

Jennette Arnold GLA

Romney House  
Marsham Street  
London SW1P 3PY  
Switchboard: 020 7983 400  
Minicom: 020 7983 4458  
Web: [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)

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**The Rt Hon Chris Smith MP**

Secretary of State  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
London  
SW1Y 5DH

Dear Chris

**BBC Digital Radio Services**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Labour Group on the London Assembly as lead member for Culture, to respond to the proposals set out by the BBC for future digital radio services, and in particular Network X, which is described as a "black music" station.

In the BBC's own proposal documents it states:

*"Network X and the Asian Network will better reflect the cultural activity, the ethnic interests, and the lives of Britain's black and Asian communities".*

However, the outline of Network X as proposed by the BBC would do little to reflect black culture in Britain, and again according to the proposal document would instead be:

*"dedicated to playing the very best in contemporary black music to a young audience".*

A number of concerns have been raised with Assembly Members from the commercial radio sector, regarding the possible impact of Network X in its current proposed format on extant and planned black music stations. They are concerned that Network X will be a duplication of services provided by commercial stations, and would benefit from a narrow definition of "black music", whilst they are prescribed to play other less commercial forms, such as soca, gospel, African and reggae by their regulator.

By duplicating commercial provision, the BBC's plans are inconsistent with their duty to provide services not available from the commercial sector. While the Asian Network will be a mainly speech-based service, Network X will do little to address wider black culture in Britain, and will wholly fail to address the needs of our older black population.

The Labour Group on the London Assembly strongly urges you to clearly prescribe the content of Network X, particularly in the following areas:

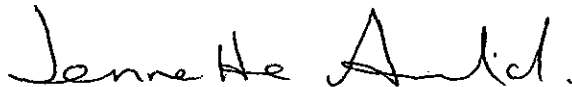
- That it should be a "black culture" station rather than "black music".
- That the nature and levels of speech and music provision are closely prescribed.

- That it should provide an outlet for black artists of all kinds, e.g. poets, writers, as well as musicians.
- That use is made of the large amount of archive material concerning African, Caribbean and Black Britons held by the BBC.

Furthermore, we would urge you to ensure that current provision for black culture on the BBC's other stations, particularly its analogue services, is maintained, so that Network X does not become a ghetto for black output on the BBC.

The Labour Group on the London Assembly broadly welcomes the BBC's proposals for new digital radio services, but hopes that the finally agreed proposals will plug some of the gaps in existing provision of radio in the UK, rather than duplicating that which is available from the commercial sector.

Yours sincerely



**JENNETTE ARNOLD-GLA**  
Assembly Member