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## **GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR DIGITAL TELEVISION SWITCHOVER**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Subject to Ministerial approval, analogue terrestrial television transmissions could begin to be phased out as early as 2007, with full switchover by 2010. The purpose of this report is to ask Members to consider the implications of this for Rochford District Council in respect of communal housing and to set out the options to be considered.
- 1.2 Although this report signposts Members to further investigatory work on the Digital Switchover, it is a Government requirement that all social landlords consider the implications of this action at an early stage.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The digital switchover will affect all users of terrestrial television services and in particular communal television systems (where one aerial or dish serves a number of housing units and televisions in a building). Communal television systems that cannot deliver digital television will cause major dissatisfaction for tenants who find their television service either disrupted or stopped altogether. The cost of ensuring that communal systems can deliver digital television services will vary depending on the age, size and condition of the existing system and its cabling.
- 2.2 Rochford currently owns 791 flats, but added to this figure are approximately 110 flats which are leaseholder owned.

### **3 Options**

- 3.1 The first option would be to keep the existing wiring but to purchase for each tenant a new digibox at a cost of £100 each (possibly less with a bulk purchase). This, however, would not guarantee a good reception and relies on the existing aerial and wiring being up to standard.
- 3.2 The second option is to replace the aerials with satellite dishes and to carry out some rewiring at a cost of approximately £175-£250 per flat (dependent upon number of flats in a block). This would not give tenants any extra channels but would allow tenants to purchase a digibox (costing £100 including installation) if they wanted.
- 3.3 The third option would be to opt for FreeSat. This was launched in November and has been developed by the BBC and the Government. If this option were chosen it would give tenants the choice of either satellite or terrestrial television. Tenants could then purchase the necessary receiver and have it

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installed for around £150. This would cost RDC approximately £275 per flat to cover the necessary wiring.

- 3.4 Although approximate costings have been given, until a full survey is carried out it will not be known how many tenants have already made their own arrangements for receiving digital TV. However, even if some tenants have done this, some rewiring will still probably be necessary to ensure good reception.

#### **4 Rochford Garden Way**

- 4.1 Recently one block of 12 flats in Rochford Garden Way has been upgraded as part of the area regeneration work. In this block a new central aerial system was installed and wired into each flat. This has given tenants the choice of having either digital or terrestrial television. Tenants were then given the option to purchase a digibox should they wish to receive more than the channels currently being enjoyed.

- 4.2 The new aerial system should last for at least 25 years and its installation meant that all the individual satellite dishes and a large amount of unsightly cabling was able to be removed.

- 4.3 The cost of this installation was £2100 (£175 per flat).

#### **5 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

##### **5.1 Reputation Risk**

Rochford District Council needs to be ready to deliver digital television and tenants will be looking to their landlord to ensure that digital television equipment purchased will work when connected to the communal television system.

#### **6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 This type of improvement/repair is not specifically defined in the lease so further investigation will need to be done in respect of recharging leaseholders for any work carried out.

#### **7 RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

that the Head of Revenue and Housing Management prepare a fully costed report on the introduction of Digital Television to be considered by March 2005.

Steve Clarkson

Head of Revenue and Housing Management

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**Background Papers:-**

Government Consultation Document

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