

TENANTS' & LEASEHOLDERS' PANEL
1 February 2012

Lead Officer: Director of adult services, health and housing

Wards: All

Agenda Item: 9

Subject: INTEGRATED RECEPTION SYSTEMS (DIGITAL TELEVISION
AERIALS)

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to note that it is the Council's intention not carry out any further provision of communal aerial systems ahead of the national digital switchover and to endorse the approach to deal with any blocks where problems may subsequently arise.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report gives a brief background to the Council's previous decision to upgrade the communal analogue television aerials to digital by providing an IRS, and sets out why the Council does not intend to invest in any further such work to other blocks ahead of the digital switchover.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Several years ago we carried out and completed a programme of replacing all the Council owned and maintained analogue television aerial systems fitted to various blocks in advance of the Government deadline for switching the analogue signals off. This was to ensure that we were still able to offer those tenants who benefited from a Council owned and maintained analogue aerial system a television reception service, once the analogue service had been discontinued.
- 3.2 The IRS to each block consisted of a new digital dish and aerial receptors coupled with "head end" equipment which distributed the signal to each dwelling via a single cable to a three way outlet within each flat.
- 3.3 A single cable was installed as this was, at that time, the current standard required to provide a signal to the decoder ('set top box') or digital television within the flat. The 'set top box' was to be provided by the resident as required.

- 3.4 Although technical standards have moved on in recent years, the primary requirement was to ensure that residents would have access to all the “terrestrial” television channels that were available on the analogue system, eg BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. As a benefit, residents would also have access to the other “Freeview” channels broadcast via the satellite including various radio stations.
- 3.5 Whilst we met the original Government switch off target set (2008) the Government did not meet this themselves and the analogue service is only now, slowly, being discontinued starting in the North of England/Scotland. The target is now to switch over to digital by April 2012 in the South East, including London.

4. DETAIL

- 4.1 A consultation exercise has been undertaken locally within the London area to ascertain what other councils are planning, or have planned in respect to providing IRS to blocks which did not have original council owned systems. We consulted with 15 adjacent boroughs and received 12 returns. 58.33% of respondents are not planning to install IRS onto blocks which do not currently have a communal system. 41.67% are planning or have completed such an improvement although in some cases the provision is part of the conditions of tenancy. Overall, these results indicate that there is no general consensus about this issue.
- 4.2 We already have approximately 4180 individual flats in 212 blocks served by our own digital Integrated Reception System (IRS). Residents have only to provide a ‘set top box’ to be able to decode and receive the signals. Most modern televisions now have this facility built in.
- 4.3 We estimate that there are 888 blocks of flats containing approximately 6533 individual dwellings which do not have a council maintained communal television aerial system and consequently would not have access to an IRS after switchover. However -
- Many of these blocks have a number of individual satellite dishes already fitted, and therefore already receive a digital signal.
 - There are a substantial number of residents in blocks that are already connected to cable and these residents will be unaffected by the digital switchover.
 - Many residents will be able to receive the new digital signal simply by adding an indoor aerial.

- 4.4 We do not know how many residents in total are included in the categories set out in 4.3 above. For example Virgin Media cannot confirm how many of our residents are served by cable. However there is a belief that the majority of residents will not find the change to digital as difficult as was originally believed.
- 4.5 It is assumed that council houses, by their very location already have access to, or will have easy access to cable television when the local cable company (now Virgin Media) installs cables into their street. Alternatively, householders would have ready access to satellite reception with a single small dish or to digital "Freeview" through an aerial mounted onto the roof or using an indoor aerial. Consequently, we do not consider that council houses are a concern.
- 4.6 We believe that it is prudent to not spend £1.25m upgrading all blocks when only a limited number may suffer reception problems which cannot be addressed by the resident themselves adding an indoor aerial. Instead it is considered better value for money to restrict our programme expenditure to dealing with those blocks that do experience post-switchover problems on an ad-hoc basis within a reasonable period of time.
- 4.7 This may mean that we spend only £100K installing an IRS system into only those blocks that have serious problems and these blocks will only become apparent after the switchover has taken place.
- 4.8 We do not intend to further upgrade any of the 212 blocks that have already been fitted with a digital system as our sole objective is to ensure all residents can have reasonable opportunity to access the former terrestrial channels after the switchover takes place and this criterion is already met by the current digital installations.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 We estimate that there are 888 blocks of flats containing approximately 6533 individual dwellings which do not have a council maintained IRS.
- 5.2 As a result of discussions with service providers and after investigations into other frameworks, it is now estimated that to convert all of our remaining blocks to a communal digital aerial installation would cost approximately £1.25m.
- 5.3 Expenditure of £1.25m is not allowed for in the five year programme and were such funding to be made available it would have to be at the expense of other work streams. There continue to be many competing demands against the repair and improvement budget.

6. EQUALITIES CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Our most vulnerable residents living in sheltered and special sheltered accommodation have already had their communal aerial systems converted to digital.

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Background Documents: None