

DAB in North Devon: Response from Heart FM

Question 1: Do you think that allowing Now Digital to extend the coverage area of its Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex licence to include North Devon would unacceptably narrow the range of DAB programme services available in the Exeter and Torbay area? Please explain the reasons for your view.

There will be no change to the digital stations currently available in Exeter and Torbay so the range of services available there will not be narrowed.

Because a different frequency will be used for North Devon, it may be possible in the future to broadcast different services in North Devon to those available in Exeter and Torbay. This will further improve choice and it would allow Heart to provide the "split links" we provide on FM for North Devon e.g. in news bulletins on DAB.

Question 2: Do you think that allowing Now Digital to extend the coverage area of its Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex licence to include North Devon would be calculated to maintain or promote the development of digital sound broadcasting in the UK otherwise than by satellite? Please explain the reasons for your view.

No local digital radio multiplex licence exists for North Devon and Ofcom do not currently plan to advertise a licence. Extending the coverage area of the Exeter and Torbay multiplex is therefore the best, if not the only, practical way to bring local digital radio to North Devon.

Local listeners with digital radio can currently only receive national stations. Making the existing local FM stations, Heart and BBC Devon, available on digital radio, as well as the other stations broadcast on the local multiplex which are not available at all in North Devon will undoubtedly promote the development of digital sound broadcasting in the area.

Question 3: Do you think that Now Digital's proposals for providing coverage of North Devon are satisfactory? Please explain the reasons for your view.

We believe that Now Digital's proposals for providing coverage in North Devon are satisfactory.

More than half the people in North Devon will get coverage when digital launches. This is comparable to coverage of other local multiplexes in the UK. Coverage will improve to 70% of people in North Devon when the 2 additional transmitters launch from 2013, which is comparable (on a consistent definition of coverage) to the coverage plans of the new local multiplex licences awarded by Ofcom in 2007 and 2008, but which are yet to launch. Based on the financial commitment made

by Heart, Now Digital has committed to launch the Huntshaw Cross transmitter within 6 months of Ofcom approving the request.

Clearly, coverage will need to increase beyond 70% before a switchover to digital can occur. Heart's parent company, Global Radio, are currently working with other commercial groups, Arqiva, the BBC, Government and Ofcom to agree a plan for the build out of the local DAB layer with the aim of reaching 90% coverage of the local layer, which is one of the Government's criteria for setting a switchover date, and ultimately achieving FM equivalence before switchover happens.

No decision has been made on digital switchover and therefore improving coverage over time is the most commercially viable way of building out DAB coverage.

Question 4: Do you consider that Now Digital has the ability to maintain its local radio multiplex service if its request is granted? Please explain the reasons for your view.

We are completely confident that Now Digital can maintain the local radio multiplex service if the request is granted.

Heart and its parent company Global Radio relies on Arqiva, Now Digital's parent company, for all of our analogue transmission. Now Digital is one of the largest local multiplex operators in the country in its own right, while Arqiva provides transmission services not just for Now Digital but for all existing DAB multiplexes in the UK.

Question 5: (For programme service providers on the Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex only) Do you consider that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect your rights and interests in the event that Now Digital is permitted to extend coverage to include North Devon?

Heart is a service provider on the Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex, and we are committed to fund the majority of the cost of extending the multiplex into North Devon. Since all the other stations on the Exeter & Torbay multiplex are either national or quasi-national stations (such as Kiss and NME) or target all of Devon (such as BBC Devon) we consider that the interests of all service providers on the Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex have been protected.

Question 6: Do you consider that there any other grounds on which Ofcom should approve, or not approve, the request from Now Digital? Please explain the reasons for your view.

This proposal will help to strengthen the provision of local radio in North Devon, to the benefit of listeners and local advertisers. It will give listeners extra choice and will help drive the take-up of digital radio.

Digital radio listening is growing and listeners in North Devon should not be left behind. There is clear evidence of demand from local people for digital radio. We recently ran a competition on air to win a digital radio and received 800 entries.

Ofcom notes in the consultation document that Heart will be able to apply for a renewal of its Barnstaple analogue licence if Now Digital's request is approved. While such a renewal is not relevant to the consultation, we believe that securing the future of a popular and successful station which attracts an audience of over a third of local people, works with a very large number of local businesses and supports a wide range of local events and community organisations would be an additional benefit.