

CIVIL UNREST BROADCAST AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL for local and community radio UK 2025

1. Purpose and Scope

This protocol provides guidance for community and local radio stations in the UK during civil unrest. It ensures responsible reporting, staff safety, accurate public information, and coordination with local police and authorities. It also promotes the role of community radio in de-escalating tensions and protecting democratic values.

2. General Principles

- Serve the public interest by providing clear, factual, non-inflammatory information
- Uphold impartiality and accuracy at all times
- Protect the safety of all staff, contributors and volunteers
- Strengthen community cohesion and calm during unrest
- Collaborate transparently with police and local authorities while maintaining editorial independence

3. Pre-Unrest Preparedness

3.1 Internal Readiness

- Maintain up to date contact lists for all staff, volunteers, and emergency services
- Train all staff in this protocol and emergency broadcasting practices
- Establish a secure communication method for internal coordination (radio, encrypted messaging, secure email)
- Pre-record emergency public safety messages in multiple community languages

3.2 Local Authority and Police Engagement

- Set up a liaison agreement with local police and council emergency response teams
- Assign one station representative as the official contact for authorities
- Share station contact details with the police's local press and communications team
- Participate in local emergency drills and information-sharing forums

4. Activation During Civil Unrest

4.1 Immediate Station Response

- Notify all essential staff and volunteers of the situation
- Suspend normal programming if needed to focus on public safety broadcasting
- Activate safety protocols including remote working if necessary

4.2 On Air Messaging

- Confirm facts before broadcasting, avoiding speculation
- Provide location-specific updates only when confirmed by trusted sources
- Use neutral language and avoid inflammatory or emotionally charged terms
- Broadcast official public safety messages from local police and councils
- Share hotline numbers and resources (legal aid, shelters, emergency transport)

4.3 Avoidance of Harm

- Do not air live calls or unverified citizen reports without editorial review
- Do not broadcast names or images of individuals involved unless officially cleared
- Limit or delay coverage of ongoing unrest locations to avoid crowd escalation
- Refrain from rebroadcasting violent or distressing content

4.4 Community Dialogue and Calm

- Host moderated call-in or message-in programmes to allow peaceful community voices
- Broadcast calming and culturally inclusive music or community leaders' messages
- Offer airtime to community organisers promoting peace, safety and support

5. Collaboration with Authorities

5.1 Daily Coordination

- Participate in daily briefings (in person or virtually) with police and council representatives
- Provide authorities with a list of confirmed broadcasts to avoid misinformation

5.2 Information Integrity

- Clarify on air when information originates from the police, council or community
- Maintain editorial control and right to refuse content that breaches neutrality or safety

6. Staff and Volunteer Safety

- Never require staff to report from locations where unrest is active
- Equip field reporters with ID badges, first aid kits and if possible, body-worn cameras
- Ensure mental health support is available for those affected by distressing content or threats

7. Post-Unrest Actions

7.1 Review and Reflection

- Hold internal debrief meetings within one week of the end of unrest

- Conduct a public listener feedback session or survey
- Share learning outcomes with Ofcom, community media alliances and local authorities

7.2 Archive and Reporting

- Retain recordings of all emergency broadcasts for a minimum of 3 months
- Compile a report of actions taken, lessons learned and improvements for future

8. Appendices

Appendix A: Key Contacts Template

- Station manager mobile and landline
- Police communications lead contact
- Council emergency response media contact
- Ofcom regional community media officer

Appendix B: Sample On Air Messages

- “This is a verified public safety message from [Council/Police]...”
- “We urge all residents to remain calm and avoid the area of...”
- “If you are affected or in need of shelter, please contact...”

Appendix C: Emergency Broadcast Log Template

- Date and time
- Nature of message
- Source verification method
- Presenter or journalist name
- Transmission outcome (live, delayed, withdrawn)

9. Compliance

All broadcasters must comply with the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, particularly sections on harm and offence, due accuracy, and fairness. This protocol serves to support stations in meeting those standards during times of crisis.