**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To seek Member approval for the Comhairle’s proposed approach to digital TV switchover.

**COMPETENCE**

1.1 There are no legal, financial or other constraints to the recommendations being implemented.

**SUMMARY**

2.1 Television services in the UK will go completely digital over the period 2007 to 2012. This “digital switchover” process will see the old analogue television signal being switched off and replaced with a digital signal. Any TV set or video recorder that is not converted to digital will no longer receive television programmes. Switchover in the Outer Hebrides will be part of the “STV North TV Region” switchover and is programmed to begin in 2010. The exact date for the switchover should be known early in 2009.

2.2 Digital UK, an independent not-for-profit organisation, is leading the implementation of the switchover. A previous report in December 2007 recommended that the Comhairle made contact with Digital UK to allow discussion on local switchover issues. This was followed by a presentation by Digital UK representatives to the Sustainable Development Committee in early 2008.

2.3 More recently, the Comhairle has received a local government checklist from the Scottish Government on behalf of Digital UK. This aims to assist local authorities to consider the strategic, technical and practical implications of switchover. The initial response to this is attached at Appendix 1 but it is anticipated that this will be updated on a regular basis. There has also been renewed contact with Digital UK, and representatives of Digital UK will be visiting the islands in February 2009 in order to meet with public agencies, the voluntary sector and the community. This may lead to the establishment of a Regional Stakeholder Group for the Outer Hebrides or for the wider Highlands and Islands region.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle:

a) participate in any regional stakeholder group established by Digital UK; and

b) agrees that officers continue to monitor and action the issues raised within the Local Government Checklist.

Contact Officer: Anne Murray, Economic Development Officer, Ext 277
Appendix: 1. Local Government Checklist
Background Papers: None
INTRODUCTION

4.1 All UK television will go digital over the next four to five years. Starting in 2008, the UK will switch to digital TV, transmitter by transmitter. This process is called digital switchover and will result in all UK analogue broadcast signals being switched off and replaced with a “digital” signal. Any television, video recorder or similar piece of electronic equipment not converted to digital when the switchover takes place will no longer receive television programmes.

4.2 Switchover is a complicated process that requires to be done in stages. For the Outer Hebrides switchover will be part of the STV North TV region switchover, beginning in 2010. The exact date of the switchover programme should be known early in 2009.

4.3 A report in December 2007 recommended that the Comhairle made contact with Digital UK to allow discussion on switchover issues. This was followed by a presentation by Digital UK representatives to the Sustainable Development Committee in early 2008.

4.4 More recently, the Comhairle has received a local government checklist from the Scottish Government on behalf of Digital UK. This aims to assist Local Authorities to prepare for the switchover by ensuring that lead Members and officers consider strategic, technical and practical implications, whether as planning authority or provider of services such as education, adult social care and trading standards. This document has been completed by the relevant sections within the Comhairle, and is included as Appendix 1.

4.5 There has been renewed contact with Digital UK, and representatives of Digital UK will be visiting the islands in February 2009 in order to meet with public agencies, the voluntary sector and the community. This may lead to the establishment of a Regional Stakeholder Group for the Outer Hebrides or for the wider Highlands and Islands.

THE DIGITAL SWITCHOVER PROGRAMME

5.1 The UK Government is responsible for the policy of digital switchover. Implementation of switchover is being led by Digital UK, who will co-ordinate the technical rollout of the digital terrestrial television network; communicate with the public about digital switchover to ensure everyone knows what is happening, what they need to do and when; and liaise with stakeholders to ensure understanding of and support for the switchover programme.

5.2 A Digital Switchover Help Scheme has been designed to provide help for identified groups, such as the elderly, who may have the most difficulty in making the switch to digital TV. Those who are eligible will be sent more details before their area switches to digital.

CONCLUSION

6.1 The digital switchover process is well-mapped out. The move to digital will bring a range of benefits to consumers of television, while simultaneously freeing analogue spectrum and band-width for other uses. The Switchover Help Scheme should ameliorate impacts on those who may struggle to adopt digital services.

6.2 Over the coming months there may be specific issues relating to the switchover process within Comhairle services or the wider community which the Comhairle will be required to react to. The Local Authority checklist offers a helpful guide for individual services within the Comhairle to identify these issues and react appropriately. In addition, ongoing contact with Digital UK should ensure that the Comhairle is supporting efforts to inform the wider community, public and voluntary sector.
1. **Do we know when our area goes digital?**

   **Switchover will be part of the STV North TV region switchover, beginning in 2010. The exact date of the switchover programme will be known early in 2009.**

2. **Has our housing service considered all the implications for council-retained housing stock, tenants and leaseholders, and communal TV aerial systems?**

   **The Comhairle owns 4 homeless properties and leases a further 28 from Hebridean Housing Partnership, where TV's are provided. Around 10 are ready for digital. The Comhairle is progressively upgrading TV's to digital / getting digi-boxes and anticipates being fully digital come switchover.**

3. **Is our trading standards / public protection service set up to deal with issues such as rogue trading and misselling?**

   **There has been some dialogue nationally within Trading Standards about this issue. The Trading Standards service is set up to deal with issues such as rogue trading and misselling in general.**

   **There may be some preparation needed as switchover gets closer. A “Cold Calling Control Zone” has been set up, which should help. Consumer Direct Scotland will be used as an interface with the public to highlight any regional issues. Trading Standards is aware that “rogues” have caused problems in other areas, selling equipment that is not required or unsuitable, or claiming to be accredited installers when they are not.**

   **In addition, Trading Standards issues can be dealt with through COSLA or the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland.**

4. **Do those working in social care and children’s services know about the Digital Switchover Help Scheme for people over 75 and on certain disability benefits, the implications for our own residential homes and schools, and the importance of working with the local voluntary sector to support clients during switchover?**

   **Social Work – In partnership with MG Alba, a programme of enabling Care Homes to receive digital channels is underway. Reports are anticipated to be placed on CHaSCP Management Team Agenda in January 2009 and links established with Western Isles Community Care Forum. There is an increasing level of awareness and knowledge.**

   **Education - A high level of awareness within the education service. This is taken into account in equipment replacement programmes. Some schools are already equipped to cope with the switchover. The challenge will be ensuring that budgetary provision is adequate to meet requirements, especially in the context of financial pressures.**

5. **Do our environment and planning services understand the implications for energy efficiency, waste disposal and planning issues in our area?**

   **Colleagues in these areas are considering implications for their service areas as appropriate.**
6. Have we met Digital UK’s manager for our area or contacted someone from Digital UK’s national office?

Representatives from Digital UK presented to a Comhairle Committee early in 2008. There has been further contact with a view to a visit early in 2009. By that stage we will know which part of 2010 will see the majority of the islands go digital.

7. Have we appointed a switchover co-ordinator as a single point of contact to liaise with Digital UK, the Help Scheme and others?

The Comhairle’s Economic Development Service is currently acting as point of contact. Contact has been made with the Scottish Regional Management of Digital UK.

8. How are we going to relate to other councils and the voluntary sector to deal with switchover? Should we be part of a regional steering group?

Digital UK has advised that there are plans for a regional stakeholder group which involves all key players in the area - involving all relevant Local Authorities, third sector etc. No timescale has been set for this yet.

Digital UK will be setting up meetings with other stakeholders in the islands in February, with a view to making raising awareness and considering a regional stakeholder group.

9. Are our Members briefed on the implications for the council and for their constituents?

A report was presented to Sustainable Development in December 2007. A further report will be presented to Sustainable Development in February 2008.

10. Are we providing access to information for residents using our council publications, A-Z of services, website, customer access points and other communications?

Information has been placed on the Comhairle website (http://www.cnesiar.gov.uk/general/digital_television.asp).

11. Have we considered this issue at Cabinet / Senior Management level?

A report was presented to Sustainable Development in December 2007. A further report will be presented to Sustainable Development in February 2009. Senior management is informed on the issue.