



Providing a service in accordance with ‘Key Commitments’, Dorset Community Radio Ltd

Type of case	Broadcast Licence Conditions
Outcome	In Breach
Service	Hot Radio
Date & time	18 March to 24 March 2024
Category	Key Commitments
Summary	The Licensee failed to fulfil the requirements specified in its Key Commitments to maintain its character of service. Breaches of Licence Conditions 2(1) and 2(4).

Introduction

Hot Radio is a community radio station based in Poole. The licence is held by Dorset Community Radio Ltd (“Hot Radio” or “the Licensee”).

Like other community radio stations, Hot Radio is required to deliver ‘[Key Commitments](https://static.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/commitments/cr000120.pdf)’ (https://static.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/commitments/cr000120.pdf), which form part of its licence. These set out how the station will serve its target community and deliver social gain (community benefits), and also include a description of the programme service.

Ofcom found the Licensee [in breach of Conditions 2\(1\) and 2\(4\) of its licence](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/266711/Providing-a-service-in-accordance-with-Key-Commitments,-Dorset-Community-Radio-Ltd-Ofcom-final-decision.pdf) in August 2023 (https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/266711/Providing-a-service-in-accordance-with-Key-Commitments,-Dorset-Community-Radio-Ltd-Ofcom-final-decision.pdf) for failing to comply with its Key Commitments relating to character of service, music and speech. We also stated that we would monitor the service to ensure that Dorset Community Radio Limited was complying with its Key Commitments.

Ofcom therefore requested recordings of the output of the service for the week beginning 18 March 2024.

Having assessed the recordings, associated programme schedule and information from the Licensee, we found that Hot Radio was meeting its commitments concerning the types of music it broadcasts, including its specialist music programmes. However, it appeared that the Licensee was not delivering the following aspects of its Key Commitments:

- Character of service: Hot Radio is for the people of Poole. It promotes a better understanding of Poole across the community and strengthens links between all groups of local people. The station provides a forum for debate on issues which affect Poole and its residents. Its programming includes local news and information, and a diverse range of specialist music programmes.
- Speech. The main types of speech output broadcast over the course of each week are: news bulletins, discussions, public service announcements and local information.

Ofcom considered that this raised potential issues under Licence Conditions 2(1) and 2(4). These state, respectively:

2(1): “The Licensee...shall provide the service specified in Part I (b) of the Annex for the remainder of the licence period” and

2(4): “Subject to Condition 2(5) below..., the Licensee shall ensure that the Licensed Service accords with the proposals set out in Part I (b) of the Annex so as to maintain the character of the Licensed Service throughout the licence period”.

We requested comments from the Licensee on how it was complying with the above conditions.

Response

In addition to the Licensee’s comments, we also received third-party representations from the Community Media Association (“CMA”), a representative body for the community radio industry.

Character of service

Hot Radio stated that it believes it fulfils all commitments concerning its character of service. It explained how it provides on-air discussions, interviews, interaction from listeners, information on events, local recruitment, local community events and local events of interest to the residents of Poole. The Licensee further stated that it invites local businesses, charities, and other community interest groups from Poole “to interact” and by doing so “provide information for [its] community”.

The Licensee further added that following the previous breach it introduced a new bulletin named “positive news from Poole” which is broadcast a minimum of 15 times a week.

Hot Radio listed several events it had taken part in within Poole in recent times, including:

- Hosting an event for those suffering from anxiety in social settings, on Poole hill, which was attended by over 220 people.

- Broadcasting its breakfast show live from the Reptile Academy based in Wimborne. Though this area is five miles north of Poole, Hot Radio explained how the intention was to let the “SEND & SEMH communities in Poole [know] about this facility, because according to the reptile academy 52% of all SEND & SEMH¹ visitors are from the borough of Poole”.
- Attending the Bournemouth Bay Run, and, although the race started and finished in Bournemouth, Hot Radio set out that the route went through parts of Poole, was attended substantially by people from Poole and the money raised benefitted three charities based in Poole itself.

Hot Radio highlighted that it considers Poole and the surrounding area to be one and the same and stated that “Poole is no longer recognised by government nor are Bournemouth and Christchurch and therefore are one community, a combined conurbation”. The Licensee believed that Ofcom should recognise this and approve its request to amend its target community to Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (“BCP”). It stated that it includes “countless references to Poole” and its listeners in Bournemouth and Christchurch were questioning why Poole was being mentioned so often. The Licensee reiterated its concerns surrounding the BCP region when responding to our Preliminary View.

In its representations, the CMA described Hot Radio as a “fantastic example of community radio in the UK at its best”, “an inspiration for many of our members” and further described the service as a “genuine community asset to Poole and the surrounding areas”.

In response to our Preliminary View, the Licensee highlighted that it meets its “commitments concerning the Character of Service by providing on-air discussions, interviews, listener interaction, and information on local events, recruitment, and community interests specific to Poole.” As evidence, it stated that its “positive news from Poole” bulletin, which was “introduced following a previous breach, is broadcast a minimum of 20 times a week now and focuses on local stories and events.” Alongside its comments, Hot Radio provided recordings of its previous ten “positive news from Poole” bulletins.

Speech

Hot Radio stated that it believes it met its speech requirement as per its key commitments during the week monitored. Hot Radio provided examples of shows it considered met the criteria including “Hot Positive News from Poole, Hot Jobs, Community Radio Billboard, Customer services, Hots On Guide, Friday Frolics, Lunchbox of the day as well as the surf report, Local Traffic & Traffic and local weather”. The Licensee further added that it “point[s] people to [its] website for further local news” and it encourages discussions and social interaction with its listeners consistently through various features during the day.

Hot Radio stated that it is working hard with its local university to develop more regular local news bulletins delivered by journalism students but that this will likely not be facilitated until “at least the last quarter of 2024”.

Hot Radio stressed that it has twice tried to update its Key Commitments in March 2023 and December 2023 with a view to removing the word ‘bulletins’ from the speech requirement. Hot

¹ SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disability and SEMH: Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

Radio indicated that this would allow it to better meet its current obligations under its Key Commitments.² Hot Radio expressed that change allowed it to “include local news within our broader speech requirements rather than adhering strictly to scheduled news bulletins.” The Licensee further added that the “flexibility enables [it] to integrate local news more organically into [its] programming, which [it] believe[s] will better meet the needs of [its] listeners while still fulfilling [its] obligation to provide local news and information.”

Decision

Reflecting our duty to ensure a diverse range of local radio services, community radio licensees are required to provide the licensed service specified in their Key Commitments. This is a fundamental purpose for which a community licence is granted.

Character of service

Hot Radio’s licence was granted with a licensed coverage area of Poole and its character of service states that it “is for the people of Poole. It promotes a better understanding of Poole across the community and strengthens links between all groups of local people”. However, Ofcom’s assessment of the recordings provided by the Licensee found that there was insufficient content to distinguish the service from a service targeting the wider BCP area. Though there were examples of Poole being mentioned directly regarding local events, much of the focus was on other areas, specifically Bournemouth which is outside of the coverage area.

We acknowledge that the Licensee also broadcasts the service on DAB via the Bournemouth and South Hampshire local multiplexes, and its digital simulcast can therefore be heard more widely within and outside of the BCP area. It is a decision for the Licensee whether it broadcasts its community radio service via another platform, but it is required to continue to meet its Key Commitments and serve its target community as set out in its community radio licence when broadcasting on FM.

Ofcom accepts that content referring to the wider local area is of interest to residents of Poole. However, the licensed coverage area for the station is that of Poole solely. Furthermore, the character of service specifies that the content should “promote a better understanding of Poole across the community”. Ofcom is concerned that the content broadcast in the week monitored did not achieve this because there was insufficient content specifically about Poole and instead the focus was often on other areas of BCP in conjunction with Poole.

Ofcom acknowledges that the Licensee has been promoting and/or attending events which are taking place in Poole, such as Poole Harbour Festival, and has engaged with its target community. This marks an improvement to its off-air engagement and helps fulfil its commitment to strengthen links between all groups, as per its character of service. Subsequent recordings provided by Hot Radio of its “positive news from Poole” bulletin did demonstrate a focus on Poole, in line with its character of service, marking an improvement from the week initially requested for monitoring. However, for the week monitored we consider that the Licensee had not met its character of service.

² The request from Hot Radio to change its Key Commitments was approved in June 2024.

Speech

As part of its speech requirement, Hot Radio is required to broadcast news bulletins which should include local news given that its character of service requires the broadcast of local news and information. The speech content during the week monitored mainly consisted of presenter chat, traffic updates, job vacancy advertisements, 'what's-on' information, 'feel-good news', and weather forecasts for the local area. Ofcom does not consider this content to constitute news. Furthermore, during the week in question, Ofcom found that the "Hot Positive News from Poole" segment contained news from the wider BCP region and not Poole itself.

Hot Radio stated that it directs listeners to its website to access local news stories. This does not meet Hot Radio's Key Commitment to broadcast "news bulletins" as part of the main types of speech output.

Ofcom acknowledges that the word "bulletins" has been recently removed from the Licensee's speech requirement in its Key Commitments. However, even with the word "bulletins" removed from the Licensee's Key Commitments, there is still a requirement to broadcast news, including local news from Poole, during the week monitored. Ofcom welcomes the Licensee's efforts in integrating students into its programming in the near future with the aim of creating a local news bulletin. Given that news was broadcast during the week and there is no longer a requirement to broadcast "news bulletins", we consider this matter resolved.

Conclusion

Ofcom's Decision is therefore that Dorset Community Radio Ltd is in breach of Licence Conditions 2(1) and 2(4) for failing to comply with the following Key Commitments:

- Hot Radio is for the people of Poole. It promotes a better understanding of Poole across the community and strengthens links between all groups of local people. The station provides a forum for debate on issues which affect Poole and its residents. Its programming includes local news and information, and a diverse range of specialist music programmes.

Ofcom also took into account that in [issue 480 of Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/266711/Providing-a-service-in-accordance-with-Key-Commitments,-Dorset-Community-Radio-Ltd-Ofcom-final-decision.pdf) the Licensee was found in breach of the same licence conditions for failing to comply with its character of service, music and speech requirements between 17 and 23 April 2023 (https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/266711/Providing-a-service-in-accordance-with-Key-Commitments,-Dorset-Community-Radio-Ltd-Ofcom-final-decision.pdf). We are therefore concerned that just under a year later the Licensee has failed to make all necessary changes to its content to come into compliance with its current Key Commitments, although we acknowledge that the Licensee is now meeting its music commitment and has improved its adherence to its character of service. Furthermore, with the recent approval of Hot Radio's Key Commitment change to omit the word "bulletins" from its speech requirement we expect it to be more able to meet this requirement going forwards.

We therefore expect the Licensee to work to rectify these issues immediately. We will monitor this service to ensure that Hot Radio is complying with the Key Commitments.

Breaches of Licence Conditions 2(1) and 2(4)

