

Digital media

Summary

This paper provides members with an update on the roll-out of digital TV, and asks for comments on the issue transition to digital radio.

Councillor Peter Phillips (Shropshire Council) will attend the board to hear and contribute to this discussion.

Recommendations

That members note the report and provide comments on the issues related to the transition to digital radio as outlined.

Action

Following members' comments, officers to take forward appropriate actions.

Digital media

Background

1. On 16 June the Government published *Digital Britain*, its strategic vision for ensuring that the UK is at the leading edge of the global digital economy. The strategy proposes the future phasing out of analogue broadcasting for both TV and radio. Some councils are concerned about the impact of this on their residents.

Digital Television

2. Digital TV switchover is the process of converting the UK's terrestrial television system to digital. Between 2008 and 2012, analogue channels broadcast from more than a thousand transmitter sites are being switched off, region by region, and replaced with digital TV services.
3. In late 2007 Copeland (Cumbria, including Whitehaven) was the first area in which the analogue signal was switched off. This was followed by the Scottish Borders region in November 2008 and the Beacon Hill transmitter area (West Country) in April 2009. By the end of the year 18% of households will have switched to digital transmission, including the Granada area, which covers 3 million households. Details of when each transmitter region will switch to digital are enclosed at **Annex A**.
4. Local Authorities have been working to support residents in areas where the switchover has occurred. Copeland BC, for example established a stakeholder group bringing together the local press, businesses, Digital UK (not-for-profit company responsible for leading the UK's switchover from analogue to digital TV) and residents groups to help communicate messages about the switchover and to resolve potential issues as they arose. In advance of the wider switchover in Cumbria, the County Council communications team publicised information about the switchover process and date, and about Digital UK roadshows in their area. The messages were carried in UK roadshows in their area. The messages were carried in *Your Cumbria*, the councils residents magazine, which goes to every household in the County.
5. So far the LGA has not received any direct representations about the performance of public agencies or private companies in relation to the digital TV switchover. The process appears to be operating well, although it should be noted that those regions which were the first to switchover did receive substantial direct assistance from Digital UK, were followed closely by government and also benefitted from substantial national media coverage. All of these factors will have acted to increase public awareness of, and preparedness for, the switchover. This may not necessarily be the case when future transmitter regions experience the switchover.

Digital Radio

6. *Digital Britain* outlines the possibility of creating a dedicated digital platform onto which current FM radio would be migrated, allowing the FM bandwidth to be utilised by “community radio”, which at present predominantly uses the MW bandwidth. In addition, bandwidth would become available for resale to new operators.
7. The report suggests there should be a single switchover date for all radio services; 2015 is proposed. There are though two conditions attached to this proposed date:
 - That 50% of listeners use digital radio; and
 - That national DAB coverage (by area and quality) is comparable to FM coverage, and local DAB reaches 90% of the population and all major roads.
8. Shropshire Council recently agreed a motion to Council urging the Government not to confirm the 2015 switchover date until proposals had been fully rural proofed. A copy of this motion and the proposed criteria for rural proofing are enclosed at **Annex B**. The motion is principally concerned with the availability of the digital signal in remote or particularly hilly rural areas, where a satellite receiver would be required to pick up transmissions.
9. Concerns are also raised about the disposal of analogue radio sets, and the fact that most households have a greater number of sets that would need to be replaced than is the case with TV. The Shropshire motion therefore proposes a “hardship” scheme to offer financial assistance to residents who would be adversely affected by the digital switchover.
10. Members are asked to discuss the issue of rural proofing the proposed transition to digital radio, and to **agree** any follow-up actions for officers to take forward.

Financial Implications

11. None for the LGA. Transition to digital radio would have financial implications for residents who must buy new DAB radios to replace their existing analogue sets, local authorities, who would need to meet the increased costs of disposing of analogue radios under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment regulations.

Implications for Wales

12. To be taken forward as appropriate with the WLGA

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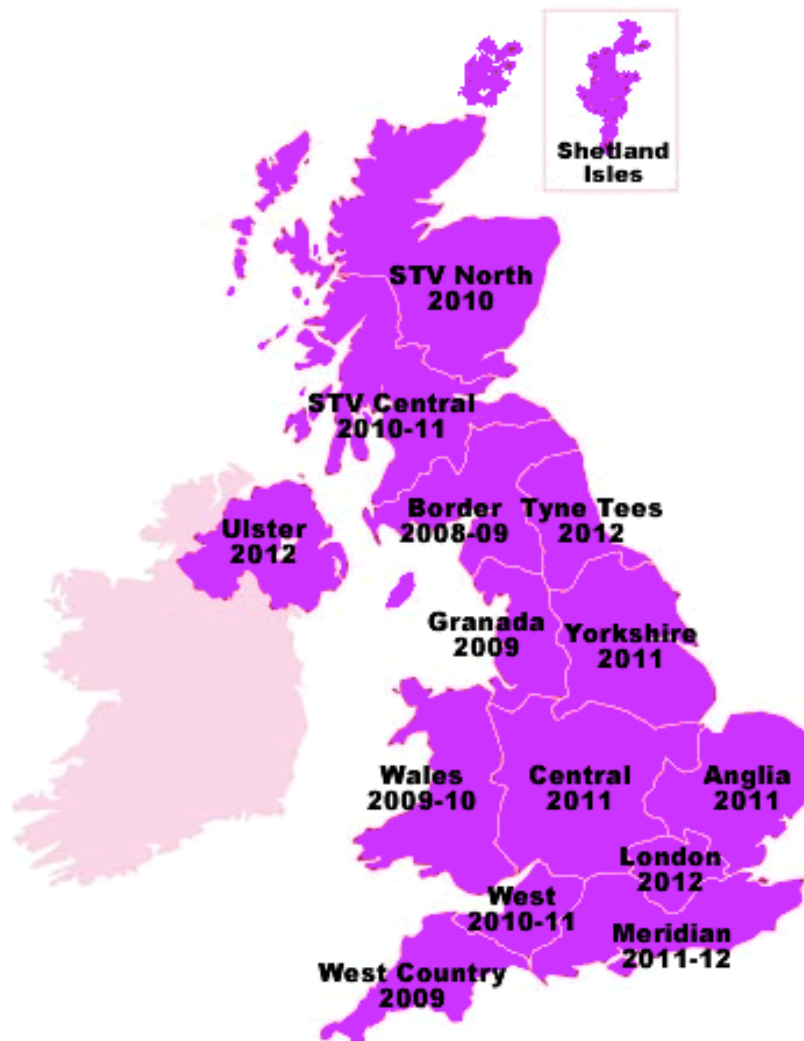
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Annex A

Digital TV switchover by transmitter region (Source: *Digital Britain*)

Border	2007-08
Granada	2009
West Country	2009
Wales	2009-10
Channel Islands	2010
West, STV North	2010
STV (Central Scotland)	2010-11
Central, Anglia, Yorkshire	2011
London, Meridian, Tyne Tees & Ulster	2012

Map of digital TV switchover by transmitter region (Source: <http://www.digital-tv-advice.co.uk/switchover.html>)



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Annex B

Motion to Council

Analogue Radio Switch Off

Council urges the Government not to confirm the 2015 date suggested by Lord Carter until:

1. Full consultation with the public has been undertaken;
2. The proposals have been submitted for Rural Proofing to the Commission for Rural Communities and/or the Rural Advocate;
3. Proposals have been brought forward to alleviate financial hardships which will be inflicted on
 - (a) poorer households who have to replace all their radio sets;
 - (b) households in hilly rural areas who will have to install satellite dishes and sockets in every room;
4. Proposals have been brought forward to deal with the disposal of 100 million redundant radio sets.