The Community Media Association's response

The Community Media Association (CMA) is the democratic, members-based representative organisation for Community Radio in the UK. We are committed to promoting access to the media for all, and safeguarding the future of not-for-profit media. Our mission is to enable people to establish media for cultural and creative expression, community development and entertainment.

We've been championing community media for 41 years and are driving dynamic approaches for its future and social value. Having successfully lobbied for the creation of community radio licensing in the UK we continue to support and represent the best interests of not-for-profit broadcasters in an ever changing landscape driven by technical and social innovation.

From 24/05/2024 to 06/06/2024 we surveyed our members and other Community Radio stakeholders in an online form titled 'CMA - Response to consultation on Ofcom's proposal to streamline and simplify Key Commitments'. In addition to the 50 responses we received, we have also taken into account a robust discussion between around 50 CMA members on all the consultation questions at our AGM in April 2024. This response has also been endorsed by the CMA Council and the CMA Advisor Group.

The CMA Council are:

Terry Lee	Chair	University of Bedfordshire
Vijay Umrao	Vice Chair	EAVA FM
Richard Hilton	Treasurer	Individual Member
Sian Medford		Individual Member
Jessica Memon		Raq Raw Radio
Dr Katie Moylan		University of Leicester
Neil Munday		Susy Radio
Javed Sattar		Awaz FM, Glasgow
Suzie Stevens		Individual Member

The CMA Advisor Group are:

Bill Best
Technical Solutions Manager at RadioPlayer UK

Steve Buckley
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Dom Chambers
Sound Vision

Dr Janey Gordon
Principal lecturer in journalism and communications, University of Bedfordshire

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Danny Lawrence
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Dr Caroline Mitchell
Professor of Radio and Participation, University of Sunderland

Question	Your response
Question 1: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposed approach to remove specific music genre requirements from Key Commitments? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N The CMA supports Ofcom's proposed approach to remove specific music genre requirements from Key Commitments, recognising the importance of music as a core element of the character of service for many stations. Our survey results were relatively conclusive: To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to remove specific music genre requirements from Key Commitments (other than where music is a core element of the character of the service)? 50 responses Our members and stakeholders provided numerous insights and examples demonstrating the challenges and benefits related to the current music genre requirements: - Revolution Radio and DevonAir Radio have had to deal with Ofcom investigations regarding music genres, consuming significant resources. - One station recounted a unique incident where a complaint arose from a listener mishearing lyrics, highlighting the complexities and occasional irrelevance of strict genre regulation.

Question	Your response
	- First FM in Oxford faced issues when it interpreted its commitment to playing local music as including songs by bands with local members, leading to an Ofcom breach finding. - Some stations playing music from different parts of the world as part of their Key Commitments have faced complaints when specific programs were unavailable. Several respondents emphasised the importance of flexibility: - A station's music policy should be defined by its character of service rather than rigid genre commitments. - Reducing genre-specific requirements can mitigate opportunities for vexatious complaints, which can unduly burden volunteer-driven community radio stations. - Local and community preferences should guide music choices, as they are most attuned to their audiences' needs and tastes. Other insights included: - Some respondents believe Ofcom aims to prevent stations from drastically changing their music policy to something entirely different, such as switching from mainstream to religious content. However, it is noted that songs of faith are considered mainstream in many cultures. - The popularity of reggae music among Native American communities in the US Southwest was mentioned, illustrating how music tastes can transcend external cultural expectations and policy remits. However, some concerns and additional thoughts were noted: - There is a need for clarity to prevent ambiguity and misinterpretation on both sides (stations and Ofcom) if genre commitments are removed. - Maintaining genre diversity is crucial to avoid community radio becoming too similar to commercial formats, potentially losing the unique local content variety. - Stations like Angel Radio base their music output on specific decades rather than genres, demonstrating diverse ways stations can define their musical identity.

Question	Your response
	- Concerns about lyrical content, such as the necessity of playing 'radio' versions of tracks to avoid obscene language, were raised. - Maintaining an identity through genre-specific commitments can be beneficial, yet flexibility is crucial for serving the audience's diverse tastes and needs. The CMA agrees that removing specific music genre requirements from Key Commitments will benefit Community Radio stations by providing them with the flexibility to better serve their audiences' diverse musical tastes. It will reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, mitigating opportunities for vexatious complaints. However, it is essential to ensure that this change is implemented with clear guidelines to prevent misinterpretations and to maintain the unique identity of Community Radio stations. We support this proposal with the recommendation that stations be allowed to determine their music policy based on local and community preferences (indicated by the standardised character of service definition), ensuring they remain distinctive and relevant to their audiences.
Question 2: Do you agree with Ofcom's approach to remove specific speech content requirements from Key Commitments? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N The CMA supports Ofcom's proposal to remove specific speech content requirements from Key Commitments, while acknowledging the importance of maintaining certain character of service elements for specific stations. Our survey results were conclusive: To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to remove specific speech content requirements from Key Commitments (other than where particular ...t is a core element of the character of service)? 50 responses Our members and stakeholders provided a range of insights and examples demonstrating the challenges and potential benefits associated with the current speech content requirements:

Question	Your response
	- Ribble FM shared experiences of facing an Ofcom investigation after dropping their Farming News segment; they stress the proposed change would have prevented this investigation. - One syndicated series welcomed the proposed change, stating that it would facilitate greater inclusion of relevant health content on community radio, which had previously been restricted by local speech content requirements. - Revolution Radio shared their experience of a concerted campaign of complaints widely believed to be made by a competitior, illustrating how current requirements can be exploited for vexatious complaints. - Angel Radio had a breach due to offensive language used by a presenter, highlighting the importance of clear guidelines for acceptable speech content. Several respondents emphasised the need for flexibility and locally relevant content: - While content should be driven by community preferences, local news and information remain essential. The provision of these elements can depend on volunteer availability, and resources should be ringfenced to ensure their continued provision. - The importance of local content was underscored during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when localised communication became crucial. - Many argued flexibility in speech content requirements can enhance creativity, allowing stations to better tailor content to their audience's preferences. However, some concerns were also raised: - There is apprehension about what would be expected as speech content if there are no specific Key Commitments. Clear guidelines would be necessary to prevent stations from becoming mere "jukeboxes." - Some respondents fear that without specific speech content requirements, stations might abandon speech content altogether, which could diminish the unique value of community radio. - The need for Ofcom to maintain regulations against offensive language remains crucial, ensuring community radio stations uphold standards of decency.

Question	Your response
	• A significant minority of concerns were noted about the format of community radio becoming too similar to that of commercial radio. The CMA supports the removal of specific speech content requirements from Key Commitments, as this will provide community radio stations with the flexibility to better serve their audiences with relevant and engaging content. However, it is essential that clear guidelines are established to ensure that community radio does not lose its distinctiveness or become dominated by music-only formats. Stations should be allowed to curate their speech content based on local and community preferences, ensuring they remain responsive to their audiences' needs. Ofcom's role should focus on ensuring the delivery of social gain, upholding standards of decency and preventing offensive content, while allowing stations the freedom to innovate and reflect their communities.
Question 3: Do you agree with Ofcom's approach to remove original output requirements from Key Commitments? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N The CMA broadly supports Ofcom's proposal to remove specific original output requirements from Key Commitments. However, we emphasise the importance of maintaining a balance that ensures community radio stations remain locally relevant and continue to provide valuable content to their communities. In our survey we asked: To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to remove specific original and locally-produced output requirements from Key Commitments (other t...riginal and locally-produced content every day)? 50 responses Our members and stakeholders provided various insights and examples related to the current requirements for original and locally produced output: • Angel Radio, Keep106 and others were keen to stress they consistently fulfil their original and locally produced hours every week, demonstrating that

Question	Your response
	adherence to these requirements is achievable for many (or even most) stations. - Revolution Radio and Ribble FM have faced complaints and investigations related to original output, suggesting that current requirements can lead to regulatory challenges and operational burdens. - Radio Saltire received a complaint about insufficient original and locally produced output, which was later rejected by Ofcom. The proposed change would have likely prevented such a complaint. Several respondents highlighted the need for flexibility and the benefits of removing rigid requirements: - One respondent noted that relaxing the rules would make it easier for not-for-profit content, such as health-related awareness features, to be utilized as catalysts for local follow-up. - Cumbernauld FM and others indicated that emergencies and unforeseen circumstances can sometimes prevent original content production, leading to regulatory breaches. However, there are also significant concerns: - There is a fear that without original output requirements, stations might resort to fully automated or syndicated content, losing their local relevance and the social benefits of training local presenters. - Some respondents stressed that community radio should not become a "jukebox" and that guidelines should be maintained to ensure a certain amount of locally relevant content. - Concerns were raised about the risk of community radio stations becoming too similar to commercial networks, undermining the unique value of community radio. Some other inputs we received included: - While some stations have no issues meeting original content requirements, others struggle with the rigidity of these mandates. - Technological changes, such as cloud-based playout systems and voice tracking, challenge the traditional definitions of locally produced content. For example, content produced locally but edited or finalised remotely should still be considered locally relevant.

Question	Your response
	• Canalside Radio questioned how much local news content is required to fulfil 'local news' as part of current Key Commitments documentation, whilst also suggesting that prerecorded short announcements of local events should count as original content. The CMA supports Ofcom's proposal to remove specific original output requirements from Key Commitments, as this will provide community radio stations with the flexibility to better serve their audiences and adapt to changing circumstances. However, it is crucial to maintain some guidelines to ensure that community radio stations do not lose their local focus or become dominated by automated content. We believe Ofcom are proposing to develop a flexible framework that allows stations to innovate while ensuring they continue to provide valuable, locally relevant content. This approach will help community radio stations remain responsive to their communities' needs and maintain their unique character and social value.
Question 4: Do you agree with Ofcom's approach to remove locally-produced output requirements from Key Commitments? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N The CMA acknowledges Ofcom's proposal to remove locally produced output requirements from Key Commitments. We understand Ofcom's definition of locally-produced output, as per their note to broadcasters in July 2023, includes content produced within the defined coverage area of the station. However, we believe there are several key considerations that should be taken into account to ensure community radio stations continue to serve their local communities effectively. As per the previous question, our survey indicated the following: The responses from our members and stakeholders highlight both support and concerns regarding the removal of locally-produced output requirements:

Question	Your response

	- Support for Flexibility:
	
	  o Several respondents noted that the removal of these requirements would provide much-needed flexibility. For example, one respondent mentioned that their health-related awareness content, which is professionally produced and relevant to all communities, faced resistance from local stations due to current regulations. The proposed change would facilitate the inclusion of such valuable content.
	  o Angel Radio and other stations have consistently met their locally produced output requirements, but emergencies and unforeseen circumstances, as noted by Cumbernauld FM, can lead to regulatory breaches. Flexibility would alleviate these pressures.
	
	- Concerns about Loss of Local Focus:
	
	  o There is a strong concern that without locally-produced output requirements, stations might rely heavily on automated or syndicated content, diminishing their local relevance. Respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining some form of guideline to ensure stations continue to provide locally relevant content.
	  o Again, one respondent highlighted that community radio should not become a "jukebox" and should retain its unique character by ensuring locally relevant programming.
	
	- Technical and Logistical Challenges:
	
	  o Clive Glover raised an important point regarding the definition of 'local'. Ofcom's current coverage maps might not accurately reflect the realities of modern broadcasting (with different colours representing different strength of signal on each map).
	  o As more listeners access radio through IP-based devices like smart speakers, the concept of a transmission area becomes less relevant. Therefore, the definition of local output should be extended to include

Question	Your response
	programming that is explicitly for or about the geographical community the station serves, even if produced outside the Ofcom-defined coverage area. Examples of Regulatory Challenges: - Radio Saltire experienced a complaint regarding insufficient locally-produced output, which was later rejected by Ofcom. This highlights how the current rigid requirements can lead to unnecessary regulatory challenges and burdens. - Respondents from stations like Ribble FM and Revolution Radio mentioned that targeted malicious complaints have led to regulatory scrutiny, which could have been avoided with more flexible guidelines. Additional Considerations: - The increasing use of IP-based devices for listening to radio makes defining transmission areas more complex and less relevant. Community Radio could adapt to this changing landscape by Ofcom broadening the definition of locally produced content to include programming explicitly focused on the station's community, regardless of the physical location of the production. - Respondents also emphasised the importance of original and locally relevant content in maintaining the social value and community engagement that define Community Radio. Whilst flexibility is important, there should still be an expectation that stations provide a significant amount of locally relevant content. The CMA supports the proposal to remove rigid locally produced output requirements from Key Commitments, although we suggest that the definition of local output is expanded to include programming that is clearly and explicitly for or about the station's community. This approach will ensure that community radio stations remain locally relevant and continue to serve their communities effectively, even as the technological landscape evolves. By allowing stations to adapt to modern broadcasting realities while maintaining their local focus, Ofcom can help Community Radio thrive in the digital age.

| Question	Your response

Question 5: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposed approach to language requirements for community radio stations? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N
	
	The CMA welcomes Ofcom's proposed approach to language requirements for community radio stations. We believe this approach provides the necessary flexibility for stations to adapt to the linguistic needs of their communities, which are often dynamic and evolving.
	
	Our survey indicated a degree of uncertainty about the proposed changes:
	
	To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's proposed approach to language requirements for community radio stations?
	50 responses
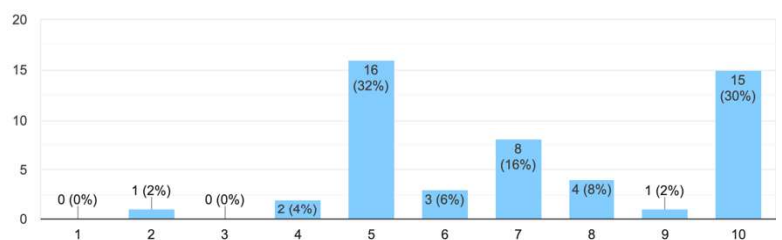	
	The feedback from our members and stakeholders offers valuable insights into the implications and potential benefits of Ofcom's proposal:
	   - Support for Flexibility:
	
	     o Many respondents highlighted the importance of allowing community radio stations to adapt their language offerings based on the needs and demographics of their listeners. As one respondent noted, "Demographics change ... Awaz FM is a Community Radio Station that is Community of Interest rather than a Community of Place."
	     o Respondents also emphasised that the availability and enthusiasm of volunteers often drive non-English language programming. This organic approach can ensure that the languages broadcast are those most relevant and beneficial to the community.
	
	   - Community-Centric Approach:
	
	     o There was broad support for the idea that radio provision should be driven by community listenership and its individual needs, rather than by rigid, prescriptive requirements. This

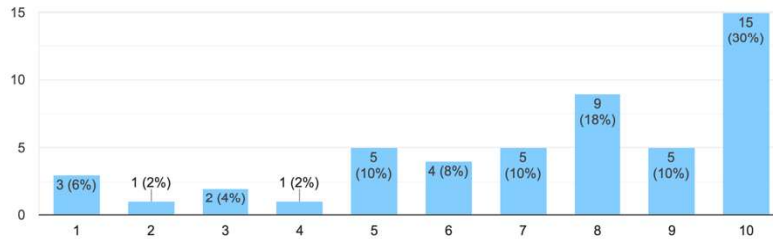| Question	Your response

	approach aligns with the core mission of community radio to serve its local audience.
	  o As one respondent aptly put it, "A community radio station should respond to its listeners' needs whether it's music and speech content or languages."
	
	- Challenges and Considerations:
	
	  o Some respondents expressed concerns about the implementation and monitoring of language requirements under the new approach. For example, one respondent questioned how linguistic communities would be mapped and updated, which is crucial for ensuring that language provision remains relevant and effective.
	  o The issue of managing non-English language content, such as swearing in other languages, was also raised. This underscores the need for robust internal guidelines and training for presenters to maintain broadcast standards.
	
	- Examples of Station Practices:
	
	  o Respondents cited specific examples of stations that have successfully managed multilingual programming, such as EAVA, Radio Seerah, Kohinoor, and Sabras, highlighting that these stations broadcast in various languages based on audience demand rather than regulatory imposition.
	  o Conversely, there were examples like Capital Birmingham, which broadcasts Gaelic programming at an impractical hour due to licensing requirements, illustrating the limitations of rigid language mandates.
	
	Additional Considerations:
	  ● Evolving Community Needs:
	    o The dynamic nature of community demographics means that the language needs of a community can change over time. Community Radio stations must have the flexibility to adapt to these changes to remain relevant and effective.

Question	Your response

	o This flexibility can also help stations better serve the third-generation of ethnic communities, who may not be as familiar with their parents' heritage languages.
	  • Technological Changes:
	     o As more listeners use IP-based devices like smart speakers, the geographic boundaries that define a station's coverage area become less relevant. This technological shift further supports the need for flexibility in language programming to serve a broader and more diverse audience.
	  • Character of Service Definitions:
	     o It is essential that any language requirements or expectations are clearly defined within the station's Character of Service definitions. This approach ensures that language provision aligns with the station's overall mission and the specific needs of its community.
	
	The CMA supports Ofcom's proposal to remove prescriptive language requirements from Key Commitments, provided that the language needs of the community are clearly articulated in each station's character of service. This approach will allow Community Radio stations to remain responsive to their listeners' needs, nurturing greater engagement and relevance. While we recognize the need for some guidelines to prevent potential issues, we believe that a flexible, community-centric approach is the best way to support the diverse linguistic needs of Community Radio audiences.

Question 6: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposed approach to standardising language in the character of service descriptions for community radio stations? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N The CMA supports Ofcom's proposed approach to standardising language in the character of service descriptions for Community Radio stations. This approach potentially brings clarity, consistency, and fairness across the sector while recognising the unique needs and identities of individual stations.

Question	Your response
	To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's proposed approach to standardising wording (where appropriate) in the character of service descriptions for community radio stations? 50 responses Bar chart values: 1: 3 (6%); 2: 1 (2%); 3: 2 (4%); 4: 1 (2%); 5: 5 (10%); 6: 4 (8%); 7: 5 (10%); 8: 9 (18%); 9: 5 (10%); 10: 15 (30%) The feedback from our members and stakeholders provides a diverse range of perspectives on the benefits and potential challenges of this proposal: - Simplification and Clarity: o Many respondents noted that standardising the language in Character of Service descriptions would simplify regulatory processes and reduce misunderstandings. This would benefit both Ofcom and licensees by providing clear guidelines and reducing the likelihood of complaints. o As one respondent stated, "Simplifying regulations will assist community radio." Another noted, "Standardised wording is always good. It brings about fairness for everyone." - Support for Flexibility: o While there is broad support for standardisation, some respondents emphasised the need for flexibility to account for the unique characteristics of each station and the communities they serve. One respondent expressed this concern: "Standardising wording where appropriate sounds sensible to me, but driving consistency is good; we wouldn't want to see an increase in expectations for specific stations without further discussion." o There is also an understanding that standardisation should not impede a station's ability to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of its community. "A community radio station should respond to its listeners' needs

Question	Your response
	and wants. Over-regulation muddies the waters rather than clarifies."

- Addressing Complaints:

   o Several respondents highlighted that standardised language could help prevent complaints and reduce the regulatory burden on stations. One station noted, "We were found in breach regarding a term on our Character of Service following a single complaint. Standardised Character of Service would be helpful."
   o By providing clear, consistent guidelines, standardisation can help ensure that all stations are held to the same standards, thus enhancing fairness and transparency in the regulatory process.

- Challenges of Implementation:

   o Some concerns were raised about how the standardised language would be implemented and whether it would fully capture the diversity of the Community Radio sector.
   o A respondent mentioned, "The character of service should be influenced by the local geographical area it serves rather than nationalising it. Each area should reflect its own character of service."

- CMA Involvement:

   o There was a suggestion that the CMA is involved in the initial standardising of the language to help ensure it is reflective of Community Radio's diversity. This is something the CMA is prepared to participate in.

Question	Your response
	The CMA supports Ofcom's proposed approach to standardising language in the character of service descriptions, with the caveat that there should be room for flexibility to accommodate the unique needs of different stations and their communities. The proposal suggests this standardisation would be developed in consultation with community radio stations to ensure that it is practical and fair. We would strongly recommend that the CMA is involved in the initial standardising of the language to help ensure it is reflective of Community Radio's diversity. By following-through with this proposal, Ofcom can help create a more streamlined, transparent, and equitable regulatory environment that benefits both broadcasters and listeners.
Question 7: Do you agree with Ofcom's assessment of the impacts of its proposed changes? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N

The CMA has gathered feedback from its members regarding Ofcom's assessment of the impacts of its proposed changes. While there is much agreement with Ofcom's assessment, there are nuanced perspectives and concerns that need to be considered to ensure the changes benefit all stakeholders and do not inadvertently harm the Community Radio sector.
Our survey indicated general agreement with Ofcom's assessment:

To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's assessment of the impacts of its proposed changes (including potential impacts on specific groups of ...including equality recognised in their document?)?
50 responses

The feedback provided by our members highlights several key themes and concerns:
- Perceived Motivation for Changes:

  o Some respondents feel that these changes are "more about reducing Ofcom staff workload than benefitting stations or their audiences."
  o Others see Ofcom's assessment as a reasonable and measured evaluation of the proposed changes. One comment noted, "This is a |

Question	Your response
	measured and reasonable self-assessment of these changes by Ofcom."
	- Balancing Flexibility and Accountability:
	o Respondents appreciate the potential for greater flexibility in station operations, allowing for more training, creativity, and financial relief. However, there is also a call for maintaining some level of accountability to ensure stations continue to serve their target communities effectively. "Ofcom needs to be able to trust stations to carry out their commitments to the community. Yes, there should be some accountability and measures to ensure stations are providing the appropriate level of service, but not the draconian measures we have at present."
	- Impact on Community Engagement and Content Quality:
	o There is a belief that lifting some restrictions will empower stations to improve their social impact and provide better content for their community. One respondent stated, "I believe lifting such restrictions will empower stations and give them the capacity to improve their social impact and provide better content for their community."
	- Need for Clear Resource Allocation:
	o As part of the rationale for these changes is freeing up Ofcom resources for areas with more serious potential harm to target communities, respondents suggest a clear statement on the allocation of resources for community stations in need. This could include resources for local news and information provision. "A clear statement of allocation of resources to community stations in need for this purpose, alongside resources for provision of local news and information, should be included in these proposals."
	- Accountability for Social Gain:

Question	Your response
	○ There is strong support for ensuring stations remain accountable to their communities, particularly regarding social gain programming. One respondent emphasised, "There needs to be some specific requirement on stations to ensure accessibility, inclusion, and participation."
	- Standardising Key Commitments Reporting:
	○ To simplify compliance, there is a suggestion to include a simple tick-box exercise in the Ofcom Financial Return to confirm compliance with each station's Character of Service. "As part of its Ofcom Financial Return, it should also have a simple tick-box exercise - confirming compliance or reporting changes without being held in breach, allowing Ofcom to work with the station to relook at Key Commitments."
	- Ensuring Non-Profit and Community-Focused Character:
	○ It's crucial that Community Radio remains a non-profit sector distinct from other local radio sectors. Broadcasters need the freedom to serve their communities in the best way they can while maintaining this distinction. "It is important that community radio remains a non-profit sector distinctive in character from other local radio sectors. At the same time, broadcasters need to have the freedom to serve their communities in the best way they feel they can."
	Respondents would welcome a clear statement on the level of resources that Ofcom anticipates will be freed up to deal with areas where the potential for harm to target consumers or communities is more serious and direct. The CMA would welcome clarity on these areas as well as a dialogue on whether Community Radio can help Ofcom with this issue. The CMA acknowledges the careful consideration Ofcom has given to assessing the impacts of its proposed changes. While there is broad support for the direction of these changes, it is crucial to address the concerns raised by Community Radio

Question	Your response
	stations to ensure the changes do not inadvertently harm the sector. We recommend that Ofcom: • Conduct independent surveys one year after implementation to assess listener satisfaction and the impact of the changes. • Provide flexibility in enforcement for stations making genuine efforts to meet their commitments but facing challenges. • Implement measures to protect stations from harassment through repeated complaints. • Maintain safeguards to prevent Community Radio from being used as a cover for non-local commercial stations. • Allow for short-term variations in quotas to accommodate unforeseen circumstances without penalising stations unduly. • Clearly allocate resources for community stations in need, particularly for local news and information provision. By taking these steps, Ofcom can ensure that its proposed changes benefit the Community Radio sector while mitigating potential negative impacts.
Question 8: Are there any impacts of these proposals which Ofcom has not recognised in this document?	Confidential? – N The CMA has collected feedback from its members regarding potential impacts of Ofcom's proposals that may not have been fully recognised in the consultation document. The following points encapsulate the diverse perspectives and concerns of the Community Radio sector: Unrecognised Impacts and Concerns: -The Local Radio Void and Community Radio's Role: • With local commercial radio increasingly losing its local focus, Community Radio stations have an opportunity to fill this void. However, the proposed relaxed regulations should ensure that Community Radio does not compromise on its commitment to serving local needs. A respondent noted, "Local radio is no longer local, so community radio can fill the void with relaxed regulation." • There is a risk that removing too many controls might open up opportunities for less community-focused organisations. It's crucial to maintain a clear distinction between commercial and community

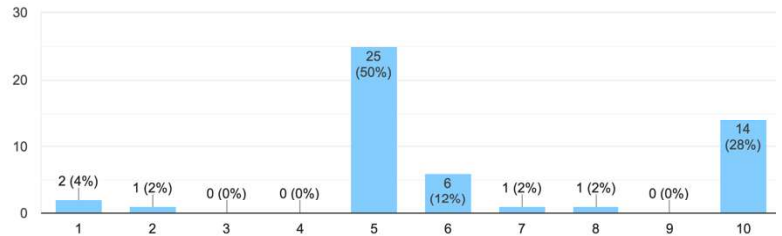| Question	Your response
	stations to ensure proper service to local communities. "A clear distinction between commercial and community stations should be maintained to ensure that local communities are being properly served by a range of offerings." -Maintaining Commitment to Social Gain: • There is a concern that the changes might lead to some stations neglecting their social gain responsibilities. One member stated, "Provided services cannot be allowed to 'degrade' to a level that is not bound by any commitment, then the changes are fair. Ofcom needs to ensure that this does not become an excuse for stations to slacken their social benefit responsibilities." • It was powerfully suggested by one respondent that the focus should move away from individual complaints about quantitative measures to complaints about social gain and qualitative measures: "The emphasis should be on social gain and qualitative rather than quantitative approaches." • The CMA previously stated (in a 2015 response to an Ofcom consultation about Key Commitments) that social gain objectives as defined in the Community Radio Order 2004 should be emphasised and incorporated into Key Commitments. This ensures the full range of 11 social gain objectives is recognised and integrated into the proposals. • Additionally, the CMA suggested that Ofcom should collaborate with the CMA to develop training and education initiatives around record-keeping under the new Key Commitments. This suggestion still stands in 2024. -Impact on SSDAB Multiplex Operators: • Differential pricing offered by SSDAB multiplex operators to C-DSPs versus DSPs may need to disappear because the barrier to being a C-DSP is massively reduced. This could shift the ratio of C-DSP to DSP on a multiplex. "Any differential pricing offered by SSDAB multiplex operators to C-DSPs (versus DSPs) will have to disappear because the barrier to being a C-DSP is massively reduced." • Although the CMA recognises this consultation is not specifically about SSDAB issues, we felt it was pertinent to highlight this potential issue in this section. -Risk of Stations Becoming Juke Box Stations:

Question	Your response
	- There is a likelihood that some community stations might take the easiest option and revert to being juke box stations with little or no local output. "The likelihood that many community stations will take the easiest option, and depending on their finances/resources, will revert to being jukebox stations with little or no output that is specifically local." -Need for Comprehensive Station Visits: - Some responses suggested Ofcom should visit a wide cross-section of stations, to define what Community Radio is before finalising proposals. The CMA believes that while Ofcom's proposals are largely beneficial, these additional impacts and concerns must be acknowledged and addressed to ensure the continued success and distinctiveness of the Community Radio sector. By incorporating these considerations, Ofcom can ensure that its regulatory framework supports Community Radio stations in fulfilling their unique role in serving and enriching their local communities.
Question 9: Do you agree with our assessment of the potential impact of our proposals on the Welsh language? Please provide further information and/or evidence in support of your response.	Confidential? – N The CMA has collected responses from its members on the potential impact of Ofcom's proposals on the Welsh language requirements. The feedback highlights a range of perspectives regarding the importance of protecting and promoting Welsh language programming within community radio. A significant majority of respondents didn't feel knowledgeable enough to agree or disagree with the proposal due to their non-Welsh perspective:

Question	Your response
	To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's assessment of the potential impact of their proposals on the Welsh language requirements? 50 responses **Local Decision-Making:** ● The consensus is that local stations should make decisions regarding language use, reflecting the preferences and demographics of their audience. "The station also knows their audience better than anyone." **Risk of Reduced Welsh Output:** ● There is a concern that deregulation might lead to a reduction in Welsh language output, as experienced in the commercial sector historically. GTFM, a station based in Wales, noted: "This has led to both the Radio Authority and subsequently Ofcom being unable to prevent unscrupulous commercial operators from dropping most or all Welsh language output from stations they happened to acquire, directly against the interests of local Welsh-speaking residents." **Historical Context and Regulatory Role:** ● The shift from 'Promises of Performance' to 'Formats' in the regulation of independent local radio led to reduced Welsh language quotas. This deregulation allowed some commercial operators to drop Welsh language output, which negatively impacted Welsh-speaking communities. "I feel the role of Ofcom as the sole regulator in this regard is crucial." ● Given that the Welsh Government has no media regulation powers, Ofcom's role is vital in ensuring that community radio stations continue to serve Welsh-speaking communities effectively. "The role of Ofcom as the sole regulator in this regard is crucial." While there is a mixed level of agreement with Ofcom's assessment, the feedback underscores the importance of

Question	Your response
	maintaining a strong regulatory framework to protect Welsh language programming. The CMA recommends that Ofcom: 1. Ensure Flexibility While Protecting Welsh Language Output: Allow stations autonomy while ensuring that Welsh language programming is not unduly compromised. 2. Provide Clear Guidelines: Offer clear guidelines to community stations on how to balance Welsh and English content in a way that reflects community needs. 3. Monitor and Support: Continuously and positively monitor the impact of deregulation on Welsh language output and support stations in maintaining their commitments to serving Welsh-speaking communities. By taking these steps, Ofcom can better ensure that its proposals positively impact the opportunities to use the Welsh language and treat it no less favourably than English, thereby supporting the cultural and linguistic diversity within community radio.
Question 10: Do you think our proposal could be formulated or revised to ensure, or increase, positive effects, or reduce/eliminate any negative effects, on opportunities to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English?	Confidential? – N The CMA has analysed insights from our members on how Ofcom's proposals could be revised to better support the use of the Welsh language and ensure it is treated no less favourably than English. The responses indicate several ways to enhance the positive impacts and mitigate any potential negative effects on Welsh language broadcasting. Protecting Welsh Language Programming: Many respondents emphasise the importance of safeguarding Welsh language programming. Ensuring that Welsh language content remains a core component of community radio stations' offerings is crucial for cultural preservation and community engagement. Station Autonomy: There is a strong sentiment that stations should have the autonomy to decide on the balance between Welsh and English based on their audience's needs. "It should be left to the station to decide... they may not have Welsh speaking presenters either available or wanting to volunteer." Allowing stations this flexibility ensures that programming is relevant and responsive to the specific needs of their listeners.

Question	Your response
	Reflecting Community Needs: Respondents believe that stations know their communities best and should respond to the language preferences of their listeners. "If listeners want to listen to a particular language, this would define how the station responds." This community-focused approach ensures that broadcasting remains relevant and valuable to local audiences. Welsh Community Stations' Knowledge: Welsh community stations have the insight to balance Welsh and English broadcasts appropriately. "Welsh Community Stations should know their areas and the balance needed on broadcasting in Welsh/English." Leveraging the local knowledge of these stations can help ensure that programming meets the linguistic and cultural needs of the community. The CMA is confident that if a response is made by the Welsh Community Radio Network (WCRN) it will accurately reflect the consensus of the opinions of the Welsh Community Radio sector. CMA Recommendations: -Ofcom should allow stations the flexibility to decide their programming balance while ensuring that Welsh language content is not unduly compromised. Providing guidelines and support to help stations maintain a healthy mix of Welsh and English programming would be beneficial. -Clear guidelines, training and resources should be offered to community stations on balancing Welsh and English content in a way that reflects community needs. This can help stations navigate the requirements and make informed decisions about their programming. It could also help them develop and deliver high-quality Welsh language content. This support can also include workshops on best practices for bilingual broadcasting and content creation. -Ofcom should continuously monitor the impact of deregulation on Welsh language output and support stations in maintaining their commitments to serving Welsh-speaking communities. This could include regular check-ins, feedback mechanisms, and additional resources for stations struggling to meet language requirements. -Encouraging stations to engage with their communities to understand their language preferences and needs can help ensure that programming remains relevant and responsive. This engagement can be facilitated through surveys, community meetings, and feedback channels. - We would encourage Ofcom to petition the Welsh Government to reintroduce the Welsh Community Radio Fund

Question	Your response
	that ran from 2008-09 to 2013-14 and was responsible for distributing £567,518 to10 Welsh community radio stations. The CMA concludes that to maximize the positive effects and minimize any negative impacts of Ofcom's proposals on the Welsh language, it is essential to protect Welsh language programming, grant stations the necessary autonomy, and ensure that community needs are met. By providing clear guidelines, ongoing support, and opportunities for community engagement, Ofcom can help community radio stations continue to serve their Welsh-speaking audiences effectively and uphold the cultural and linguistic diversity that is vital to these communities.
Question 11: Do you agree with our proposed compliance principles?	Confidential? – N The CMA has reviewed the responses from its members regarding Ofcom's proposed compliance principles as outlined in Section 4.51. The feedback indicates a broad agreement with the principles, though several areas for improvement and clarification have been highlighted. To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's proposed compliance principles? 50 responses Many respondents believe that the proposed compliance principles will have a positive effect on Community Radio operations, helping to streamline processes and ensure better alignment with community needs. Specific Feedback and Recommendations: -Use of Recordings and Written Information: ● Respondents agree with the use of recordings and written information provided by the station to assess compliance. However, some suggest that Ofcom should consider more than one week's worth of recordings to determine if non-compliance is an isolated incident or a recurring issue. -Compliance with Character of Service:

Question	Your response
	• There is agreement on the importance of stations complying with their Character of Service, ensuring that programming remains relevant to the target community.

-Presenters from the Target Community:

• While it is important to have presenters from the target community, some respondents highlighted challenges with this requirement. They suggest that the focus should be on the presenter's involvement with the community rather than their physical location. For example, a presenter living outside the target area but actively involved locally in addition to their activities at the station itself should be considered acceptable.

-Programming Reflecting the Character of Service:

• Ensuring that programming appeals to the target community and reflects the character of service is crucial. Respondents support this principle as it helps maintain the relevance and impact of community radio.

-Specialist Programming Across the Schedule:

• There is agreement on the need for specialist programming to be reflected across the station's schedule, ensuring diversity and comprehensive coverage of community interests.

-Original and Locally Produced Output:

• While Ofcom expects stations to broadcast some original and locally produced output each day, many respondents suggest revising this to a weekly requirement. This allows for flexibility, particularly on days when volunteer presenters may not be available.

-Remote Presenters and Technological Advancements:

• Respondents highlight that with current technology, remote presenters can effectively contribute to local content. They propose that presenters from further afield should count towards locally produced output if they include explicit and relevant local content in their shows. This flexibility would help stations benefit

Question	Your response
	from a broader pool of talent and maintain high-quality programming. -Evaluation and Reporting: • There is concern about how performance against these compliance criteria will be measured and reported. Respondents note that current reporting is data-driven and straightforward, and they seek clarity on how new measures will be implemented and assessed to ensure transparency and fairness. -Balancing Regulation and Development: • Respondents emphasise the need to balance regulation with the development of appropriate output. Over-regulation could hinder the evolution of stations' content as community needs change. The CMA supports Ofcom's proposed compliance principles but recommends several adjustments to ensure they are practical, flexible, and supportive of community radio stations' needs. Key suggestions include allowing flexibility in the source of presenters, considering technological advancements for remote content creation, revising the daily output requirement to a weekly one, and ensuring clear guidelines and fair assessment methods for compliance. These changes would help stations maintain high standards while adapting to the unique needs of their communities.
Question 12: Do you agree with Ofcom's proposed next steps for varying Key Commitments?	Confidential? – N The graph below demonstrates a broadly positive reception to the proposal among the surveyed community radio stakeholders towards Ofcom's proposed next steps for varying Key Commitments: To what extent do you agree with Ofcom's proposed next steps for varying Key Commitments? 50 responses 2 (4%), 0 (0%), 0 (0%), 1 (2%), 7 (14%), 2 (4%), 7 (14%), 10 (20%), 7 (14%), 14 (28%)

Question	Your response
	Feedback received offered further insights into the perceived advantages and concerns regarding Ofcom's proposed approach. Several respondents acknowledge the potential benefits, including streamlining operations, enhancing consistency, and allowing for more tailored commitments suited to individual stations' needs. There was recognition of the importance of collaboration between Ofcom, the stations, and the target communities in this process. Moreover, there was an emphasis on the need for clear communication, support, and acknowledgment of station feedback to ensure the success of the initiative.

However, there are also notable reservations expressed by some respondents. Concerns primarily revolve around the need for careful consideration to avoid unintended consequences that could potentially compromise stations' original commitments to their local communities. There is a call for diligence and transparency from Ofcom to safeguard against any degradation of service quality or community engagement. Additionally, there were practical considerations raised, such as the allocation of resources and the potential time and effort required from both Ofcom and the stations to navigate this process effectively.

In light of these responses and the broader context of supporting not-for-profit media and Community Radio's vital role in fostering cultural expression and community development, we feel it would be prudent for Ofcom to consider these concerns in refining their proposed next steps. Collaboration with stakeholders, including the CMA and Community Radio stations, will be key to ensuring that any changes effectively balance regulatory objectives with the unique needs and missions of individual stations.

In January 2024, Radiocentre's response to a DCMS consultation, emphasised the valuable contributions of community radio to the UK's diverse media landscape and the crucial role it plays in providing hyperlocal content, social gain programming, and training opportunities for aspiring radio professionals. As the members-based representative organisation for Community Radio in the UK, the CMA remains committed to facilitating constructive dialogue with stakeholders and advocating for the interests of our members and the broader Community Radio sector throughout this process. Both the CEO of Radiocentre and the Head of Local BBC recently attended a Community Radio symposium at DCMS to join the conversation about our sectors role growing in the UK radio ecosystem. What was fundamentally clear is |

Question	Your response
	the importance of Community Radio in the local media landscape. The CMA hopes that this consultation and its outcomes will lead to a strengthening of this critical role.

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