

Stratford upon Avon Television Ltd response

RESPONSE IN RELATION TO STRATFORD UPON AVON LICENCE ONLY

Having had experience in being part of the team that won the original L-DTPS licence in Birmingham, sitting on the original make up of the Local TV Association, founding a local digital tv platform in Stratford upon Avon and then working to build a local consortium in Luton and Bedford to apply for the original licence when it was advertised, I have submitted separate responses by email in regard to both the Luton/Bedford area and Stratford upon Avon.

In the case of Stratford upon Avon specifically, we are broadly supportive of Ofcom's position not to offer the licence for a L-DTPS service. We do so on the basis that:

- any potential service for Stratford upon Avon must reflect its unique place in the heritage of the UK and truly serve the local community of people who live, work or study there,
- it should not become an outpost for a Birmingham channel,
- and it should not become part of a larger network of channels that cannot truly serve nor be a part of the community.

Since 2011 we have developed an online digital channel in Stratford upon Avon (www.stratfordtv.tv), which still searches for the right business model, but reflects the original longer term vision for local tv:

"In the longer term, IPTV offers vast potential for the distribution of local television services. So any local TV solution will need to offer a smooth glide path to that IPTV future...offering a new voice for local communities, with local perspectives that are directly relevant to them."

**Speech by Secretary of State for Media, Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP
Oxford Media Convention, Wednesday 19 January 2011**

Stratford TV was developed to find new ways of making Community Media sustainable. It reflected the optimism of Ofcom's PSB Review:

"Our research also shows that online media services can fulfil the public service objectives in ways that traditional broadcast media cannot. Instant feedback, interactivity, on-demand content and a personalised experience are features of online media services that are not easily replicable in one-to-many broadcast media like television and radio."

Ofcom's PSB Annual Report 2014

In a speech to a Westminster Forum soon after, I called for a new funding mechanism for 'quality' local digital channels. As Ofcom said in its review of Public Service Broadcasting when it called for a 'new framework for public service broadcasting':

"PSB should in future be defined in terms of its purposes and its characteristics rather than by specific genres (programme types)...[and]...The purposes of PSB lie in underpinning an informed society, reflecting and strengthening our cultural identity, stimulating our appetite for knowledge, and in building a tolerant, inclusive

society. “

All of these purposes and aspirations can be met by quality digital channels, which have a far lower cost entry point and can be far more flexible than the current L-DTPS channels. They can also adapt far more quickly as technology develops and the shift to mobile video, with the development of 5G, changes viewing habits again. Short-form non-linear, interactive, on-demand content with a personalised viewing experience can truly deliver local media in a sustainable and new way, giving real power to communities to come together and be more inclusive.

What was the “*longer term*” in 2011 is here now, and digital media platforms and streaming technology are more than capable of technically delivering the “*vast potential*” of the original vision today.

Although out of the direct scope of this consultation, the larger debate about the future of local media has to be addressed and is constantly in the background in any discussion about the current L-DTPS network. When will Jeremy Hunt’s “*smooth glide path*” be able to be supported and how?

How can a ‘quality threshold’ for digital channels, that serve their local communities with broadcast quality, editorially sound and attractive content be developed, so that these channels can access essential funding through a new mechanism or fund?

Local advertising and sponsorship may be able to add to the financial support for such channels, but there is no recognised model that will provide the answer to keeping them going in a sustainable way. However, access to a new PSB fund could underpin their survival and leverage other funding or investment. Linear ‘broadcast’ channels cannot be the answer in the long term to meet local demand and as Jeremy Hunt also said in 2011:

“Just as technology drives globalisation, it also drives localisation. And consumers want both.”

As I said in an email to Ofcom in June 2015, when you announced the delay in advertising the L-DTPS licence for Stratford upon Avon:

“We welcome the decision to delay advertising the licence, as we continue to grow as a community-interest digital portal, encouraging community engagement and interaction in a very local, yet professional and creative model.”

However, the economics of such a model are currently not sustainable and we have had to suspend our regular creation of content for the time being, whilst maintaining our presence locally. The sector of hyper-local, yet dependable and responsible, quality digital channels has to be supported and encouraged to grow. It can work with local BBC channels, local radio and the press, to offer a local ‘video’ offering, giving an opportunity for communities to tell their own stories, and growing community cohesion and inclusion.

Partnerships over content with BBC local radio can work, as we have proved in other community areas and a new ‘threshold’ standard or licence that then enables a level of funding for PSB content, has to be developed to ensure their survival.

If there is any level of funding from the Licence Fee or any other source for local television, then we believe it should enable the:

*“voice for local communities, with local perspectives that are directly relevant to them”
and have a vital role to play in
“underpinning an informed society, reflecting and strengthening our cultural identity, stimulating our appetite for knowledge, and in building a tolerant, inclusive society”;*

and not be used to further support the L-DTPS roll out in the areas that cannot, by your own analysis, sustain them in the long term.