

Reference: 02163917

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

17 March 2026

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning broadcasting licensing (in the context of a current Ofcom consultation).

Your request was received by the Broadcast Licensing team on 17 February 2026 and was passed to the Information Requests team the same day. We have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the 'FOI Act').

Your request

Local DAB Multiplexes

- 1. What work has Ofcom undertaken, since the completion of SSDAB licensing rounds, on assessing spectrum availability for new local DAB multiplex services? Please include any spectrum planning studies, feasibility assessments, or internal reviews.*
- 2. Has Ofcom identified any specific areas of the UK where spectrum is available for new local DAB multiplex services? If so, please identify those areas.*
- 3. Has Ofcom received any expressions of interest, requests, or correspondence from third parties regarding new local DAB multiplex licences? If so, please identify the areas to which these relate (without disclosing the identity of the third parties, if that would engage an exemption).*

FM Community Radio Demand

- 4. What records does Ofcom hold of expressions of interest, enquiries, or requests for new FM community radio licences received since the conclusion of the last community radio licensing round (final awards made in 2020)? Please provide, in summary form, the number of such approaches and the areas to which they relate.*
- 5. Has Ofcom undertaken any assessment of likely demand for the forthcoming FM community radio Invitation to Apply? If so, please provide any such assessment or estimate.*

SSDAB Coverage and the 40% Ceiling

- 6. Has Ofcom received any applications or requests from existing SSDAB multiplex licensees for coverage extensions or power increases that would result in the population overlap with a local DAB multiplex exceeding 40%? If so, please provide details of the areas concerned and the outcome of each request (without disclosing the identity of the licensee, if that would engage an exemption).*

7. In its statement of 7 April 2020 ("Licensing small-scale DAB"), Ofcom stated at paragraph 4.28 that it had considered "the circumstances under which we might wish to apply the limit flexibly either by substantially exceeding the 40% threshold in a small number of cases, or by slightly exceeding it in a somewhat larger number of cases." Please provide any internal analysis, working papers, or records of the specific geographic locations Ofcom identified as cases where there was "some argument for substantially exceeding the 40% limit" (as referenced at paragraph 4.29 of that statement).

FM Spectrum

8. When did Ofcom last undertake a comprehensive assessment of FM spectrum availability for community radio services across the UK? Please provide the date and, if it has not been published, a copy of the assessment or its conclusions.

9. Since the September 2018 spectrum identification exercise (which identified 43 areas potentially suitable for community radio), has Ofcom undertaken any further FM spectrum planning work relevant to community radio licensing? If so, please provide details.

Resourcing

10. The consultation states that the same specialist staff are required for both SSDAB and FM community radio licensing. How many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff are currently allocated to broadcast radio licensing work (covering SSDAB, FM/AM community and commercial licensing, and technical change requests)? How does this compare with the staffing level during the peak of SSDAB licensing rounds?

Our response

We can confirm that we do hold information that would fall within the scope of your request, however a considerable amount of time would be required to locate, retrieve, identify and extract all the information specified in your request, especially given the scope of the information being requested under question 4. We further explain this under "**FM Community Radio Demand**" below.

Section 12 of the FOI Act provides that we are not obliged to comply with a request for information if we estimate that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the "appropriate limit". The appropriate limit is set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (the "Regulations"), and is, for Ofcom, £450. That sum is intended to cover the estimated costs involved in determining whether Ofcom holds the information requested, locating, retrieving and extracting the information from any document containing it. The Regulations provide that costs are to be estimated at a rate of £25 per person per hour, which equates to 18 hours of time. We estimate that it would take us more than 18 hours to locate, retrieve, identify and extract all the information specified in your request.

You may wish to submit a narrower request for our consideration under the FOI Act. However below we have provided information, including website links, that you might find helpful. Please note that other exemptions may still apply to further information requested.

Local DAB Multiplexes

You will find some information available online that may be helpful – in particular, see this [Licensing SSDAB consultation](#) published in July 2019. In this consultation, we explained that "At present, we expect the areas where sufficient spectrum should exist to support both small-scale DAB and additional local radio multiplex services to be limited to the following areas: most of Scotland; Northern Ireland; Tyneside and Teesside in north east England; One of; Bradford, Leeds or North Yorkshire and Devon and Cornwall in south-west England."

This information was based on the information we had available at the time and will need to be re-validated if we receive evidence through our current consultation that there is demand for us to license further local multiplexes.

We have been aware of interest from stakeholders in the possibility of new local radio multiplexes being advertised however we consider that information we have received on this would likely be exempt from disclosure under the FOI Act given we are prohibited under section 393 of the Communications Act 2003 from disclosing information about businesses that we have obtained when exercising our functions¹.

FM Community Radio Demand

Although we have received expressions of interest, inquiries and requests for FM community radio licences, as with all other incoming broadcast licensing correspondence, we do not generally keep count of these. We also do not hold summaries of these. We would need to search our mailboxes, going back a number of years, to identify inquiries of this nature in order to identify the volumes and we estimate this would take us over 18 hours to do.

Please also note our explanation above about the disclosure prohibition in section 393 of the Communications Act 2003 that would prevent us from disclosing information we have obtained about businesses.

SSDAB Coverage and the 40% Ceiling

We have received a small number of applications or request from existing SSDAB multiple licensees for coverage extensions or power increases that would result in the population overlap with a local DAB multiplex exceeding 40%.

We publish any approvals we make on our websites, however other than information already published, please see our explanation above about the disclosure prohibition in section 393 of the Communications Act 2003.

FM Spectrum

Ofcom's approach when inviting applications from prospective Community Radio licensees originally excluded areas where it was unlikely that there would be spectrum available. Our assessments of likely frequency availability were done regionally, and only in areas for which we had previously received expressions of interest from potential applicants. In our 2017 [Statement: Community Radio: future licensing and technical policy](#) we confirmed that we would no longer pre-assess the availability of spectrum before inviting applications, and would only search for a suitable frequency once in receipt of an application.

We have subsequently not carried out any FM spectrum planning work relevant to Community Radio licensing, apart from 1) checking spectrum availability while assessing applications received following this [2018 statement](#), and then the one round of Community Radio licensing in Northampton in 2020, or 2) considering requests for extensions and enhancements or site moves from existing Community Radio licensees on an ad-hoc basis.

¹ Where section 393 of the Communications Act 2003 applies, the exemption under section 44 of the FOI Act would also likely apply.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).