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Radio News in Wales – BBC Briefing Note to the National Assembly for Wales’ Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

1. Purpose

BBC Wales provided evidence to the National Assembly for Wales’ Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee as part of its inquiry into Radio in Wales. The Committee raised the question of the BBC’s ability to opt out of its Network FM radio services, primarily Radio 1 and 2 in Wales.

This note provides additional information for the Committee by the BBC in response to that question.

2. Distribution

The primary challenges the BBC faces in implementing an opted news bulletin are technical distribution issues.

The Wenvoe transmitter provides FM coverage for an estimated 1.5m listeners (0.63m households) in the South West of England, and 1.3m listeners (0.54m households) in Wales.

Any editorial change to the network output from that transmitter would have to take the coverage footprint into consideration. The BBC could mitigate the impact on around 0.2m listeners in England by changing the source feed for a number of FM relay transmitters (at significant expense) but beyond that we would require additional frequencies that are simply not available.

The BBC has, on limited occasions in the past, opted on UK-wide FM. However, these programmes when transmitted from Wenvoe have only been available to listeners in both Wales and the West of England since it is impossible to isolate the signal to Wales only.

For these reasons, the two hour-long weekly *BBC Radio One Introducing in Wales* programme which came to an end in 2011, was available in both Wales and the South West of England.

3. Summary

The BBC is always looking for ways to serve our audiences better, and the provisioning of our Radio Services is a central part of this. The internet enables the BBC to offer a more

personalised audience service and with a suitable distribution network across fixed and 5G mobile networks in place, this may provide a better solution in the long term to the problem of bringing opted content to BBC Network audiences.

In the meantime, and in the context of the expected DCMS review into digital listening, we continue to monitor the best way to deliver our services and to seek improvements where possible.

This note does not consider whether implementing such a change might be considered a material change to these services requiring approval by Ofcom.

Rhys Evans, Head of Strategy, BBC Wales

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