

Fax 020 8008 2693



**Distribution**

18 July 2012

John Mottram  
Head of Radio and International Broadcasting  
Department for Culture, Media, and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
London  
SW17 5DH

Dear John,

**Re: Future of BBC Long Wave Network**

Thank you for your letter of 11 July enquiring about the BBC's proposals for the continuation of BBC Radio 4 Longwave, especially as it relates to its ancillary data service and the use of that service by the Energy Networks Association.

As you reflect in your letter, the BBC's position is as set out in Delivering Quality First: that it will seek to avoid reinvesting in the infrastructure that supports Radio 4 Longwave and that, accordingly, the BBC's service is expected to close when the current infrastructure has reached the end of its life.

In practice, determining how much longer the infrastructure will remain serviceable is not a precise science, as it depends on the reliability of the small number of remaining valves that are fundamental to the transmitter at Droitwich. The life of each valve is affected by a wide number of factors, including the original manufacturing process, the method and integrity of storage between manufacture and usage, and the way in which the valve is then put into service. All of these elements together determine the amount of stress which the valve is able to take, and it is not possible to be certain about the life of an individual valve before it is put into service. A valve may last a thousand hours or ten thousand hours; indeed, we understand that one of the current valves in service at Droitwich has been in service for more than a hundred thousand hours to date.

This notwithstanding, the BBC has sufficient confidence from Arqiva the current provider of this service to the BBC to have little expectation that the transmitter will reach the end of its life before the end of this Charter period (end of 2016). With careful maintenance, and flexibility both in terms of output power and lengths of outage and reductions in power for planned work, the BBC expects that this will be achievable but cannot be guaranteed.

It should be noted that because of the way the radio teleswitching service operates, outages for maintenance are not believed to be an issue for the users of this service. (Moreover, the BBC has recently worked with Arqiva and the Energy Networks Association to confirm that reduced power operation has little measurable impact on the users of service.)

It may, of course, be possible to continue to operate the service beyond 2017, subject to the BBC's Charter being renewed on terms which allowed us to do so. To be clear, though, it is not currently our intention to force the service to close unless the transmission infrastructure is unable to continue to support it.

As you may already be aware, and subject to the agreement of terms, the BBC is willing to offer an extension of the data service to the Energy Networks Association for the remainder of the time that Radio 4 Longwave is maintainable.

The BBC is currently re-procuring all of its transmission services for analogue radio, as a result of the scheduled expiry of its current transmission agreements. This is being conducted as an open public procurement and the BBC is seeking the views and expertise of Arqiva and all bidders around the continuation of all of its analogue radio services, including Radio 4 Longwave. As this is a complex procurement, the BBC does not expect to be in a new set of contractual arrangements until the end of spring 2013. It is only at this point that we will be able to negotiate final terms with the Energy Networks Association, these terms necessarily needing to reflect the terms of the underlying transmission agreements.

In correspondence with the Energy Networks Association, the BBC agreed to set out in the autumn of this year the status of its procurement and the likely timescale for a contract renewal.

Finally, whilst the BBC wishes to continue using the frequency allocated to Radio 4 Longwave until such time as the current transmission infrastructure is no longer able to support the service, you will appreciate that if the service closed, the frequency would be returned to Ofcom. It would then be a matter for Ofcom as to what it chose to do with that frequency at the time and whether it wished to relicense it to either another broadcaster or, potentially, to a data services provider or other operator.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alix Pryde". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alix Pryde  
**Director, BBC Distribution**