

Consultation response form

Consultation title	Ofcom's proposed Plan of Work
Full name	[X]
Contact phone number	[X]
Representing (delete as appropriate)	Organisation
Organisation name	Leicester Community Radio
Email address	[X]

Your response

Question	Your response
Question 1: Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Plan of Work 2024/25?	Confidential? – N

2024 is the 50th anniversary of Leicester Community Radio, which started broadcasting from a cupboard at the Leicester General Hospital in 1974.

We started broadcasting in 1974 in expectation of an IBA ILR licensing round, to improve the credentials such that when the ILR license was advertised then LCR would be successful.

LCR lobbied for a ILR license in Leicester and in 1981, the long-awaited ILR franchise was advertised. LCR applied, and was rejected in favour of Centre Radio as it was deemed LCR was "not viable". Centre Radio then went bust less than 2 years later.

This is a pattern that has been repeated – LCR has had to extensively lobby for a license round and either the eligibility criteria are changed so LCR cannot apply, or LCR is rejected in favour of another applicant who then fails.

This has happened with Centre Radio, Leicester Sound, Takeover Radio and numerous others.

For 50 years, LCR simply wants to provide a local radio station for Leicester. We have 50 years of experience, 50 years of support from the community. If LCR needs anything from our community, we get it as the community value us. LCR is invited as the headliner acts to all the large events in Leicester. We are the only local radio station invited to cover elections. We work with all the prominent charities in the city. By far we have the largest number of listeners. We are the only station catering for the ethnic minority White-British and Black-British communities, and the majority of our area is

unserved by any other community station. We have been visited by little stations such as Radio 5 Live who did a 4 hour simulcast with LCR from our studios regarding deprivation, using the LCR listeners as people to interview and we were commended for the quality of our output.

LCR was rejected for the access pilot Community scheme as it was “too similar” to Leicester Sound. We were told not to apply for other community licences for the same reason. In 2017, Ofcom ran a license round but only for Leicester City, which means as the majority of our support is from a “donut” shaped area around the Unitary Authority, our application was significantly weakened. Despite strong support and available spectrum (as Ofcom confirmed) and our area being unserved, Ofcom did not put our area into the “Unserved Areas” 2018 FM round. Furthermore Ofcom did not include the Demon FM license (which Ofcom refused to transfer to us due to “lack of time”) in the Northampton 2019 round, despite our strong submissions and the reasons being virtually identical – loss of a long-term established service that the community wished to continue.

LCR has been rejected over the years to protect “Leicester Sound” and others. The last time the “Leicester Sound” license was advertised was in 1994. They promised 18 hours per day of live local programming, 3 “fully developed” news stories per hour, 7 full-time journalists, an “eye in the sky” aircraft for traffic and a whole plethora of other obligations. Today they are preparing to become “Capital UK” under the Media Bill 2023 deregulation and LCR is delivering most of what Leicester Sound originally promised, yet we have no legal means to get on air and actually meaningfully deliver what Leicester Sound promised all those years ago. This surely cannot be in the consumer’s best interests?!?!

LCR has no legal means to broadcast. On the contrary, on multiple occasions Ofcom has threatened to prosecute LCR, sent multiple agents without notice to inspect transmitters and constantly refuses to listen to our arguments or representations to annual plans. Ofcom has interviewed our directors under caution on multiple occasions. Our MPs have written numerous letters to Ofcom and DCMS and the responses have been proven to be untrue (such as SSDAB catering for our area, or that there was no FM spectrum in our area), yet Ofcom is not prepared to remedy the situation.

LCR was promised in Parliament that SSDAB would be our route to getting on air. LCR therefore paid for the entire transmitter and multiplex and pays the operational and running costs of the multiplex, giving completely free carriage to all other local community stations, yet the SSDAB multiplex covers virtually nowhere where our audience lives. LCR asked to launch a SSDAB trial using parameters that would be more typical of a “final” installation (none of the trials technically represented the actual installation in terms of power, antennas, etc), yet Ofcom refused and therefore LCR could not have foreseen at the time the inadequacy of the solution.

LCR was running EEP1A error correction, which provided some amelioration to the coverage deficits, but then Ofcom has suggested that this could result in prosecution and LCR has had to revert to UEP3 error correction, which has resulted in all the on-air advertisers cancelling contracts and one advertiser seeking to hold us to a contract but at a substantially reduced rate. It has also meant deprived listeners who Ofcom instructed to purchase DAB radios when they can barely put food on the table now have useless radios.

We have informed Ofcom we have reverted to UEP1 and are prepared to fight the Ofcom decision in Court if Ofcom do decide to prosecute (as they keep threatening) as we have no legal means to broadcast, despite being promised so much.

Four community licences have now been surrendered in our area since the last analogue licensing round, yet Ofcom refuses to assist with transferring them to us or re-advertising these licences.

We ask Ofcom to recognise our issues predate SSDAB, the reasons given at the time (such as 2018) have been proven to be invalid, SSDAB has not delivered what was promised and to run an analogue licensing round.

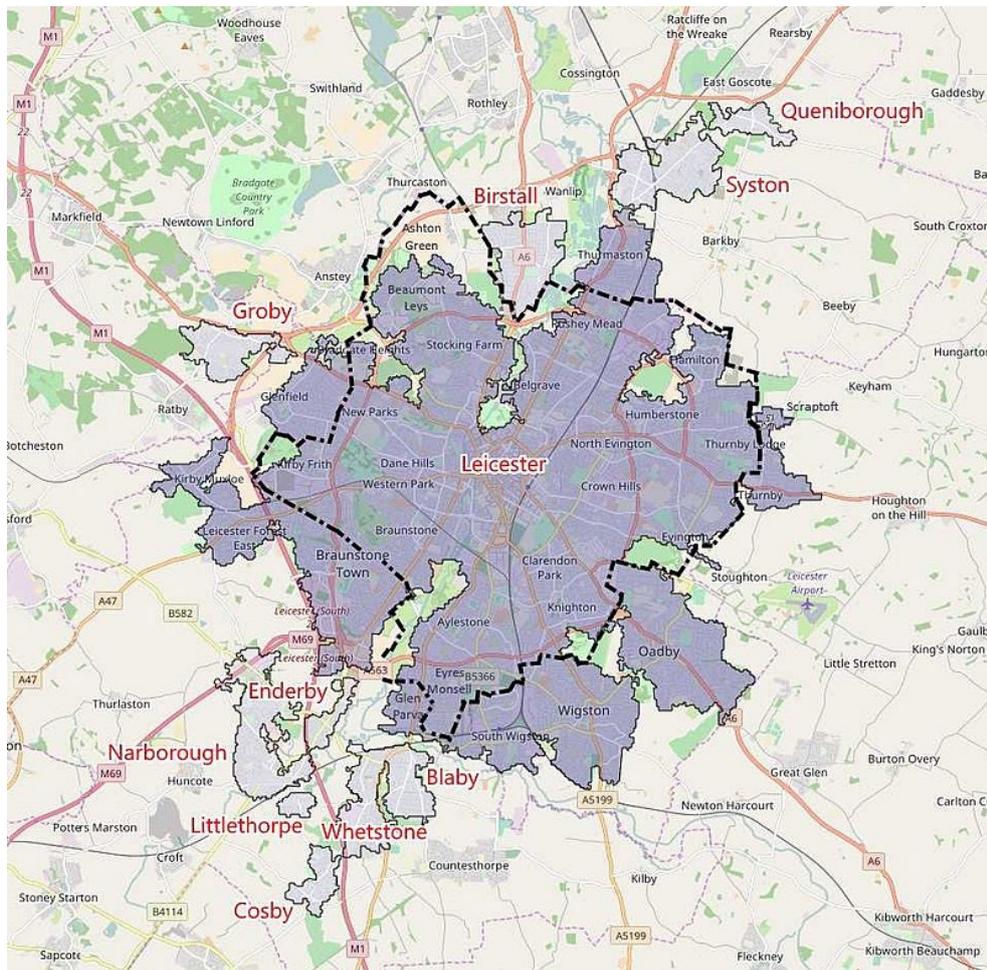
This strict interpretation of the 40% rule for SSDAB is completely inappropriate in the case of Leicester.

If Ofcom cannot in any way provide a legal means to broadcast then Leicester Community Radio is unlikely to see its 50th Anniversary in August 2024, as it is currently unviable due to lack of coverage.

Lack of coverage means listeners cannot hear us, stakeholders will not grant projects to us as we are unable to deliver them as the audience cannot actually hear us and advertisers refuse to advertise on a service that does not actually work.

If LCR comes off the Leicester SSDAB multiplex, which it is now having to consider, then it is unlikely this will survive as our £500 per month is the only thing covering all the costs and keeping it on air.

We have always been very clear where our coverage area is – the entire Leicester Urban Area. This is the area we were assured we would get coverage of by Ofcom and DCMS, yet we do not. When we had a 15-month Covid RSL we got coverage of this on FM, but we do not have any legal means to broadcast to this area currently and Ofcom instead is running a witch hunt against a group of volunteers being commended by a number of people (including in Parliament) for the good work they are doing for their deprived ethnically diverse audience.



For the avoidance of doubt, this is a map of the Leicester Urban Area and this is the area that LCR serves.

The SSDAB multiplex covers less than 50% of this area, and as our audience is located predominantly in the outskirts of this area, it is useless to LCR, despite us paying for the thing.