

## Renewal procedure for local radio multiplex licences: update October 2024

In September 2020, Ofcom published guidance on the renewal procedure for local radio multiplex licences appending coverage plans for the purposes of assessing eligibility for the renewal of those licences.<sup>1</sup>

In May 2023, we published an [update to our procedures](#) for the renewal of local radio multiplex licences, amending a number of the coverage plans appended to the guidance. This allowed more licences to be renewed by removing the requirement to implement those ‘Step 2’ sites that would make negligible contribution to matching FM coverage. The aim was to secure existing levels of DAB coverage for households in those areas, and guard against potential reduction of coverage which might result from licences being readvertised rather than renewed and thus applicants being able to propose entirely new coverage plans.

Since publishing that update, we have further considered two multiplexes – Mid & West Wales, and North East Wales & West Cheshire – whose coverage does not currently extend as far as the coverage plans appearing in the guidance currently. As a result, we are revising our position with regard to these multiplexes.

### North East Wales and West Cheshire

The coverage plan published in September 2020 requires the multiplex to offer coverage of Llangollen in North Wales. However, we are satisfied that the Llangollen site would not contribute to equivalence with “*relevant existing FM local commercial radio coverage in that area or locality*” as there is no local commercial FM coverage in this area. Consequently, we are updating the [coverage plan](#) to remove this requirement.

### Mid & West Wales

The updated coverage map published in May 2023 includes coverage of Aberystwyth and surrounds. There is a local commercial FM service which covers Aberystwyth, and we continue to consider that FM equivalence requires coverage of Aberystwyth.

DAB coverage for Aberystwyth in the September 2020 coverage map was based on a ‘Step 1’ site in the Government’s Framework Agreement on Local DAB Expansion, at Blaenplywf. The cost of building and operating a transmitter at this site is considered by the licensee to be prohibitive.

As such, we have decided to amend the coverage required for this licence to be eligible for renewal, to retain a requirement for there to be coverage of Aberystwyth but also to provide greater flexibility as to how this coverage might be secured. To this effect, we have published an [updated coverage map](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Under section 58ZA(1) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as amended), the holder of a local radio multiplex licence may apply to Ofcom for renewal of the licence to 31 December 2030 if it has, “completed the works necessary to ensure that, as a minimum, coverage of the multiplex service in the area or locality in which the licence is granted complies with the coverage plan for that area or locality”. Section 58ZA(8) defines “coverage plan” as being, “a plan produced by Ofcom which sets out the coverage on local Digital Audio Broadcasting which Ofcom have assessed is broadly equivalent to relevant existing FM local commercial radio coverage in that area or locality”.

We consider this approach is the best way to ensure there is some coverage in the Aberystwyth area, while securing the existing level of coverage offered elsewhere by the multiplex for the duration of the new licence period.

It is noted that, were the licence to be readvertised rather than renewed, applicants would need to specify new coverage proposals as part of their application; any such proposals would be unconnected to existing coverage. Given transmission costs and other contextual factors, applicants are less likely to preserve existing coverage or increase coverage to include Aberystwyth in their application, and more likely to reduce existing coverage.