

Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Digital Communications

Tuesday 23 June 2015 6.00pm

Chair: Russell George AM

Members Present:

Alun Ffred Jones AM (Arfon)

Representatives:

Hywel Wiliam - Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales

Rhodri Williams – Director, Wales – Ofcom

Elinor Williams – Regulatory Affairs Manager – Ofcom

Nia Thomas – Regulatory Affairs Advisor – Ofcom

Neil Stock – Head of Radio Policy – Ofcom

A formal AGM was held and Russell George was re-elected Chairman. This was seconded by Alun Ffred Jones AM and members of Ofcom. It was agreed that Ofcom would provide secretariat to the Group.

The Chairman welcomed Neil Stock from Ofcom who proceeded to give a presentation on Community and Commercial Radio in Wales. The presentation was divided into four sections

- Local Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) roll-out
- National (UK-wide) DAB
- Small-scale DAB
- Community Radio

Local DAB roll-out

Neil Stock discussed Government policy to increase coverage and take-up of Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB), driven by the Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, Ed Vaizey. A question was asked on whether DAB is at a greater cost to analogue radio and it was confirmed that DAB is more expensive than FM but the cost can vary depending on the locality. He added that the target is to match FM coverage of 'large' local commercial radio services. He informed attendees that new transmitters will be erected in Wales over the next year to improve coverage to both households and roads. A question was asked about the current coverage of DAB on roads in Wales and Neil Stock noted that he will provide a map indicating coverage levels on both motorways and A roads in Wales.

National (UK-wide) DAB

Neil Stock highlighted the BBC's own UK-wide multiplex which aims to expand its coverage to 97% and noted that Ofcom recently awarded a licence for a second national radio multiplex service to Sound Digital. It was noted that radio is far more complex than television and a potential switchover

is driven by Government policy and not Ofcom. He also noted the benefits of DAB with regard to the quality of sound and functionality.

Small-scale DAB roll-out

Reference was made to Ofcom's small-scale DAB trials to encourage community radio stations to move on to DAB. He noted that the trials are funded by the Government and that there were no applicants from Wales. A question was asked on whether radio stations could broadcast online and it was noted that they could. He added that Ofcom has no power to regulate online broadcasting.

Community Radio

It was noted that the Government has relaxed the funding rules for community radio stations and now allows licences to be extended for up to five years. It was also noted that community radio stations are largely funded by grants.

Agreed Actions

ACTION: Neil Stock to circulate coverage maps to Assembly Members

Meeting closed at 7.30pm