

Government wants Scottish Digital Network publicly funded

Proposals to establish the Scottish Digital Network (SDN) to deliver local television services in Scotland have been put forward by the Scottish Government.

A formal expression of interest has been submitted to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in response to its Local Media Action Plan consultation.

✘ Culture Minister Fiona Hyslop told the Scottish Parliament's Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee the bid presses the case for the network in Scotland to be publicly funded, as recommended by the Scottish Digital Network Panel.

In the Scottish Government's response to the Scottish Digital Network Panel's report – also announced today – the Minister agreed that the best possible source of funding for a digital network is the television licence fee.

Ms Hyslop said:

“We firmly believe that a publicly-funded Scottish Digital Network is the best way to sustain and support local television services in Scotland. It would bring benefits to viewers in all parts of Scotland – not just the largest centres of population which are commercially viable – as well as meeting the need for choice in public service broadcasting in Scotland.

“I believe that the case for a digital network is sufficiently strong, and has such support across the political spectrum in Scotland, that the establishment of a network will happen. The

main uncertainty, to my mind, relates to when a network will be established, rather than if it will be established.

“The report’s recommendations in relation to funding a digital network can only be implemented with the co-operation and agreement of the UK Government. My key priority, therefore, since receiving the Panel’s report, has been to make the case for funding a Scottish Digital Network to the UK Government, in order to try to secure prompt agreement from UK Ministers about possible funding for a network

“We recognise that the UK Government’s view is that the core network for local television services should largely be commercially funded. However we do not think that such a solution is likely to offer significant public service benefits for viewers in Scotland. It is now for the UK Government to work with us to establish a digital network for Scotland, funded from the licence fee as S4C will be from 2013-14, or from the sale of spectrum once digital television switchover has been completed, which will then accommodate more localised broadcasting.”