

What are your comments on these proposals?:

Proposal 1. I believe that regulation is currently letting "localness" slip, particularly in regard to news.

I have witnessed it letting news be recorded at peak times and for whole days and sent to different counties, dozens of miles away, in poor quality (MP3 rates as low as 64kpbs), and with little or no understanding by the journalist preparing, reading and editing the bulletin of the area he is broadcasting to. As a recent regional former editor I saw the erosion of local news values and quick responsiveness to stories. I saw more than 90% of stories derived and regurgitated from local newspapers. Court cases only attended in the area around the news hub, and not other stations served, and no local journalist for months on end at entire stations.

At one station I saw news, which was pre-recorded in a news centre seventy miles a way going out for entire days all through breakfast and drive. Groups are playing fast and loose with license obligations. It means pre-recorded bulletins are being played out with faults in them, such as stopping half way through because a presenter in a studio thinks an MP3 has downloaded but has in fact not. I've even witnessed and heard bulletins go out with swear words in because a harassed journalist recording up to eight bulletins an hour hasn't had time to edit out mistakes. Groups give OFCOM woolly commitments to have "field reporters" who can respond to news but in fact they are often based just in the news hub station, up to two hours from the scene of a breaking story in their patch. Many of these "field reporter" positions go unfilled for months on end because they are seen as starter roles where the journalist is little more than a gopher, going to stories and collecting audio. They are rarely getting their voice to air.

At one station I worked at recently, they used to have at least one full time journalist. But now it only gets pre-recorded bulletins and rarely has a journalist anywhere near the patch, the RAJARS have dropped by more than half in just one year. What does this tell you about what the listener thinks of mistake ridden pre-recorded news, recorded forty minutes before, with swearing sometimes left in them, and with very little if any quality content. This is because it's seen as more efficient to have them at a news hub 70 miles away doing pre-recorded interviews and bulletins, because groups think they can get away with it.

OFCOM shouldn't pay too much attention to groups who say they can't make money in the current climate. OFCOM should instead start giving licenses to small licensees more locally committed to their area and to potential audiences. Groups really want to shed some of their local news commitments so that they can save money. It also means they can run the news on less personnel. It used to be the case that one man newsrooms, where a full time journalist handed over to a presenter to read the news were considered the worst. I now believe News hubbed news is the worst because stations often have no journalist at all and just pre-recorded journalists. An agency might as well provide the news.

In general, News hubs, network shows and voice tracking are corroding local commercial radio. Maybe analogue radio should be given better access to digital platforms but OFCOM should be strong and not be bullied or intimidated into giving large radio groups what they want.

If stations claim they are not making money OFCOM, should look at their RAJARS and see if the audiences are noticing the lack of quality local information. The OFCOM should re-advertise the license. Above all OFCOM should listen to local

communities who put news and LOCAL information at the top of their list of needs and ask itself if this is likely to be provided with less Localness regulation.