

Spence, Mr

Consultation question:

Should regional radio station Capital FM (Birmingham) be permitted to make the changes to its Character of Service as proposed with particular regard to the statutory criteria as set out in the summary? (The Broadcasting Act 1990 Section 106 (1A) (b) and (d) relating to Format changes).

Capital Birmingham should not be allowed to make the changes to the Character of Service as this would essentially change the station from an urban/black music station to a hit music station format which can potentially stop playing urban music if they wanted to if in the future it becomes less mainstream. The format change represents a real danger to the radio landscape in Birmingham as it can so significantly reduce the choice of music available in the area over time. It will make the station sound too similar to its main competitors in the area on FM.

I am not happy with the decision in particular to remove the commitment to listeners of African or Afro-Caribbean origin in terms of content and music. I do not believe the music output of Capital Birmingham should be allowed to be aligned to that of Yorkshire or London without a readvertisement of the license as the change requested is far too significant. I believe that the format must retain the words 'URBAN CONTEMPORARY BLACK MUSIC' and 'REGGAE, RnB AND HIP HOP' in order to be an acceptable request. The new requested format is already provided in much better quality by BBC Radio 1.

I am not happy with the way the station has been allowed to gradually change from Choice FM in the mid 90s to the present day Capital FM with such a dramatic change in music output despite only slight changes to the official OFCOM agreed station format, while Choice London and Capital FM co-exist in London providing 2 very different sounding services. The Capital Birmingham format is worded similarly to the Choice London format and so the station be broadcasting similar music and programming.

A station cannot be allowed to change format just because it wants to play the music that has the most appeal. If all stations were allowed to do this, eventually all stations would play the same music.

I disagree that halving the specialist music content is not significant, it is very significant and will simply mean that such shows will only take place in the middle of the night when no one is listening.

Changing the target demographic from "listeners of African and Afro-Caribbean origin, but with cross-over appeal to young white fans of urban contemporary black music" to a "service for 15-29 year-olds" with "particular appeal for listeners in their 20s" marks a very significant change and should only be allowed by way of readvertising the license. The proposed new demographic is very vague and basically means broadening the output to the point that it will be a mainstream station instead of a specialist music station. A modern rock music station such as Kerrang or XFM would not be allowed to make such a request so why should an

Urban music station? If this change is allowed, it will mean other similar specialist stations like Kiss may also start to submit similar requests to go mainstream as well. I wouldn't be surprised if they try doing something similar with XFM and Choice London's formats if this change is approved by OFCOM. Imagine having Capital1, Capital2 and Capital3 in London! and then Heart could apply for a format change as their music policy is also becoming more mainstream and upbeat, and could eventually merge with the Capital network as well! This is a very dangerous slippery slope if approved by OFCOM and will destroy the future of commercial radio for the listener, simply because some companies are so desperate to make as much money as they can.

None of the changes proposed should be allowed, OFCOM should reject the format change request and instead readvertise the license so another radio group can provide a more suitable service.

Additional comments:

I believe Global Radio should change Capital Birmingham into the former Choice FM station, hence no format change would be needed and the other Capital stations would have much more freedom with their playlists.

I believe that Global should have made this format change request before going ahead with the change from Galaxy Birmingham to Capital FM Birmingham. It seems silly to want to change a station format just months after launching just because the music policy doesn't fit into the new brand. They should have realised this before deciding to incorporate it into the Capital FM network.