

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Ymchwiliad i'r achosion o COVID-19 ac effaith y feirws ar ddiwylliant, y diwydiannau creadigol, treftadaeth, cyfathrebu a chwaraeon / Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications and sport

CWLC COV31

Ymateb gan Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy / Response from Conwy County Borough Council

Please find below Conwy County Borough Council's response for submission to The Welsh Parliamentary Inquiry relating to **community media, including community radio**.

Welsh Parliamentary Inquiry: response re: community media, including community radio – Conwy County Borough Council.

What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

COVID-19 has encouraged more engagement, interaction and listening as our communities seek connection local perspective and up to date information during this time of great change and uncertainty. Social media activity, page views, interactions and visitors have all increased significantly. An example in point is Conwy County Borough Council's Facebook page has increased its profile in the local community and has increased in "Likes" by over 1,000. Video communications have been a crucial part of our communication planning and the 30 video's that have been done over the last several weeks have been viewed by over 230,000.

We're aware that local community radio stations have been issued with temporary FM licenses. This has provided a valuable platform to communicate important health and community information along with reinforcing the important 'stay at home' message. This has been achieved despite a reliance on volunteers many of whom are older and have not been able to contribute just at the point where demand for information, entertainment and news is at its greatest.

How effectively has the support provided by the Welsh Government, the UK Government and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

Ofcom have made emergency short term COVID-19 restricted service licences available to enable local people to receive information pertinent to their communities on FM rather than relying a Wales wide or national perspective. The rate and spread of COVID-19 differed across Wales and so this provision has ensured that accurate local information tailored to our area has been delivered to those who perhaps may not have access to the internet or mobile devices.

Heart's 'Key Worker Diaries' a campaign funded through the Dept for Culture, Media and Sport enabled CCBC to share stories celebrating local people and their efforts .

What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

All our communities are going to be severely impacted by the pandemic but particularly our most vulnerable (those which, despite regeneration efforts fall in the top 10% of the Welsh Multiple Deprivation Index).

Ofcom have announced that they will no longer licence additional community radio licences on FM. Locally there is a call for this policy to be re-considered so that temporary COVID-19 stations or

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stations that are looking to support communities as they re-build their futures are allowed to set up quickly, efficiently and at relatively low cost.

Ofcom have stated that they will be turning their attention to small scale digital radio licensing but this will be at large cost and possibly unfeasible in more rural areas where the sector will struggle to attract radio services to fill a 'multiplex'. The financial impact of COVID-19 will mean that the funding landscape is even more challenging. We understand that the timescales of the licensing process can be longwinded which could cause delays (4 – 5 years), leaving a gap in provision when our communities need access to information and services most

Community stations such as Bayside Radio in Colwyn Bay have demonstrated their responsiveness to the crisis and the need locally by shifting from online provision to launching an emergency FM service in 10 days.

What lessons can be learnt from how the Welsh Government, the UK Government, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

Ofcom's responsiveness has been impressive during the crisis but it can be argued that their future roadmap does not consider the overall picture in the community radio sector and their 'one-size fits all' approach principally benefits the cities where there is high demand for digital radio capacity. We would argue that small and more rural communities in Wales should not be disadvantaged during this time. To meet community need could a relatively straight forward round of licensing be undertaken to address gaps?

Regarding Welsh Government's response, it has been felt that not enough focus has been placed on information tailored to regional differences. Many press releases, bulletins and reports have focussed on the all-Wales picture and as a result information has not been clear or as accurate as it could have been. For example, press releases referred to Wales coming past its peak whilst in North Wales, the COVID-19 peak has not even begun.

How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can the Welsh Government support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

In response to the above, Welsh Government may consider a review of the Community Radio sector in Wales to evaluate how local grassroots radio and media have supported communities to respond positively to the crisis and what role they can play moving forwards to support renewal. Locally there is call for quick-turnaround licences in areas where community radio has demonstrated a need and is able to build on existing provision to support communities.

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