should be avoided.

2.17 In addition, for any variation requests which are subject to consultation, if we are satisfied in relation to the statutory criterion specified in paragraph 2.7 we will also have regard to the following additional criteria when determining whether to vary the licence:

- a) whether the change in transmission arrangements would be calculated to maintain or promote the development of digital sound broadcasting otherwise than by satellite;
- b) whether the licensee's proposed coverage plan is satisfactory;
- c) whether the licensee has the ability to maintain the licensed service;
- d) whether there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect the rights and interests of stations carried on the multiplex and the rights and interests of other multiplex operators (and the stations they carry); and
- e) Any other factors that appear relevant to the particular case.

3. The variation request

Proposed new technical plan

- 3.1 The licence to provide the Torbay small-scale radio multiplex service was awarded to TorDab Ltd in January 2023. The multiplex launched in November 2023.
- 3.2 TorDab Ltd has applied to vary its licence on the basis that the current transmitter site at Bovey Tracey is financially unsustainable and has resulted in a lack of coverage on the coast near Babbacombe. It is proposing to use a new transmitter site in Babbacombe in order to reduce costs and increase coverage of the bay area. TorDab has highlighted that, if the Bovey Tracey site is maintained, the multiplex operator will likely cease operations.
- 3.3 Annex 1 sets out a comparison between the current coverage and that which Ofcom calculates would be achieved by the revised technical plan proposed by the applicant. In brief, the revised technical plan proposes replacing the current transmitter site at Bovey Tracey with a site in Babbacombe, which is predicted to result in a net loss in coverage of around 18,500 people compared to the currently licenced coverage area. This net loss is comprised of around 24,200 people who will no longer be served by the multiplex, partially offset by around 5,700 people who will gain coverage.
- 3.4 Section 7 of Ofcom’s [Guidance Notes](#) for small-scale multiplex applicants and licensees sets out our approach to considering requests for changes to the coverage of existing small-scale radio multiplexes. Having regard to the criteria set out in the guidance note, we considered that it was appropriate to consult on the licence variation request for Torbay given that the request:
- a) would involve providing new coverage (primarily in the Babbacombe and Exmouth areas) which we consider would constitute an extension to an adjoining area, and
 - b) would lead to coverage losses (primarily along a stretch of the A38 near Bovey Tracey) which, given their magnitude and location, we consider to be significant.

Our preliminary view

- 3.5 In our consultation published on 11 March 2026, Ofcom considered that the application received met the technical requirements as to content set out in section 54A(3) and (4) of the Broadcasting Act.
- 3.6 In relation to the statutory requirements in section 54A(6), the proposed change results in a net decrease in coverage amounting to an adult population of approximately 18,500, and this involves increases in some areas and reductions in others. The change in transmitter site location means that around 24,000 people, mainly in Heathfield, Kingsteignton and Chudleigh, would lose coverage compared with the current licenced area. In the context of a multiplex covering around 159,000 people, this is a material loss.
- 3.7 However, the statutory provision requires consideration of whether this is “unacceptable”. The acceptability of a loss is not simply a matter of the number of households affected but the circumstances of the particular case. In this case, Ofcom noted that the licensee has provided evidence that the current transmitter site at Bovey Tracey is financially unsustainable, and continuing at this site would likely lead to TorDab ceasing operations. The licensee has declared that proposed site at Babbacombe would be free of rental and

power costs, and as such the change would significantly reduce site costs, therefore making the operation sustainable.

- 3.8 TorDab has stated that it considered retaining a site around Newton Abbot, however concluded that this was not in line with the direction of the multiplex, the requirements of stakeholders and the financial position of the company. It further stated that service providers have been informed about the implications of this change. Ofcom also noted that the topography of the area creates a challenge regarding DAB coverage.
- 3.9 While the loss of coverage is disappointing for affected listeners, Ofcom’s provisional view was that the alternative scenario of the multiplex ceasing to broadcast would constitute a significantly worse outcome for listeners within the coverage area, and the programme services currently carried on the multiplex.
- 3.10 In relation to policy considerations, Ofcom provisionally considered that all technical requirements referred to in paragraph 2.14 above were met, as overlap with the relevant local multiplexes remains below the 40% threshold and international constraints are still adhered to. While the coverage into other small-scale multiplexes increases slightly, we did not consider these to be large enough to warrant refusal.
- 3.11 With regards to the considerations listed in paragraph 2.15, we were also preliminarily satisfied. Our view was that continuing with the current technical plan was demonstrably unfeasible due to the costs associated with the current Bovey Tracey site, and that the licensee had taken some steps to explore less impactful options. Further, we were of the view that overlap with other small-scale multiplexes would not be excessive if the proposed technical plan were to be enacted. Ofcom was also satisfied that the criteria listed in paragraph 2.16 had been met.

Consultation responses and Ofcom assessment

- 3.12 Ofcom did not receive any responses to this consultation and as such the consultation did not provide any grounds for departing from our preliminary view.

Ofcom’s decision

- 3.13 We have decided, for the reasons set out above, to exercise our discretion under section 54A(2) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as modified by the Small-scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019) to approve the application from TorDAB Limited to vary the small-scale radio multiplex licence for Torbay so as to change the area within which the service is required to be available.

The overview section in Section 1 of this document is a simplified high-level summary only. The decision we have taken is set out in the full document.

A1. Proposed change

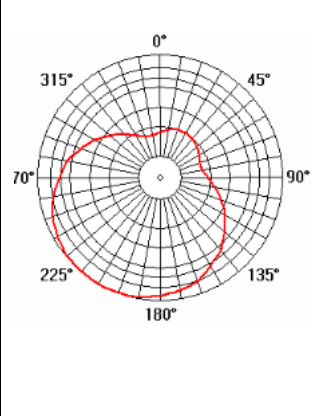
- A1.1 The licensee is proposing to change one of its three transmitter sites. The current site at Bovey Tracey would be replaced by a new site at Babbacombe. No changes to the technical parameters of the Alpine Lodge (Torquay) and Teignmouth Golf Course sites are proposed.
- A1.2 A summary of the currently licensed and proposed coverages is given below, together with a comparison of the coverage provided by each plan, and population counts of the adults (aged 15+) within the areas.
- A1.3 The coverage maps indicate where the small-scale radio multiplex service should be receivable on a DAB digital radio within a typical domestic building.¹
- A1.4 However, please note the following caveats:
- The maps are based on computer predictions rather than actual measurements, so is indicative only.
 - 'Receivable' is based on the defined signal level required by a receiver that meets the minimum receiver specification (available here: [Minimum specifications for DAB and DAB+ personal and domestic digital radio receivers: Digital radio action plan report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk), although that level may not be adequate for receivers built to a poorer sensitivity, or be sufficient in every location.
 - The maps do not take account of any interference from other DAB digital radio services. The likelihood of any such interference will increase as more DAB services are launched, but Ofcom will seek to reduce the impact as far as is reasonably practicable.
 - The maps do not show where reception outside homes (e.g. along roads) may be possible.

Coverage required by current licence

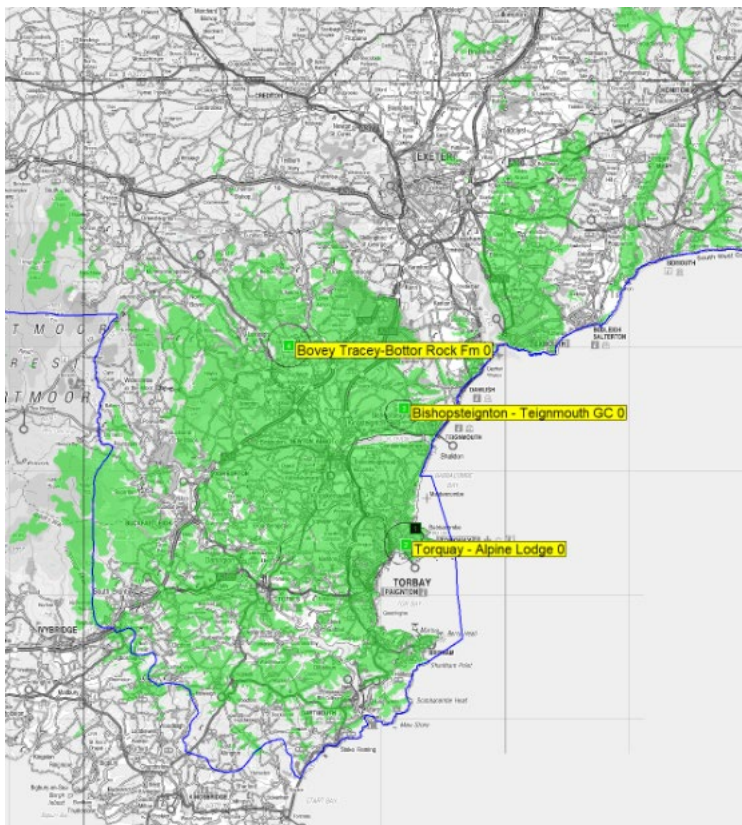
Currently licensed transmitter details

Site name	NGR	Site height	Power (W)	Aerial height	Aerial Pattern
Alpine Lodge	SX 92022 64079	81	160W	8	

¹ The areas classed as served are where we predict a field strength of at least 63dB μ V/m at 10m above ground level, which corresponds to providing a service at 80% location probability and 50% time availability, as set out in our [Technical policy guidance for DAB multiplex licensees \(ofcom.org.uk\)](http://www.ofcom.gov.uk)

Teignmouth Golf Course	SX 91851 75115	241	200W	11	
Bovey Tracey – Botter Rock Farm	SX 82552 80148	213	200W	12	Non-directional

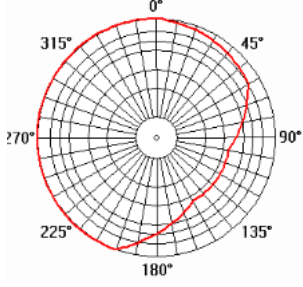
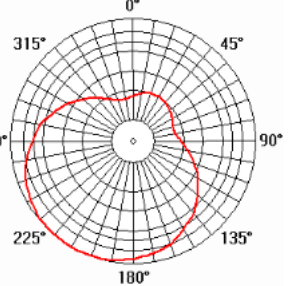
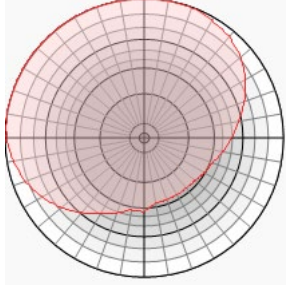
Map of currently licensed coverage



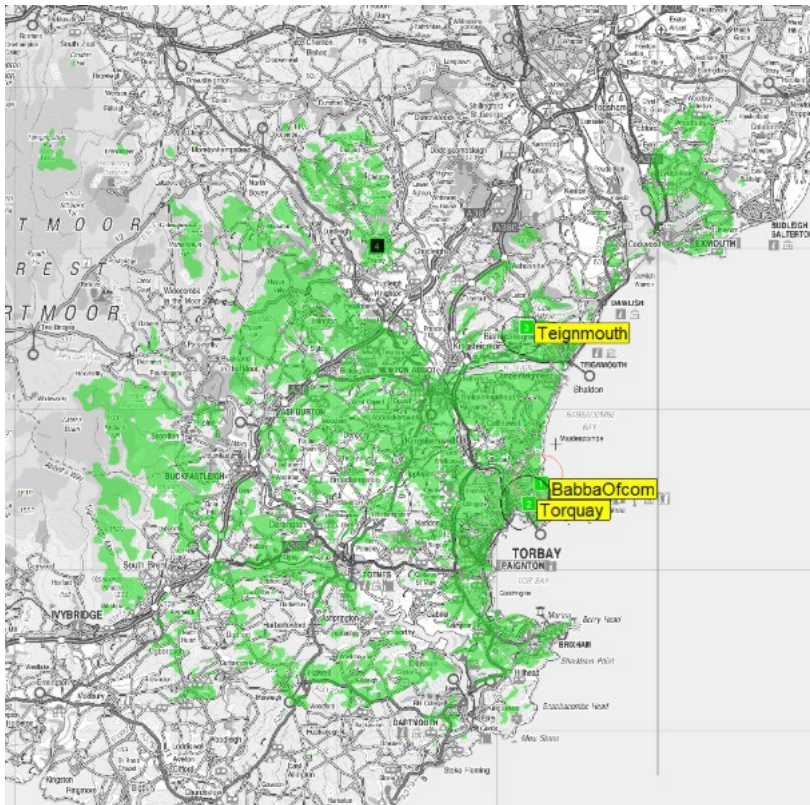
Coverage shown is for predicted indoor coverage (63dBµV/m at 10m above ground level)

Coverage proposed by the licensee

Proposed transmitter details (new site in bold)

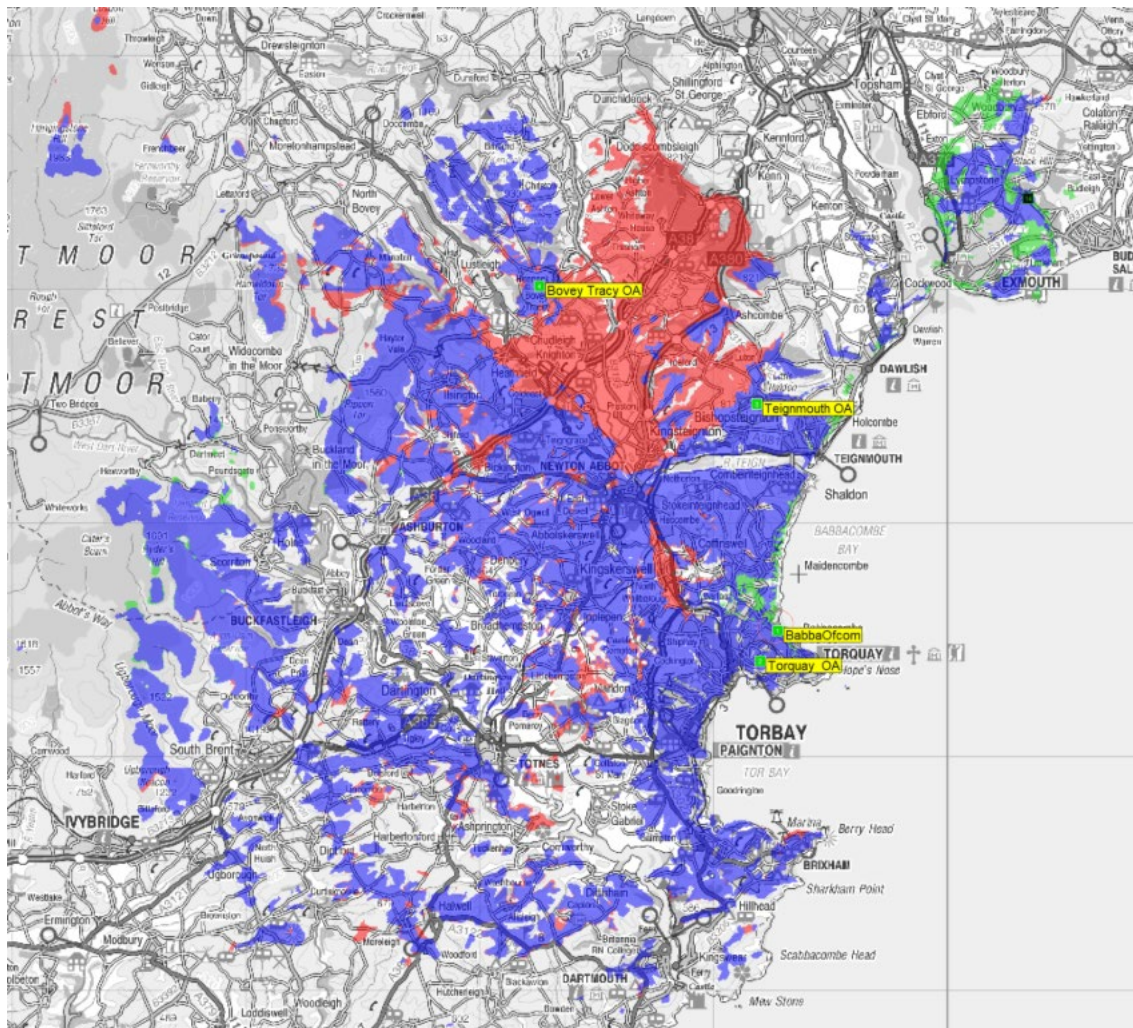
Site name	NGR	Site height	Power (W)	Aerial height	Aerial Pattern
Alpine Lodge	SX 92022 64079	81	160W	8	
Teignmouth Golf Course	SX 91851 75115	241	200W	11	
Babbacombe	SX 92725 65415	81	100W	12	 <p>AKG1 340 ETN</p>

Map of proposed coverage



Coverage shown is for predicted indoor coverage (63dBµV/m at 10m above ground level)

Comparison of coverage



Coverage comparison for the Torbay small-scale multiplex. Red is lost coverage, green is gained coverage and blue is retained coverage.

Coverage Summary Table (adults 15+)

Population served by currently licensed coverage	159,356
Population served by proposed coverage	140,845
Net population change	-18,511
Population retained (blue areas)	135,101
Population gained (green areas)	5,744
Population lost (red areas)	24,255

A2. Impact assessments

Impact assessment

- A2.1 Section 7 of the Communications Act 2003 requires that, where we are proposing to do anything for the purposes of, or in connection with, the carrying out of our functions, and it appears to us that the proposal is important, we are required to carry out and publish an assessment of the likely impact of implementing the proposal, or a statement setting out our reasons for thinking that it is unnecessary to carry out such an assessment.
- A2.2 In approving the request, there will be reduced coverage by the multiplex service, compared with the service currently required to be provided. The multiplex is required to provide capacity for community digital sound programme services, a characteristic of which is that they are provided for the good of members of the public or particular communities, and social gain within the locality. Commercial digital sound programme services do not have requirements in relation to social gain, but it is recognised that some have a particular community focus and in practice provide some benefits to listeners.
- A2.3 Therefore, the changes will have an adverse effect on consumers in the Torbay multiplex area when compared to the current coverage. This is due to the reduced coverage in the Heathfield, Kingsteignton and Chudleigh areas, which, while mitigated by relatively small coverage gains elsewhere, would amount to a net loss of around 18,500 adults.
- A2.4 However, Ofcom judges it appropriate to consider the alternative counterfactual of the multiplex ceasing operations entirely due to a lack of financial viability which we believe to be likely based on the evidence provided to us. As such, we believe the adverse impacts on consumers to be acceptable, as around 140,000 people will continue to be able to access the service if the proposed changes are enacted.

Equality impact assessment

- A2.5 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 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.
- A2.6 Regarding Ofcom's duties under the Equality Act, as noted above community services in particular can provide benefits to listeners sharing protected characteristics, and foster good relations between such people and others. There would be a net reduction in availability of such services resulting from the removal of the Bovey Tracey transmitter. However, referring to the general Impact Assessment above, Ofcom considers this to be acceptable due to the alternative, which would likely be the complete loss of coverage for the entire area, and therefore access to local community and commercial services, representing a materially worse impact for all consumers including those sharing protected characteristics.
- A2.7 Ofcom has not identified any further disproportionate benefits or adverse impacts on consumers and communities.