

# Radio Humberside's Sally Fairfax slams BBC for "abandoning radio" with latest cuts

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BBC local staff have criticised the cuts to radio

## *The Radio Humberside presenter has criticised the BBC's plans to slash local radio stations*

THE BBC Local Radio network is made up of 39 stations across England.

Under recent changes to BBC Local Radio, from September, stations will only run between 6am to 2pm on weekdays. The new schedule will restrict local programming, and from 2pm, broadcasting will become shared with nearby stations. From 10pm onwards, the content will be nationwide. "People will be listening to stories that are a lot further afield," said BBC journalist Sally Fairfax.

BBC Hull reporter Sally Fairfax has worked at the corporation for over 12 years producing

content at stations across the country, including BBC Radio Manchester, BBC Radio Lincoln, and BBC Radio Humberside. Fairfax said "nobody is happy" about the proposed changes, as the BBC prepares to divert funding to multimedia operations.

Fairfax said the plans to cut local coverage will "alienate a whole generation of people" as the BBC continues to expand its "digital first" approach. She added: "Radio is companionship. It's not just information."

According to the BBC, most of the corporation's local radio listeners are from the older generation. The BBC website states that "58% of BBC

Local Radio listeners are over 55.” Blasting the changes Fairfax said: “They’re abandoning radio to put more efforts into digital.”

Since the controversial plans were announced last October, there has been widespread criticism. As a result of the cuts, the BBC confirmed there would be almost 50 job losses across the country. Among those being made redundant is one of BBC Radio Humberside’s longest-serving presenters- David Burns.

The award-winning journalist has worked at the corporation for more than twenty years. Speaking on Twitter in late April, Burns revealed that the BBC had said his services were “no longer needed.”

In a statement, Burns wrote: “The BBC has told me I won’t be needed as a presenter. I’m eternally grateful to them for the opportunity, I’ve loved every minute.” Describing the events as a “very unsettling time,” he concluded the Tweet and said: “#savebbclocalradio.”

BBC Radio Humberside presenter and long-serving colleague of David Burns, Sally Fairfax, said there has been a “massive outcry” since the announcement. Burns has presented The Burnside Show on BBC Radio Humberside on weekdays for 12 years. Discussing the popularity of Burns, Fairfax said: “He’s a well-known presenter. He’s a friend.”

Burns’ shock departure has sparked criticism across the country. Former BBC Radio Humberside presenter Carl Wheatley worked at the BBC for 25 years before resigning in 2019.

Following the news of Burns’ axe on April 24, Wheatley tweeted: “Hope those overseeing the mass destruction of BBC Local Radio are soaking in the reaction across the UK today.”

Sally Fairfax will remain at the BBC, but the operation will change “a great deal” as the corporation prepares to make major adjustments to hundreds of local radio stations. “I’m one of the lucky ones. I get to stick around,” said Fairfax.

In a bid to become “more efficient,” the responsibilities of those working within the BBC Local Radio team are expected to change.

As part of the cost-cutting plan, it will now “take longer to complete one story,” said Fairfax. She added: “If I go out to report on a story, I will be creating content for online, BBC Sounds, radio and possibly television. Whereas now we have several people collaborating on the same story.” According to Fairfax, the future will involve a “steep learning curve” for many working at the BBC.

The BBC reported that the reduction in local radio coverage will allow for an estimated £19 million in funding to be reassigned to online news platforms.

Under the new changes, the corporation has pledged to generate approximately 130 new roles within its multimedia services, including BBC sounds and podcasts.

Speaking in favour of the plans, a BBC spokesperson said: “Our aim is to achieve a better balance between our local online and broadcast services at a time when millions of people increasingly turn to their mobiles first for news and information.”

Following several “fiery debates” with the BBC directors, Fairfax said industrial action in response to the radio cuts began in March.

A first strike took place on March 15, the same day the Spring Budget was announced. The strike resulted in the disruption of several regional programmes. “We’ve already been on strike once. We have been working to rule,” said Fairfax.

Amid the new changes, BBC journalists were due to continue the strike action tomorrow (Friday, May 5), to coincide with the local election results.

However, following changes to the way the new proposals are set to be managed, the plans to stage the 24-hour walk-out across BBC stations have now “all been suspended,” said Fairfax