

Debate Pack

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The future of BBC local radio

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Summary

A debate is scheduled for 8 December 2022 on the future of BBC local radio. The debate will take place in the House of Commons Chamber.

In May 2022, the BBC announced its plans to become a digital-first service. This plan was formulated as both a response to the new licence fee

settlement announced in January 2022, and broader changes to its audience's listening habits. These plans included a commitment to focus the BBC's local radio programming to where it has the most impact.

In October 2022 the BBC announced more detailed proposed changes to local radio output:

- All 39 BBC Local Radio stations will continue with their own dedicated local programming from 6am to 2pm on weekdays.
- Between 2pm-6pm on weekdays, the BBC will produce 18 afternoon programmes across England, with a number of local stations sharing programming.
- Between 6pm-10pm on weekdays, there will be ten local programmes across England. This will also apply all day on Saturday and on Sunday mornings.
- These programmes will serve areas that broadly mirror the BBC's existing local television areas: North West & North East, Yorkshire & Lincolnshire, Midlands, London & East, South and South West.
- A national 'all-England' programme will be launched after 10pm across the week and from 2pm on Sundays.
- Local news bulletins and sports coverage will continue.

Stakeholder responses

Ofcom has said it will continue to scrutinise the proposals and discuss them with the BBC.

The Government has suggested that whilst it is up to the BBC to decide how its services are allocated, it must make sure it continues to provide distinctive and genuinely local radio services. It has raised these concerns with BBC leadership.

Finalised versions of the plans are due to be put forward in the New Year.

1

BBC local radio

BBC local radio began as a trial across eight locations from 1967-1968. In 1969, this offering was made permanent, and 12 more stations were created.¹

Today, the BBC has 39 local radio stations in England, reaching 5.7 million listeners each week.² According to the BBC Local Radio License, local radio providers have the following remit:

The target audience should be listeners aged 50 and over, who are not well-served elsewhere, although the service may appeal to all those interested in local issues. There should be a strong emphasis on interactivity and audience involvement.³

The BBC reports that 58% of listeners are over 55. The male: female split is 51:49.⁴ 70% of the BBC local radio audience listen between 6am-2pm.⁵ BBC local radio reaches 1.1 million listeners who do not consume any other radio.⁶ Figures released in October report that, on average:

- 89% of the population listened to live radio on average for 20.6 hours per week;
- 59% listened to BBC Radio for an average of 14.4 hours; and
- 13% listened to BBC Local Radio in England, for an average of 6.8 hours. This is down from 15% in September 2021.⁷

The BBC's first public purpose, as set out in its Royal Charter, references local provision:

To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them: the BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people's understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world. Its content should be provided to the highest editorial standards. It should offer a range and depth of analysis and content not widely available from other United Kingdom news providers, using the highest calibre presenters and journalists, and championing freedom of expression, so that all audiences can engage fully with major local, regional, national, United Kingdom and global

¹ Linfoot M, [The Origins of BBC Local Radio](#), BBC website (accessed 6 December 2022)

² [HC Deb 1 November 2022 c763](#)

³ BBC Trust, [BBC Local Radio Service Licence](#) (PDF) (online) April 2016 (accessed 6 December 2022)

⁴ BBC, [BBC Local Radio: Information on BBC Local Radio for suppliers](#) (online) (accessed 6 December 2022)

⁵ BBC Radio 4, [Feedback](#) (online) 4 November 2022

⁶ BBC, [BBC Local Radio: Information on BBC Local Radio for suppliers](#) (online) (accessed 6 December 2022)

⁷ Radio Joint Audience Research, [Quarterly Listening: All Individuals 15+ for period ending September 2022](#) (online), 27 October 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

issues and participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens.⁸

⁸ BBC, [Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation](#) (PDF) (Cm 9365), December 2016 (accessed 6 December 2022)

2 Proposed changes to the UK's broadcasting system (November 2020-April 2022)

The broadcasting landscape has changed dramatically in recent years. This has led to much discussion, amongst both Government figures and industry stakeholders, as to how the UK's broadcasters should adapt to the new media climate:

- February 2020: the Government commissioned the Digital Radio and Audio Review. This was a joint industry/government review “with the objective of assessing likely future trends in listening and to make recommendations on ways of strengthening UK radio and audio”.⁹
- November 2020: [negotiations on the future cost of the BBC licence fee began](#). The settlement would begin in 2022 and last for at least five years.
- October 2021: [The Digital Radio and Audio Review published its report](#). This contained 42 recommendations. The Review's main conclusion was that the Government should not yet set “mandatory dates for the end of AM services”.¹⁰
- January 2022: [the licence fee settlement for 2022-2028 was announced](#). Under the settlement, the TV licence fee will remain at £159 until 2024. It will then rise with inflation for the following four years. The Chairman and Director-General of the BBC welcomed the certainty of the settlement, but said it would “lead to a reduction in content and...services”.¹¹
- April 2022: [the Government's response to the Digital Radio and Audio Review was published](#). This included a commitment to simplify the commercial radio licensing structure when parliamentary time allowed.¹²
- April 2022: [Up Next: the Government's vision for the broadcasting sector](#) (PDF), the broadcasting white paper, was published. This included the Government's commitment to legislate to give public service broadcasters more flexibility in how they delivered their remits. The

⁹ DCMS, [Digital radio and audio review](#) (online) 28 April 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

¹⁰ As above, R30

¹¹ Chairman and Director General of the BBC, [Licence Fee Settlement: Letter to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP](#) (online) 7 February 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

¹² DCMS, [Government response to the Digital Radio and Audio Review](#) (online) 28 April 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

Library's Briefing, [Media Bill: policy background](#) (PDF) (June 2022) provides more information about this.

3

The BBC Across the UK (March 2021)

On 18 March 2021, [the BBC announced the Across the UK blueprint for its service from 2022-2027](#). The Director-General of the BBC described the aim of the plan as being to “deliver for the whole of the UK and ensure every household gets value from the BBC”.¹³ The primary goals of the strategy are the re-balancing of television and radio funding away from London:

1. 60% of network TV commissions by spend to be outside of London by 2027/28.
2. 50% of network radio and music spend to be outside London by 2027/28.

The BBC also highlighted the need for “local radio to do more, in more parts of the country”.¹⁴ Four initiatives were linked to this ambition:

- Launch of up to six peak-time BBC local radio services:
...in communities facing some of the greatest social and economic challenges-including Bradford, Sunderland and Wolverhampton.¹⁵
- Creation of local bulletins:
...for more than fifty areas across the UK on BBC Sounds¹⁶
- Use of new technology to deliver:
...a much more flexible BBC local radio network that can respond and flex quickly to changing priorities, introducing additional radio output in key areas when it can make a real difference¹⁷
- Launch of BBC New Voices:
...a pan-BBC commitment to nurturing new and diverse presenter voices from communities across the UK, building on the success of the existing BBC local radio scheme that is already transforming the sound of our stations.¹⁸

¹³ [BBC publishes blueprint for the biggest transformation in decades](#), BBC Media Centre (online) 18 March 2021 (accessed 7 December 2022)

¹⁴ BBC, [The BBC Across the UK: The BBC 2022-2027](#) (PDF), March 2021, p.8

¹⁵ As above

¹⁶ As above

¹⁷ As above

¹⁸ As above

4

Plan to deliver a digital-first BBC (May 2022)

On 26 May 2022, the Director-General of the BBC, Tim Davie, [gave a speech to staff at the BBC setting out the first steps towards a digital-first BBC](#). In response to the license fee settlement, the Director-General laid out a “£500m plan for the next few years”.¹⁹ This included £200 million a year of cuts, and £300 million a year which will be gained from moving money around the organisation and increasing its commercial revenues. The work force in the publicly funded part of the BBC will be reduced by up to 1,000 in the next few years. The market context of this speech was what the Director-General described as the movement of media platforms towards “a largely on-demand world”.²⁰

Broadly, this plan entails “changes to content and services, efficiency savings and a drive to seek new commercial investment”.²¹ This included a commitment to the complete delivery of the previous Across the UK blueprint, and the announcement of 14 future changes to the BBC’s output.

The complete detail of these plans was not announced; Tim Davie signalled that this would be communicated “across future weeks and months”.²² For local radio these changes included:

- Increasing the online component of local services:
 - ...increasing the impact of our journalism online, and putting compelling local storytelling at the heart of iPlayer, Sounds and News, with a multimedia BBC presence in over 40 towns and cities.²³
- Focusing the BBC’s local radio programming to where it has the most impact (ie the parts of the day with the largest audiences):
 - ...reducing the volume of some of our broadcast programming at times when fewer listeners tune in. We’ll do this carefully – working with our local editors – and we’ll safeguard our commitment to live sport and local news bulletins across the day.²⁴
- General re-allocation of funds away from linear distribution (programmes that are watched/listened to when they’re broadcast):

¹⁹ Tim Davie, [A digital-first BBC](#), BBC Media Centre (online) 26 May 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

²⁰ As above

²¹ [Plan to deliver a digital-first BBC](#), BBC Media Centre (online) 26 May 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

²² Tim Davie, [A digital-first BBC](#), 26 May 2022

²³ As above

²⁴ As above

Over time we expect to consolidate and share more content between services...²⁵

²⁵ Tim Davie, [A digital-first BBC](#), 26 May 2022

5 Ofcom's consultation on modernising the BBC's Operating Licence (June 2022)

The BBC's operating licence sets the regulatory conditions that Ofcom considers appropriate for the BBC to fulfil its Royal Charter purposes. The current operating licence, which runs until 2023, contains the following conditions for local radio output in England:

2.74 In respect of each BBC Local Radio station, the BBC must ensure that:

2.74.1 it provides news and information of particular relevance to the area and communities it serves at intervals throughout the day; and

2.74.2 it provides other content of particular relevance to the area and communities it serves.

2.75 In respect of BBC Local Radio, the BBC must ensure that each week at least 95 hours are allocated on each BBC Local Radio station to original, locally-made programming. For the purpose of this requirement, "original, locally-made programming" includes programming shared with neighbouring stations broadcast between 06:00 and 19:00.²⁶

Different minimum requirements for original, locally made programming apply to BBC Radio Guernsey, Jersey and Somerset.

On 22 June 2022, Ofcom began a consultation on the terms of the new operating licence for the BBC.

In the consultation document, Ofcom suggested it would maintain the locally made programming provisions of the licence. It proposed amending the programming quotas so that they apply across the year (they are currently weekly). It also gave the following clarification to the meaning of neighbouring station after the BBC stated it may wish to share programming over wider geographic areas in certain cases:

We consider that any station which is in the same geographic area, but which does not necessarily share a geographic border, would constitute a neighbouring station. We do not consider that this requires a change to the Licence. However, we believe it is important to monitor the stations between which the BBC shares its programming, as well as the specific programming being shared. We intend to do this going forward to ensure that the BBC continues to provide important local content such as local news.²⁷

The closing date for responses was 14 September 2022.

²⁶ Ofcom, [Operating licence for the BBC's UK Public Services](#) (PDF), 13 October 2017, p29 (accessed 6 December 2022)

²⁷ Ofcom, [Modernising the BBC's Operating Licence](#) (PDF), 22 June 2022, p77 (accessed 6 December 2022)

6 The BBC's plans for local radio (October 2022)

On 31 October 2022, [the BBC announced the specific proposals for its local radio services](#). Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director of Nations at the BBC, said the changes would enable the BBC's local provision to strike "a better balance between our broadcast and online services".²⁸

The proposed changes to BBC Local Radio were:

The BBC has also announced plans to introduce greater programme sharing on Local Radio at times of the day when listening is typically lower.

Under the plans:

- All 39 BBC Local Radio stations will continue with their own dedicated local programming from 6am to 2pm on weekdays. Since 2020 all local stations have broadcast three daytime programmes on weekdays (6am to 6pm), this will now reduce to two on many of our smaller stations.
- Across the week, all live sports programming will be maintained across all local stations.
- Local news bulletin services will be protected across the day on all local stations.
- After 2pm on weekdays, the BBC will produce 18 afternoon programmes across England - with a number of local stations sharing programming. Additional investment will support the production of these new programmes.
- There will be ten local programmes across England between 6pm-10pm on weekdays, across the day on Saturday, and on Sunday mornings. These programmes will serve areas that broadly mirror our existing local television areas. This is in addition to any live sports programming which will continue to be broadcast locally.
- A national 'all-England' programme will be launched after 10pm across the week and on Sunday afternoons and evenings. Again, this will be in addition to any live sports programming which will continue to be broadcast locally.²⁹

In addition to these specific proposals for local radio, the BBC also announced other plans for its local output:

²⁸ BBC Press Office, [BBC sets out plans to transform its local services to deliver greater value to communities across England](#), 31 October 2022

²⁹ As above

- Investigative journalism: proposed the establishment of 11 investigative reporting teams across England creating 71 new journalism roles. These teams would deliver content across TV, radio and online services.
- BBC Sounds: creation of a new fund to commission to original local programmes and podcasts.
- Local online news: plans to boost online news services in every local base; new dedicated local online services would be launched for Bradford, Wolverhampton, Sunderland and Peterborough.

Under these plans, the BBC aims to “maintain its overall investment in local services”.³⁰ Around £19 million of this investment will be “reprioritised from broadcast services towards online and multimedia production”.³¹

As a result of the proposed changes BBC local staffing in England is “expected to reduce by around 48 posts”.³² There will be 131 additional roles across local news services; 139 fewer roles in audio teams; and 40 posts will close due to the end of the documentary series We are England.³³

On 1 December 2022, during an oral evidence session for the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee, Rhodri Talfan Davis suggested that the objective of these proposed changes is to:

...strengthen our online news services, and that requires a level of reprioritisation of spend within our local services in England. We have looked at the audience data on local radio and focused our spend where it makes the biggest difference to audiences.³⁴

The BBC conducted an internal consultation with staff and read listener feedback. Finalised plans are due to be published in the New Year.

Responses to the proposals

In Ofcom’s annual report on the BBC, published on 30 November 2022, it provided the following assessment of the proposals for local services:

The BBC has also recently set out plans to transform its local services in England, including its local radio stations. We are discussing with the BBC, and will scrutinise, its detailed plans for sharing programming on local radio and other plans it is developing to respond to the challenges of changing audience behaviours and the financial pressures it faces. We have recently published proposals for a new Operating Licence for the BBC, under which the BBC will be required to publish more information about how it delivers high quality,

³⁰ [BBC sets out plans to transform its local services to deliver greater value to communities across England](#), BBC Media Centre (online), 31 October 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

³¹ As above

³² As above

³³ As above

³⁴ DCMS Committee, [Oral evidence: The work of the BBC](#) (PDF), HC 382, 1 December 2022, Q143

distinctive content and services for audiences across the UK. As part of our consultation, we have already committed to additional oversight of the extent of the sharing of programming on local radio. We will also consider whether Operating Licence requirements need to be strengthened to ensure the needs of UK audiences are met. If necessary, we will take steps under our competition powers to protect competition.³⁵

Some stakeholders have suggested that the BBC's proposed changes will have a large impact upon diverse programming. For instance, on 12 November 2022, The Voice reported that the BBC's plans for local radio "will see all the African Caribbean and Asian shows on BBC local radio scrapped".³⁶

On 30 November 2022, [the Black Equity Organisation \(BEO\) released an open letter to the BBC](#). The BEO is a national Black civil rights organisation. The letter flagged the "devastating impact" the changes to BBC local radio "will have on Black and Asian programmes". The letter then had two specific asks:

1. There should not be a reduction of bespoke local broadcast hours produced for local Black and Asian licence fee payers.
2. There should be no reduction in total staff salary and production spend on programme content for Black and Asian communities by local radio.³⁷

It received 43 signatures.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) said that the plans would "seriously diminish a service that is highly valued by listeners and underpins local democracy".³⁸ NUJ national broadcasting officer Paul Siegert said that:

This is the biggest threat facing local radio since it launched in 1967. The key to its success over the past 50 years has been its localness. When it stops being local it loses its USP. People in Kent don't care about what is going on in Sussex. If these proposals are allowed to go ahead it will be the beginning of the end for local radio. The NUJ is not opposed to the BBC investing in digital services, but there are ways of having both. More than five million people listen to local radio and many of them pay their licence fee largely because of local radio. They have every right to be angry.³⁹

³⁵ Ofcom, [Fifth BBC Annual Report](#) (PDF) (online), 30 November 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

³⁶ [BBC set to axe all its African Caribbean local radio shows](#), Voice news (online) 12 November 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

³⁷ Black Equity Organisation, [Open Letter to the Director-General of the BBC \(Tim Davie\) and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the BBC \(Richard Sharp\)](#) (PDF), (online) 30 November 2022, p2 (accessed 6 December 2022)

³⁸ National Union of Journalists, [#KeepBBCLocalRadioLocal](#), 8 November 2022 (accessed 6 December 2022)

³⁹ As above

Government response

The Government's most recent response to the BBC's proposals was given by Julia Lopez, Minister of State at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), in response to a written question on 21 November 2022:

While it is up to the BBC to decide how it delivers its services, I have met with BBC leadership and shared concerns expressed in recent parliamentary proceedings about reductions to BBC Local Radio. The Government has been clear that, as our national broadcaster, the BBC must make sure it continues to provide distinctive and genuinely local radio services, with content that reflects and represents people and communities from all corners of the UK. The BBC should set the standard in the UK and internationally with high-quality output across its services.

The BBC has outlined that, under current proposals, overall investment in local services is being maintained, which includes £19m from broadcast services being moved to online and multimedia production to adapt to audience changes. The BBC has confirmed that it is protecting local news bulletins throughout the day, and local live sport, and community programming across all 39 stations, and that there will be fully local programming between 6am and 2pm, with neighbouring or regional sharing in most of the remaining listening hours.

Ofcom, as the independent regulator of the BBC, is responsible for ensuring that the BBC continues to meet the public service obligations set out in the BBC Charter, Agreement, and Operating Licence. The Government understands that Ofcom is continuing to discuss the proposed changes to local radio output with the BBC.⁴⁰

Updates from the BBC

The latest BBC response to stakeholder concerns was provided on 1 December 2022 by the Directors of Nations at the BBC:

We have had, as you would imagine, a significant response from staff, particularly from local radio staff. We have had a significant response from local radio listeners and, as I said, a lot of specific feedback on, "If you are going to share, why don't you consider this, or why don't you consider that?" As we indicated earlier, we are looking hard at that.

The challenge—I have just said this—is that whenever you change anything connected with BBC broadcast services, there is a response. One of the difficulties for us here is balancing the needs of our existing local radio audience with the information and news needs of the rest of the local community. As I say, about 85% of the local community does not come into local radio. Local radio does a great job, but the majority of people do not tune into it.

I do not accept that those individuals have no interest in their local communities and have no interest in local news. Right now, I do not think that our local online services are where they need to be. They need to be more

⁴⁰ [PQ 84986 \[on BBC Radio: Local Broadcasting\], 21 November 2022](#)

consistent and more investigative; they need to draw on our specialists and on the local democracy reporter scheme that we run. We need to deliver a trusted, seven-day-a-week local online news service, and that is not where we are right now.⁴¹

⁴¹ DCMS Committee, [Oral evidence: The work of the BBC](#) (PDF), HC 382, 1 December 2022, Q205

7 Parliamentary material

7.1 Early day motions

[BBC local radio programming](#)

That this House condemns the proposed cuts to BBC local radio programming which will see programming shared between regions after 2pm and on weekends; applauds the role of BBC local radio stations in democratic accountability, combating isolation and responding to crises such as covid-19 and local emergencies; questions for what reason the BBC's digital first strategy is at the expense of a vital part of local media infrastructure; notes with concern that staff whose jobs are at risk found out about the plans through the media; stands with members of the National Union of Journalists resisting the planned cuts; and urges the BBC to consult local radio listeners and licence fee payers before making permanent changes.

07 Nov 2022 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 550 (session 2022-23)

Primary sponsor: Turner, Karl

7.2 Debates

[Public Service Broadcasting: BBC Centenary](#)

Lords motion to take note of the future of public service broadcasting, in the year of the British Broadcasting Corporation's centenary. Agreed to on question.

03 Nov 2022 | Debates | House of Lords | 825 cc392-439

Lead member: Foster of Bath, Lord | **Answering member:** Parkinson of Whitley Bay, Lord

Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

7.3

Parliamentary questions

[BBC Radio: Local Broadcasting](#)

Asked by: Whittome, Nadia

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with the BBC on its future support for BBC Local Radio.

Answering member: Julia Lopez | **Department:** Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The Government is disappointed that the BBC is planning to reduce parts of its local radio output. I met with the BBC and expressed our shared concerns in this House. I made clear that it must continue to provide distinctive and genuinely local radio services, with content that represents communities from all corners of the UK.

Ultimately, the BBC is editorially and operationally independent, and it is for them to decide how to deliver its services. However, I expect them to consider the views of this House when they make the decision over whether to proceed.

01 Dec 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 902507

Date tabled: 24 Nov 2022 | **Date for answer:** 01 Dec 2022 | **Date answered:** 01 Dec 2022

[BBC Radio: Local Broadcasting](#)

Asked by: Sheerman, Mr Barry

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with BBC leadership on proposed cuts to BBC Local Radio.

Answering member: Julia Lopez | **Department:** Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The Government recognises the important role that BBC Local Radio plays in bringing communities together, reflecting local experiences

and delivering local news. I am therefore disappointed that the BBC is planning to reduce parts of its local radio output.

While it is up to the BBC to decide how it delivers its services, I have met with BBC leadership and shared concerns expressed in recent parliamentary proceedings about reductions to BBC Local Radio. The Government has been clear that, as our national broadcaster, the BBC must make sure it continues to provide distinctive and genuinely local radio services, with content that reflects and represents people and communities from all corners of the UK.

The BBC has outlined that, under current proposals, overall investment in local services is being maintained, which includes £19m from broadcast services being moved to online and multimedia production to adapt to audience changes. The BBC has confirmed that it is protecting local news bulletins throughout the day, and local live sport, and community programming across all 39 stations, and that there will be fully local programming between 6am and 2pm, with neighbouring or regional sharing in most of the remaining listening hours.

Ofcom, as the independent regulator of the BBC, is responsible for ensuring that the BBC continues to meet the public service obligations set out in the BBC Charter, Agreement, and Operating Licence. The Government understands that Ofcom is continuing to discuss these proposals with the BBC.

21 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 84807

Date tabled: 11 Nov 2022 | **Date for answer:** 15 Nov 2022 | **Date answered:** 21 Nov 2022

[BBC Radio: Local Broadcasting](#)

Asked by: Lord Rogan

To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the BBC about cuts to local radio services; and whether they have had any indication that (1) BBC Radio Ulster, or (2) BBC Radio Foyle, will be affected by such cuts.

Answering member: Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay | **Department:** Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

His Majesty's Government is disappointed by the extent of the BBC's proposed changes to local radio services. We will be raising this issue with the BBC and wait to hear more from the BBC on how it expects these changes to affect local communities, including the provision of local news and media plurality.

The BBC's recent announcement will only affect the BBC's local radio services in England. There should be no impact on BBC Radio Ulster or BBC Radio Foyle.

17 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL3169

Date tabled: 02 Nov 2022 | **Date for answer:** 16 Nov 2022 | **Date answered:** 17 Nov 2022

[BBC: Local Broadcasting](#)

Asked by: Maskell, Rachael

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if she will have discussions with the BBC on the reasons for its decisions to reduce BBC Local Radio services.

Answering member: Julia Lopez | **Department:** Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The Government recognises the important role that radio plays in terms of the provision of local news and information, and of community engagement, and is disappointed that the BBC is planning to reduce its local radio output.

The BBC is operationally and editorially independent from the government as set out in its Royal Charter, and decisions on service delivery are a matter for the BBC. However, I will be meeting with the BBC to raise the questions and concerns that MPs have in regard to the BBC's planned cuts to local radio.

The Licence Fee Settlement, announced in January 2022, will see the BBC continue to receive around £3.8bn in annual public funding. We believe this is a fair settlement for the BBC and for licence fee payers across the UK, that allows the BBC to continue to deliver its Mission and Public Purposes and keep doing what it does best while not placing immediate additional financial pressure on households. It is up to the BBC to determine how to use its funding to deliver its Mission

and Public Purposes, and the government is not considering providing the BBC with additional funding.

Ofcom as the BBC's regulator will ensure the BBC is robustly held to account in delivering its Mission and Public Purposes. It is for Ofcom to assess whether changes to the BBC's local radio services constitutes a breach of the BBC's obligations.

It is the BBC's responsibility to assess the impact of its proposed changes. The BBC has said that the changes will see BBC local staffing in England is expected to reduce by around 48 posts, with around 131 additional roles across BBC local news services, and around 139 fewer roles in audio teams as greater programme sharing is introduced. I will discuss the potential impacts of the cuts with the BBC's leadership further in our upcoming meeting.

07 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 77470

Date tabled: 02 Nov 2022 | **Date for answer:** 07 Nov 2022 | **Date answered:** 07 Nov 2022

[BBC: Broadcasting Programmes](#)

Asked by: Baroness Benjamin

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they plan to take to ensure that the BBC does not reduce the number of quotas related to delivering public value content, including those related to (1) radio, and (2) children's programming.

Answering member: Baroness Barran | **Department:** Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The government is clear that the BBC has to provide high quality, distinctive content and services. However, it is ultimately a matter for Ofcom as the independent regulator on how to enforce these obligations through appropriate regulation. It is therefore for Ofcom, not the government, to set and amend quotas for the BBC's public services.

16 Jun 2021 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL914

Date tabled: 09 Jun 2021 | **Date for answer:** 23 Jun 2021 | **Date answered:** 16 Jun 2021

7.4

Committee material

Inquiry: [The work of the BBC](#) - Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee – Oral and written evidence transcripts, and other publications

Inquiry: [BBC efficiencies and reform](#) - Public Accounts Committee - Oral evidence transcripts and other publications

8 Media

8.1 Press releases

[#KeepBBCLocalRadioLocal](#)

National Union of Journalists

08 November 2022

[“Biggest threat ever” to BBC local radio](#)

National Union of Journalists

31 October 2022

[Cuts to BBC local radio services not on, says Assembly](#)

London Assembly

29 October 2022

8.2 Articles and blogs

[BBC 'throwing elderly under the bus' with local radio cuts](#)

Telegraph

02 December 2022

[BBC: Local radio cuts needed to 'keep pace with way audiences are changing'](#)

Independent

02 December 2022

[Local BBC Radio sharing proposals may change before implemented](#)

Radio Today

01 December 2022

[BBC must do more to serve lower income audiences, says Ofcom](#)

BBC News

30 November 2022

[Ofcom threaten to rewrite BBC operating licence over local radio cuts](#)

iNews

30 November 2022

[BBC at 100: why local radio is not being replaced by the web – and why the BBC should not scrap it](#)

The Conversation

16 November 2022

[BBC local radio is a lifeline for millions of listeners – we can't afford to cut it](#)

Guardian

14 November 2022

[BBC set to axe all its African Caribbean local radio shows](#)

The Voice Voice

12 November 2022

[Tears, fury and thunder: BBC staff reaction to local radio cutbacks](#)

Press Gazette

07 November 2022

[BBC confirms it will cut 48 jobs in local radio overhaul](#)

The future of BBC local radio

Guardian

31 October 2022

[BBC local radio stations face big cuts to content made for their area](#)

Guardian

30 October 2022

[BBC to merge news channels and make CBBC online only in move to become 'digital first'](#)

Press Gazette

26 May 2022

[BBC announces raft of closures with CBBC and BBC Four to be online only](#)

Guardian

26 May 2022

9

Further reading

BBC

BBC, [Proposed changes to BBC Local Radio, October 2022](#), 7 November 2022

BBC Press Office, [BBC sets out plans to transform its local services to deliver greater value to communities across England](#), 31 October 2022 (Updated)

BBC Press Office, [Plan to deliver a digital-first BBC](#), 27 May 2022 (Updated)

BBC Media Centre, [A digital-first BBC: BBC Director-General Tim Davie's speech to staff](#), 26 May 2022

BBC, [The BBC Across the UK: The BBC 2022-27](#), March 2021

Library publications

[Media Bill: policy background](#), 15 June 2022

Other organisations

News Media Association, [Briefing Paper for the General Debate on the Future of BBC Local Radio](#) (PDF) (online), 6 December 2022

Ofcom, [Ofcom's annual report on the BBC](#), 30 November 2022

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