



To the Director General of the BBC
BBC Radio Leeds and the future of local radio

We, senior church leaders and representatives of West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council (WYEC), are concerned that BBC's 'Delivering Quality First' proposals for 12% savings in local radio will have a damaging effect on religious and community broadcasting, with a consequent impact on social cohesion. We are particularly concerned at the (20+%) level of cuts being faced by BBC Radio Leeds. We recognise the financial challenges faced by the BBC - and regret the political impetus behind this - but urge serious consideration of the following:

Local radio promotes community identity

BBC Radio Leeds provides a unique medium of connection with and within our local communities - especially with those deemed 'hard to reach'. Consistent with our local churches' mission, it creates identity, generates local pride and makes space for genuine dialogue between communities. A reduction in the levels of service could lead to a greater sense of isolation and detachment for vulnerable, often elderly, people.

Local radio supports and reports faith, community and voluntary sectors

Local radio has a responsibility to reflect the diversity of communities, not least with regard to faith and culture. (2001 Census returns suggested a population of 1.4 million Christians in West Yorkshire.) Religious literacy requires exposure to worship and religious practice; cutbacks in outside broadcast potential will further reduce the quality of religious broadcasting.

Local radio has a unique role in encouraging listeners to take an active part in their local communities. BBC Radio Leeds provides the profile needed by churches and community groups to enable us to serve the needs of others. Radio Leeds makes a direct contribution to the voluntary sector, including its training and mentoring partnership with Bradford Community Broadcasting.

Local radio is of regional importance - it punches above its weight

West Yorkshire is a unique region and Radio Leeds has a unique role to play within it. It is one of the few agencies, like West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council, to serve the community of communities that is now known as the Leeds Local Economic Partnership. The towns and cities of West Yorkshire differ in character, yet they are economically mutually dependent - each needs to know about the others. Radio Leeds is the only mass medium devoted especially to the towns, cities and rural areas of West Yorkshire. At times, breakfast perhaps, there need to be separate broadcasts - Bradford has a very different identity to Leeds, for example - but at other times it is essential to be together, to hear each other's news, to understand the different perspectives of neighbours with whom one shares an economic future. A well-resourced local radio station can help communities listen to each other, building cohesion between as well as within communities.

Local radio provides vital local information

A local radio station is expected to provide up to date news and to be a primary source of information in, inevitably unpredictable, times of emergency. It is not only during times of unfavourable traffic or weather conditions, but also during a major incident crisis when large numbers of people turn to their local radio station. For a local radio station to operate under such pressures that it is unable to respond professionally and fully at a time of need would be like a hospital without an A&E department. It needs to be there in good times so it can provide the critical service when it is most required.

We call upon the BBC to ensure Radio Leeds has sufficient resources to fulfil its vital remit, including

- to maintain its core religious broadcasting provision
- to provide outside broadcasts, not least from places of worship
- to profile and help to bind together diverse communities in West Yorkshire, including faith communities and churches
- to resource programming that serves both local communities and champions West Yorkshire as a whole
- to resource the Bradford studio.

To this end, we call upon the BBC to reconsider the level of savings expected from Radio Leeds, which we fear would jeopardise these and other essential services.