

Your response

Question	Your response
Question 1: Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Plan of Work 2024/25?	Confidential? – N With regard to the plans for Ofcom to consult on new localness guidelines for analogue commercial radio, including regulation of local news, we believe that it is vital that new entrants be allowed into the market, to act as a balance to any deregulation of local content for existing providers. Where a new entrant is willing and able to meet demand from the local audience for a level of local content which has been lost, they should be given the opportunity to obtain an analogue licence. We believe that the Media Bill is intended to provide Ofcom with more flexibility on issuing analogue licences to new entrants when this would benefit the audience, for example where local content has been lost. We recognise that the roll out of small-scale DAB has expanded listener choice in many parts of the country by allowing new services to join a small-scale DAB multiplex. However, there are a number of online stations around the country which are providing an important service to their local community but have not been able to benefit from the roll out of small-scale DAB. In our own situation, the Rutland and Stamford multiplex is not yet live, and if small-scale DAB does become available, we have serious concerns about its viability, due to the number of transmitters required to provide a service of an acceptable standard. Given our reservations about small-scale DAB, we believe that FM will continue to be important in enabling people living in rural areas such as Rutland and Stamford to access local radio, both in homes and in cars. Local radio plays a vital role in rural areas, helping to foster a sense of community as well as combatting loneliness and isolation. The case of Rutland and Stamford Sound was raised in Parliament on 7 December 2023 during the debate on the Media Bill (fourth sitting). Andy Carter (MP for Warrington South) used Rutland and Stamford Sound as an example when raising the matter of Ofcom offering new FM licences in rural areas where there is demand, noting the difficulty in making small-scale DAB viable due to the number of transmitters required. Sir John Whittingdale (Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries) responded positively, indicating that he shared the wish to see Rutland and Stamford Sound receive an analogue licence, if possible. We request that the Ofcom Plan of Work specifically includes a licencing round for the small number of online

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	stations in rural areas which have demonstrated that they are providing a valuable service to their local communities. For new entrants, we would support a process similar to that for C-DSP licences, where credentials are judged, and then a frequency is found, subject to their being availability. We urge Ofcom to recognise that there are a small number of exceptional cases which justify allocating resources to an FM licencing round for new entrants, and to proceed with this in a timely manner, ideally within the next year.

Please complete this form in full and return to planofwork@ofcom.org.uk