

## ACTO CHECKLIST – A RESPONSE TO LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION BROADCASTING IN THE NATIONS AND REGIONS

OFCOM PHASE III PSB REVIEW APRIL 2005

### A LOCAL PSB NETWORK FOR THE NATIONS AND REGIONS

- ACTO understands that local TV channels can be inserted using add/drop boxes into DTT bandwidth. This solution for local TV should be planned with the roll out of DTT and as part of the presentation to the Regional Radio Conference in 2006 (see *Local TV Network* submitted by the Institute of Local Television)
- local TV is the new public service television broadcaster that will replace ITV's regional service as ITV drops its PSB commitments across the nations and regions – the quid pro quo is that local TV is given access to bandwidth on the channel 3 mux which was provided to channel 3/ITV in view of its PSB responsibilities – including regional PSB commitments
- a universal network of local TV stations could potentially use each of the UK's 1152 transmitter sites to transmit a signal to identified communities, using the transmitters and relays in smaller configurations than regional TV to encircle defined communities modelled as closely as possible on local authority boundaries
- local TV channels combine highly local news and other community and locally made programming with 'imported' and 'shared' programmes. Shared programming can be made for few or several local TV channels to suit communities of interest in each locality. Combined they could provide a 'nation-TV' break-out to cover parliament and assembly, national or major festivals, other broadly shared events not represented by ITV and the UK-wide channels
- to help achieve local DTT's objective a must carry rule for cable and broadband TV redistribution should apply for local public service television broadcasting
- in the nations MORI has established (for Phase III) that demand for local TV news is as strong in the isolated and smaller communities as it is in the cities
- but MORI's research also suggests that 'local area' is not synonymous with 'regional ITV area', that viewers require news from their immediate area and (in some cases) from nearby towns or cities as well as from areas where there is a strong association (see Institute of Local Television's responses to Phase III, *Speed Reading 'Programming in the Nations'* and *Mapping the social geography of local news identity*)
- each local PSB channel would be independently owned

## CHARACTER OF LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION BROADCASTING

- local news, information, debate and participation is the core of local television – generating a sense of pride and ownership in each local TV channel
- news includes cultural, social, documentary and current affairs, local entertainment information as well as hard news – but engagement with civic affairs, support for debate and intervention has a positive emphasis
- viewer participation and community involvement in all aspects of the service are seen as important contributors to local TV's distinctive and individual character in each area
- local TV can deliver on media literacy, industrial and professional training, encourage audio visual production and co-productions with neighbouring stations for export throughout the network of local channels
- local TV has three elements: a) a local news, information and participatory service, surrounded by; b) shared community or common interest programming and (for smaller channels if not for all); c) a sustaining network or networks which adds quality and value to the viewer's engagement with the local channel
- the sustaining network for local TV might be a non-profit company under the direction of the local TV channels it helps support. The model network suggested for each nation could in turn interact with or be part of a UK-wide or even a European-wide network or clearing-house. There's clearly scope for several sustaining networks to evolve from initiatives already being built up in support of local TV
- the sustaining networks' video clips or programme contribution would be locally scheduled to retain the strong sense of local control, of programmes being imported through local choice rather than being imposed - music videos have been put forward as a model in discussions in Scotland because these offer positive and flexible features which can be locally identified, described in more detail in the submission titled *Local TV Network* in papers forwarded by the Institute of Local Television from the Scottish Local TV Forum
- local TV is a channel that the viewers feel attracted to and with which they can closely identify, to which they are encouraged to respond and participate in – and this feature is most important

## ECONOMICS

- based on a local TV estimate for Spain, local TV would create 10-15,000 jobs across the UK

- Spain and France each propose 1000+ local DTT channels. An assessment has yet to be made for the UK, but the three-element local TV channel proposed by ACTO would encourage local TV for any area requiring a local news service. As a guide, in Scotland there are some 60 local newspapers. The Scottish Local TV Forum found interest from local authorities and community producers from the Western Isles, Dumfries and Galloway, Angus and Orkney. Smaller and sparsely populated communities should not be disadvantaged by their requirement for more transmitters and relays. The transmitter network costs needs resolving as part of the universal approach
- the cost of the add/drop box solution – at £30-40,000 per transmitter site – is estimated at £46m across the UK
- local TV is local public service television broadcasting – whether commercially, community or publicly owned – and should be able to access the PSP certainly for its core PSB provisions
- the PSP provides a possible means to help establish, coordinate and support local TV- but the application and bidding models proposed to date by Ofcom are for a single PSP which is difficult to reconcile with two or more distinctive PSP roles proposed in Phase III
- local TV needs to achieve as much reach as possible within its locally identified area – to attract advertisers in competition with radio and newspapers and to satisfy local authority requirements as well as stimulate local engagement
- At the Scottish Local TV Forum the advertising industry approach suggested that local TV should be primarily seen as local, attracting local advertising. Shared programming would ensure sponsorship for targeted programmes and a network contribution would interest brand and high street advertisers. It was felt important to engage with the advertising agencies with at least parts of a service they could recognise. Local TV will need to be adept in achieving local, regional and national advertising by focusing on local areas and communities of interest
- local authorities are a possible major new stakeholder in local TV – core funding for each local service (in the order of £0.50-1.00 per household per year) would involve redirecting 25-30% of the local authority advertising spend into local TV - rather than finding new money
- one Scottish local authority currently spends £30k per year on a weekly 15 minute local TV news programme, but much of this funding also contributes to income from video productions, web images, making DVDs, video training and providing access to equipment. In this local authority it is believed that there is great untapped potential for involving education in production and out-reach programming when the service becomes widely accessible across the borough

- regular programming on local arts, literature and cinema is not an expensive element and documentaries can be swapped and traded with other channels (see Institute of Local Television's response to Phase III titled *e-tv* ..... together with the DVDs forwarded to Ofcom of programmes from Edinburgh Television, Channel Six Dundee and e-tv in Aberfeldy including *Artists' and Writers' Stories* and *Cityscape*).
- without daily news the running costs for local TV were £30k per month for Edinburgh Television and £15-20k per month for Channel Six Dundee – a daily news service would be the most costly element of a local TV channel
- local TV has been exchanging programming with local European channels since 1994 (for example, through the Open Channels for Europe! network) and can help explore international links of interest to the communities in its area – to date this has included on air festivals and celebrations of local music, animation and student video production
- joint financing, sponsorship and grants are available for programmes made locally especially those with an 'export' dimension – *Art in Scotland* (made for local TV in Edinburgh and Dundee) taken by the Artschannel (UK satellite) and shown in Berlin and Belfast (on local TV networks) and also distributed to art libraries and through galleries on DVD by The Broadcasting Trust
- local TV is a powerful motor for local confidence building, for economic development in the arts, for local publicity, to encourage tourism, providing the means for greater self-representation in the wider media. Local TV is the most significant development in public service television broadcasting since the introduction of Channel 4 almost twenty five years ago
- local television will reinvent and reinvigorate public service television broadcasting – adding a positive twist to what has recently become an overly defensive and protective PSB

#### CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE LOCAL PSB SERVICE

- local TV has demonstrated (in Belfast) that it can provide alternative and innovative programming which reflects and enriches the diversity of the local community, promoting equality and social inclusion, fostering mutual understanding and cross community initiatives. This being a highly cost effective form of intervention, which can help, develop new ways of expressing local identity and confidence. It also has the capacity to mark political and social change in the local community through activity based initiatives
- local television has demonstrated (Belfast) its potential to be accessed by community/cultural organisations as a tool for enriching the lives of volunteers. It can be an outstanding example of dedicated volunteerism and a model for

community relations/development organisations. Volunteering can be seen as central to local television's social responsibility efforts, helping make communities better places to live and work, through community capacity building, community relations and media literacy

- local television has a proven capability of working with a wide range of organisations - victims groups, bereavement groups, women's groups, youth groups, community development groups, media groups, voluntary organisations, peace and reconciliation groups, children's groups, disability groups, interface projects, church (and other worship centred) groups, local government, ethnic minority groups, arts and cultural groups
- MPs who supported EDM1316 during the passage of the Communications Act recognised the important contribution community media can bring to social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal, citizens' participation, local democracy and lifelong learning. Local television to be proactive in encouraging access, participation, ownership and authorship in programme production in marginalised communities and communities of interest
- provision of free training workshops in television production for residents in local constituencies to become production volunteers, access to production equipment to produce programmes and development of standards of practice and support on an inclusive basis for groups and individuals seeking to access local television production
- local television can build upon programming policies which actively oppose and attempt to break down prejudice on the basis of race, sex, nationality, religion, disability, ethnic background, age or sexual preference.

ACTO is the industry advisory committee of the Institute of Local Television