

Digital Switchover – A Guidance Note for Local Authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The regional timetable for of Digital Switchover

1. Digital switchover will involve the phased switch-off of the analogue terrestrial television transmission network and its replacement with a new, fully digital terrestrial network. The programme for digital switchover will be rolled out starting at the end of 2008, following the pattern of ITV regions, in the following order:

Regional Timetable – by ITV Region			
Border	Start 2008	Yorkshire	2011
West Country		Anglia	
HTV Wales	2009	Central	
Granada		Meridian	2012
HTV West		Carlton/LWT	
Grampian	2010	Tyne Tees	
Scottish Television		Ulster	

2. Digital switchover will affect all television equipment used to receive broadcast television that has not yet been adapted or converted to receive digital services. This includes televisions, video recorders and some communal television aerial systems used by or operated by local authorities.

Digital Terrestrial Coverage

3. Digital switchover involves a nationwide build out of the digital terrestrial network to all existing 1154 transmitter sites in the UK. Under the plans agreed by Ofcom, the communications regulator and public service broadcasters in June 2005, this will increase coverage of the public service channels (the BBC’s services, ITV1, Channel 4, Five, S4C and Teletext) on digital terrestrial from less than 80% today to 98.5% of homes, the same proportion of homes that are currently served by the four main analogue terrestrial channels. This will increase choice for viewers in current analogue areas not served by digital terrestrial services who will, for the first time, get access to the BBC’s digital services and other digital channels through an aerial.
4. Viewers receiving good analogue services now, but who are unable currently to receive digital terrestrial services, will be able to do so once switchover takes place in their region. In most cases, viewers will be able to obtain digital services by plugging a set top box into their existing television set, or by upgrading their television to an integrated digital television (iDTV) which has a built in digital tuner. A small number of households may need to upgrade their aerial. Digital switchover only affects the reception of terrestrial services and does not affect the availability of television through the other platforms such as satellite, cable or DSL (television through a suitably adapted telephone line).
5. Around 350,000-400,000 households in the UK – many living in remote locations –

currently have either no or only very poor and unreliable access to analogue television services. Digital switchover will not significantly improve terrestrial access for these households. Though these historic difficulties are unrelated to switchover, the Government believes it is important to seek to address them as part of the switchover strategy and we are working with Ofcom, the Communications Regulator, to ensure that the ability of households living in remote areas to access digital television is fully considered. Ofcom is carrying out comprehensive research into reception issues for households in areas not served by terrestrial networks (including those with no satellite coverage) and to assess whether any measures are available to improve television coverage.

Implementation of Digital Switchover

6. Digital switchover will be a major project affecting almost all UK households and all organisations, including local authorities that use analogue television services. The UK's public service broadcasters and digital terrestrial service operators working with equipment manufacturers and retailers, have established an independent not for profit organisation called Digital UK to co-ordinate the switchover process.
7. Digital UK will have three main objectives
 - to co-ordinate the technical roll out of digital terrestrial television across the UK, ITV region by ITV region, to the timetable agreed by Government.
 - to communicate with the public about digital switchover to ensure everyone knows what is happening, what they need to do and when.
 - to liaise with TV equipment manufacturers, retailers, digital platform operators and consumer groups to ensure understanding of and support for the switchover programme.
8. Digital UK's main challenge will be to communicate with the public; to explain what is happening and what viewers need to do and by when so that the programme for digital switchover is well understood by all viewers. Digital UK aims to ensure switchover is a simple and positive experience for viewers.
9. Digital UK will work closely with Government as part of the wider digital switchover programme. This will help to make sure the plans for implementation are robust and effective and that issues affecting public services or local authorities are managed effectively. Digital UK has started to prepare details of the switchover and will be working closely with local authorities through the Local Government Association, the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and through regional forums for each regional switch-off.

Assistance for Vulnerable Groups to help cope with digital switchover

10. The Government believes that switching to digital is now an affordable option for the vast majority of homes. However it is clear from research carried out and the experience of the successful technical trial in South West Wales, that the switchover process will be difficult for older and disabled viewers. The Government has therefore

asked the BBC to establish and fund an assistance scheme, to help the most vulnerable households cope with switchover.

11. The scheme will cover:
 - households with one person aged 75 and over
 - households with one person with a significant disability (defined as those people eligible for either Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance).
12. The package of assistance will consist of providing the necessary equipment to convert one TV set and the relevant support to install and use such equipment. A small fee will be charged to cover the costs of the equipment, but the fee will be waived for eligible households who are entitled to Income Support, Job Seeker's Allowance or Pension Credit. In addition, we are working with the RNIB and the BBC on a scheme which will enable blind people to benefit from the new audio description facilities provided by digital technology.
13. The practical details of the scheme will be developed over the next 12 months. We will involve representatives from local government, as well as leading charitable and voluntary sector groups in these discussions. In particular, we will have to consider whether specific arrangements are necessary for those citizens eligible to benefit from the scheme who live in sheltered or very sheltered accommodation, in residential care or in nursing homes. The precise arrangements for the delivery of the assistance scheme are being tested in a trial scheme being carried out in Bolton, involving Bolton Metropolitan District Council and local voluntary groups. More information on the Bolton trial will be available later by June 2006.

Housing Sector

14. In blocks of flats, communal TV distribution systems are generally less expensive, more effective and less intrusive than lots of individual aerials. Therefore, private sector and social landlords very often provide and maintain communal systems for tenants and leaseholders. These systems may also be found in other buildings such as prisons and care homes. The majority of those which are only set up for analogue reception will need some upgrading to work with the digital signal. Landlords, including local authority landlords, may have an obligation under the terms of the tenancy or leasehold contract to maintain these systems and these obligations may cover upgrades for digital reception.
15. The costs of updating communal TV aerial systems for digital television services will vary depending on the type of building, its location and whether the landlord and residents opt to upgrade the system for digital terrestrial television only, or whether they wish to invest in a new system that is capable of providing all or a mix of DTT, satellite, cable or DSL services. A large number of social landlords, including local authorities who own or manage housing stock, have already upgraded systems. **Authorities that have not yet done so need to do so as a matter of priority.** We would strongly advise all authorities with housing stock (including those which plan to transfer responsibility for its management to a registered social landlord or an arms-length management organisation) to factor this into discussions and consultation with residents and residents groups.

16. To help private and social landlords manage this process, DCMS and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) have published "Digital Switchover – A Good Practice Briefing Special". The Briefing sets out in detail how the switchover to may affect communal TV aerial systems that have not been upgraded, with objective advice on the options available. A copy of the guide is enclosed. The guide is also available from www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk. The Government and Digital UK have plans to work extensively with social and private sector landlord representatives to ensure that the implications are well understood by tenants, leaseholders as well as by landlords and managing agents.

Planning Rules

17. ODPM recently announced details of changes to extend the general permitted development rights which apply to the installation of satellite dishes and other antennas in England. The new rules came into effect on 25 November 2005 and are set out in ODPM Circular 10/2005.

The Digi TV National Project

18. The switchover from analogue to digital offers the television user more choice and control. It also presents a significant opportunity for local authorities to exploit this new channel, allowing you to deliver interactive services to a cross section of customers. Many of these people will not have had the means to interact with you via more traditional electronic means e.g. the web. Moves are already well underway, through the ODPM sponsored DigiTV National Project, to educate, support and facilitate Local Authorities in using digital TV to reach citizens.
19. Over 80 Local Authorities are already offering interactive services via the DigiTV National Project, providing services such as housing repair requests, waste collection enquiries and GP Appointment scheduling amongst many others. The DigiTV National Project provides a centrally hosted solution; the Starter Kit, for local authorities to use, which enables local authorities to broadcast interactive content on Sky, NTL & Telewest and will soon include other platforms including 3G mobile and TV via broadband.
20. In addition the project, in partnership with the London Borough of Hillingdon, commissioned research that resulted in a business case that documents clear evidence of benefits to the citizen and council from offering targeted council services via the television. Hillingdon alone estimate a net saving in excess of £200,000 from their interactive television service over the first five years. Important, but less financially tangible, benefits are also predicted across the social and digital exclusion agendas. Further information on the DigiTV National Project, the Starter Kit and the business case can be found at www.digitv.org.uk or contact Guy Giles – guy.giles@kirklees.gov.uk

Waste Management

21. All electrical equipment such as televisions and video recorders need to be disposed of or recycled when they come to the end of their useful life. Digital switchover itself does not require equipment to be thrown away as almost all sets can be adapted by

means of a set-top box. However, the timing of switchover may affect the timing of disposal of some equipment such as rarely used televisions that people choose not to adapt. DTI and Defra are carrying out research to model any changes in patterns of waste disposal generated by switchover.

22. Any waste electrical equipment produced during switchover will be subject to the requirements of the EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive. The WEEE regulations, which implement the Directive, are due to come into force in June 2006. Under the WEEE Regulations, producers of electrical goods are financially responsible for the collection, treatment and recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment. Local authorities do not have obligations under the WEEE Regulations, but if they choose to register their civic amenity sites and waste transfer stations as designated collection facilities, producers will become responsible for the costs of treating and recycling separately collected WEEE arising at those sites.
23. As part of the digital switchover programme, DTI, DCMS and Defra will work with Digital UK to ensure that consumer communications do not encourage unnecessary disposal of television equipment. Information about correct disposal will be provided in the run up to switchover in each region. Manufacturers and retailers will also be encouraged to develop and promote equipment that is designed to work through switchover, has a longer effective lifespan, and corresponds to best practice on hazardous substances and recovery. We will involve the local government associations to make sure that any predicted rises in disposal can be properly managed and dealt with minimal impact on local authorities.

Conclusion

24. Digital switchover will bring many benefits to the UK and the wider economy, but it will require effective coordination across a range of bodies. The establishment of effective arrangements with local government would be widely beneficial to the process. Our role is to make sure that impacts on local authorities are minimised and that any actions that affect local government are properly coordinated. We and Digital UK will manage this primarily through the Local Government Associations, but we will also want a more direct engagement with authorities.

Contact Details

Further details about the digital switchover programme, including regular updates, are available from <http://www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk> and <http://www.digitaluk.co.uk>. Other information about digital television is available from the following web-sites.

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport www.culture.gov.uk
- Department of Trade and Industry www.dti.gov.uk
- Ofcom - Office of Communications www.ofcom.org.uk
- Digital UK www.digitaluk.co.uk

Broadcasters:

- BBC www.bbc.co.uk
- ITV www.itv.com
- C4 www.channel4.com
- FIVE www.five.tv
- S4C www.s4c.co.uk
- Teletext www.teletext.com

Digital Broadcasters/Companies

- Freeview www.freeview.co.uk
- BskyB www.sky.com
- NTL www.ntl.com
- Telewest www.telewest.co.uk
- Homechoice www.homechoice.co.uk
- Kingston Communications www.kcom.com
- Isle of Wight Cable <http://www.wightcable.com/>
- Top Up TV www.topuptv.com

Information about digital products and services is available from manufacturers, retailers and broadcasters. Please access their sites directly for more information.

Industry:

- Confederation of Aerial Industries (representative body for aerial installers and aerial industries) www.cai.org.uk
- Digital Television Group (digital TV industry standards group) www.dtg.org.uk
- Intellect (manufacturers group) www.intellectuk.org