

# Small-scale radio multiplex licence award: South West Sussex

## Background

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Ofcom has decided to award a new small-scale radio multiplex licence for South West Sussex to West Sussex Digital Radio 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

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

By the closing-date of 10 December 2025, Ofcom had received one application for South West Sussex. This was from West Sussex Digital Radio Limited (“WSDR”). 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 South West Sussex was made at an Ofcom decision meeting on 20 March 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 WSDR are summarised below.

In relation to section 51(2)(a), the applicant proposed using a single transmitter to provide its service. Ofcom calculations indicate that this would result in approximately 32% 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 well under 40% of the population in the licensed area of the overlapping Sussex local radio multiplex, and negligible overspill outside the advertised area was predicted. No further mitigations to address outgoing interference were considered to be necessary. Ofcom noted that coverage was low as a percentage of the advertised area and did not extend to several significant population centres in the area including Chichester, Bognor Regis, and Midhurst. Whilst this was disappointing, the applicant was clear that its intention was initially to serve Worthing (as noted below, Radio Worthing CIC is a significant participant in the applicant) and the plan is expected to provide robust coverage of that town and extend to an adult population of over 100,000.

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, whilst achieving limited coverage as a percentage of the advertised area, a single site plan reduced technical complexity. The applicant also includes individuals who have been involved in previous successful small-scale multiplex launches. Ofcom therefore concluded there was a good prospect of the service being established within the 18-month period allowed by legislation.

In relation to section 51(2)(ca), a participant in the application, Radio Worthing CIC, proposes to provide a C-DSP service. Ofcom noted that the participant has a significant shareholding (25%) and operates an existing online service suggesting a reasonably good prospect of the service being available on the multiplex when launched.

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. In addition to Radio Worthing, the applicant provided evidence of interest from another prospective C-DSP service (albeit one currently based just outside the advertised area) and 13 other DSP services. Ofcom noted that this represented a reasonably good level of interest in carriage given the proposal was to cover just the town of Worthing at launch rather than a wider area of West Sussex.

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.

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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