

Small-scale radio multiplex licence award: Cheltenham & Tewkesbury

Background

Ofcom has decided to award a new small-scale radio multiplex licence for Cheltenham & Tewkesbury to TLRC (Radio Investments) Limited.

In considering the applications it receives for small-scale radio multiplex licences, Ofcom is required to have regard to each of the statutory criteria set out in section 51(2) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 as modified by the Small-scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019. These are as follows:

1. the extent of the coverage area (within the area or locality specified in the Ofcom notice inviting applications) proposed to be achieved by the applicant in the technical plan submitted in its application; (section 51(2)(a))
2. the ability of the applicant to establish the proposed service; (section 51(2)(c))
3. the desirability of awarding the licence to an applicant that:
 - a. is a person providing or proposing to provide a community digital sound programme service in that area or locality, or
 - b. has as a participant a person providing or proposing to provide a community digital sound programme service in that area or locality; (section 51(2)(ca))
4. the extent to which there is evidence that, amongst persons providing or proposing to provide community or local digital sound programme services in that area or locality, there is a demand for, or support for, the provision of the proposed service; (section 51(2)(f)) and
5. whether, in contracting or offering to contract with persons providing or proposing to provide community or local digital sound programme services, the applicant has acted in a manner calculated to ensure fair and effective competition in the provision of those services. (section 51(2)(g)).

The legislation does not rate these requirements in order of priority, but it may be that Ofcom will regard one or more of the criteria as being particularly important in view of the characteristics of the licence to be awarded and the applications for it.

Assessment

On 10 September 2025, Ofcom published a notice inviting applications for licences to provide small-scale radio multiplex services in localities including Cheltenham & Tewkesbury.

By the closing-date of 10 December 2025, Ofcom had received one application for Cheltenham & Tewkesbury. This was from TLRC (Radio Investments) Limited ("TLRC"). Copies of the non-confidential parts of the application were made available for public scrutiny on the Ofcom website,

and public comment was invited as required under section 50(7) although no comments were received.

Ofcom colleagues assessed the detail of the application, including carrying out an assessment of the technical plan required to be submitted as part of all applications. The decision in relation to Cheltenham & Tewkesbury was made at an Ofcom decision meeting on 28 May 2026. The meeting carefully considered the application and professional advice from Ofcom colleagues involved in assessing the application. The statutory criteria were applied to reach a decision on whether to award a licence to the sole applicant. Reasons for the decision to award a licence to TLRC are summarised below.

In relation to section 51(2)(a), the applicant proposed using one transmitter to provide its service. Ofcom calculations indicate that this would result in just over 84% of the adult population in the advertised licence area being able to receive the service. Ofcom's coverage predictions indicated that the proposed small-scale radio multiplex service would be available to under 40% of the population in the licensed area of the overlapping Gloucestershire local radio multiplex (with negligible overlaps with the Herefordshire multiplex), and overspill outside the advertised area was predicted to be under 30% of the population of the advertised area. Ofcom therefore considered no mitigations were required to comply with the overlap and overspill thresholds. It also considered that mitigations were unlikely to be necessary to address hole punching or interference. Ofcom considered that this represented a very good level of coverage within the advertised area, including robust coverage of the largest towns in the locality, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury.

In relation to section 51(2)(c), Ofcom considered the applicant's financial and business plan, technical plan, the timetable for coverage roll-out, and evidence of relevant expertise and experience. Ofcom noted that the technical plan involved a single, well-chosen site with provisional agreement in place on site access, reducing complexity of establishing the service. The sole owner of the applicant has relevant technical expertise, and evidence of funding was provided. Ofcom therefore concluded there was a very good prospect of the service being established within the 18-month period allowed by legislation.

In relation to section 51(2)(ca), Ofcom noted that the applicant itself intends to provide a C-DSP service which was viewed positively, albeit that the service is not currently established as an analogue or online service and this inevitably has an impact on the level of confidence it is possible to have that the service will be available on the multiplex from launch.

In relation to section 51(2)(f), Ofcom considered evidence of demand or support from persons providing or proposing to provide community or local digital sound programme services (C-DSP and DSP services) in the advertised area. As well as its own proposed C-DSP service, the application stated that two prospective C-DSP services (one existing analogue community radio service within the advertised area and another outside it) and two other prospective DSP services had expressed an interest. Ofcom noted that this represents a modest level of demand and support in the context of an advertised area with a reasonably significant population including two fairly large towns. However, there was potential to build interest in a multiplex given the good level of coverage predicted to be provided by the multiplex, and it would be important to do so to secure the long term viability of the service.

In relation to section 51(2)(g) and based on the evidence received, Ofcom was satisfied that the applicant had, in contracting or offering to contract with persons providing or proposing to provide community or local digital sound programme services, acted in a manner calculated to ensure fair

and effective competition in the provision of those services. However, as noted above the relatively low level of demand and support indicated outreach had been limited and it would be important to develop that to ensure the long term viability of the multiplex.

It is noted that the award of a licence does not confer on the awardee the right to implement all elements of the technical plan submitted to Ofcom as part of the successful application. Ofcom will treat proposals in that plan, on the basis of which the award was made, as things the successful applicant has committed to achieve within the 18-month period allowed between award and launch. However, for spectrum planning reasons, Ofcom may also require amendments to proposals between award and licence grant.

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