

Our Reference: 20180515

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National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff
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29 May 2018

Dear Bethan,

BBC Radio News opt-outs for Wales

Thank you for your letter of 4 May regarding recent BBC evidence to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee, on the feasibility of providing Welsh opt-outs on Radio 1 and Radio 2 FM services. Sharon White has asked me to respond while she is away from the office.

Ofcom does not have sight of the technical and operational constraints on the BBC's networks. This means the BBC is best placed to provide detailed comments on the technical feasibility of proposed opt-outs on its FM services.

Ofcom's role is to licence all UK BBC services which includes providing details of the transmitter masts and power levels that the BBC's radio services are permitted to use. Ofcom also allocated and coordinates the radio spectrum used by both commercial and BBC radio services.

The main BBC FM transmitter serving south, and south-east Wales is the main Wenvoe mast near Cardiff. As the BBC set out, this transmitter does also serve significant areas of south-west England. Most listeners in these areas do not have access to alternative BBC FM signals from transmitters located in England. Therefore, if the Wenvoe mast were to carry Welsh opt-outs, Welsh services would also be received by listeners in English areas.

An alternative approach could be to set up additional transmissions at the Wenvoe mast carrying English versions of Radio 1 and Radio 2. However, FM frequencies are already used very intensively, and no suitable frequencies are available to carry extra transmissions which would be needed to serve English areas which currently receive signals from Wenvoe.

The BBC is best placed to provide the Committee with detailed geographic and population coverage data for their own FM services. However, I have enclosed a public coverage map for the Wenvoe FM transmitter which was produced by the BBC in the 1980s. While some of the detail shown on this map has evolved since the map was produced, such as additional smaller masts, the broad picture of Wenvoe's coverage area remains valid.

In terms of digital radio, the BBC's UK-wide radio services are all carried on a single radio network across the UK. The content carried by each transmitter in this network must be identical to avoid interference with other transmitter sites. There is not capacity on the BBC's multiplex to carry both English and Welsh opts of the Radio 1 and 2 services.

I hope this information is helpful.

Ke. Bakhurst.

Kevin Bakhurst

Group Director, Content and Media Policy