

After having read through (admittedly only once) the draft plan, I am surprised by the absence of any reference to the extension of community radio.

We are all aware that aspects of the public service/local responsibilities that the commercial radio (and TV) sectors currently have are likely to become more flexible over the next couple of years. The appetite for community radio has not diminished and I would have expected OfCom's annual plan to identify that with a commitment towards extending the opportunity for the community sector to pick up parts of this challenge. Indeed the thinking in Government (and within most political parties) is that the local voice is not only important but vital to help re-engage citizenship and social responsibility.

I appreciate that some degree of de-regulation has been proposed in an amendment to the Community Radio Order, but surely this should go hand in hand with an extended rollout. The 2nd Round commenced in 2006 and nearly 4 years later, many new broadcast startups have been born, who are all waiting for the opportunity to take on the challenge of the digital future, which must include community stations broadcasting not just on FM, but also via the internet, mobile phones and with on demand services. The key to those stations being viable remains their access to FM, since FM is the dominant delivery channel in most communities.

The absence of a reference in the annual plan suggests that a round 3 is less likely to take place, which, in my view, would undermine a lot of preparatory work that many internet only, or RSL only stations have undertaken - sometimes over the last 3 or more years.

I don't think that our circumstances at FromeFM are untypical. We missed the window for the SW in 2006 because we wanted to have a credible and robust plan in place first. We wanted to pilot our approach through RSLs and build volunteer capacity. We have utilised internet broadcasting to fine tune and this has enabled us to introduce on demand and mobile phone services. But our supporters (inc our Town Council and financial sponsors) remain, to a degree, agnostic about many of the benefits without the wider platform that FM delivers.

If a commitment was given within the annual plan, then it would go a long way to sending out a signal to those stakeholders that far from being done and dusted, community radio is alive, kicking and expanding.