

Grassroots radio boosted through community fund

Community radio is an increasingly important part of the UK radio landscape. Around 300 not-for-profit stations, staffed largely by volunteers, broadcast to around a million listeners per week.

But advertising revenues, which make up around 25 to 30 percent of a community station's income, have dropped significantly as a result of the pandemic.

The government has today announced that the £400,000 Community Radio Fund administered by Ofcom will be used to provide a lifeline for radio stations hit hardest by the coronavirus. Relevant stations will be invited to bid for emergency grants through Ofcom to help meet their core costs.

John Whittingdale, Minister for Media and Data, said:

Community stations across the country are helping people through the pandemic with up-to-date news and entertainment and through their role coordinating volunteer networks.

We recognise the difficulties they face and are releasing emergency funding to help them continue providing programming and services for the communities they serve.

Awards will be determined by the independent Community Radio Fund Panel. Guidance will be provided from Ofcom on how radio stations can bid for funding.

The Community Radio Fund is a grant scheme set up in 2005 to support the community radio sector. Funding has to date been awarded to projects and posts promoting business development and self-sustainability. It has been particularly successful in funding distinctive content tailored to the needs and interests of local audiences offering opportunities for local engagement and fostering community cohesion.

Danny Lawrence, Chair of the Community Media Association, said

We are encouraged that DCMS has listened to our presentation of how the coronavirus is affecting our members and the wider community radio sector. The quick and early release of funds from the Community Radio Fund, administered by Ofcom, will provide immediate short-term relief for those community radio stations facing immediate hardship.

We look forward to working with DCMS to continue to explore options

to fund community radio in the long term to support stations keeping their communities connected and informed during the crisis. We profoundly thank DCMS and Ofcom for acting so quickly at this difficult time.

Kevin Bakhurst, Group Director of Content and Media Policy at Ofcom, said:

During this challenging period, community radio can provide a reassuring local voice to millions of people.

We know many community stations are facing significant challenges as a result of coronavirus, and we will be working as quickly as possible to administer this fund so they can continue to reach local listeners.

Notes to editors:

- Community radio stations can receive further guidance and information from Ofcom.