

By: Paul Carter, Leader
Peter Gilroy, Chief Executive

To: Cabinet – 16 April 2007

Subject: Kent TV

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To outline the proposals for Kent TV and seek approval for implementation

For Decision

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The spread of digital technology is increasing rapidly and Kent County Council (KCC) is keen to maximise the potential this offers for transforming how we communicate with the public and how we raise the profile of Kent locally, nationally and internationally.
- 1.2 KCC is not the first local authority to invest in local television. The national government invests in Directgov teletext service on Sky and the internet, Glasgow and London both invest in channels designed to promote tourism and other local authorities are looking at following a similar route to Kent. There is also a generic local government channel that various local authorities invest in. Other countries, such as the USA are much more advanced in their use of television channels, for example New York and Seattle. However, at this stage, KCC would be the first local authority in the UK to embrace this concept in such a broad and high quality way, putting us at the cutting edge.
- 1.3 Kent TV fits comfortably with KCC's powers under the section 349 of the Communications Act 2003, the promoting wellbeing and community leadership role in the Local Government Act 2000 and in the Government White Paper "A New Future for Communications", which enables local authorities to provide information services via TV and radio.
- 1.4 "Finding new and innovative ways of communicating with the public, including trialling webcast TV" is a Towards 2010 target (number 24).
- 1.5 We commissioned specialists in this industry to explore this project. The report by Armitage Bucks Communications in July 2006 was a cornerstone in KCC's desire to explore Kent TV as it found a "powerful argument" to proceed. In such a fast-moving technology age however, this argument is now even more significant.
- 1.6 The digital age is well underway and KCC needs to embrace this in order to deliver modernised local government services and ensure information is available in a modern and contemporary way. Whilst revolutionary in what it can achieve, Kent TV is a natural next step in communication.

2. Context

2.1 The case supporting Kent TV

2.2 The case supporting Kent TV is very powerful and is becoming more powerful all the time. The main reasons for KCC investing in Kent TV are as follows (this list is not exhaustive):

- Kent TV will create employment both directly by the provider company and by stimulating the local creative industry, there will be indirect employment. The successful company delivering Kent TV will employ mainly local residents.

- It has the potential to transform the way we communicate with the public and the way they communicate with us. This will increase consultation opportunities and interaction more generally.
- The opportunities for Kent TV to enhance the democratic process are significant. KCC will be able to reach out to the people of Kent with information, particularly those in the younger age-bracket of 18-32, where the voting percentage is lowest and explore new ways of engaging in council processes.
- The channel will maximise local produced content, e.g. from schools, universities and colleges as well as user-generated content from individuals, community groups etc. The potential is almost endless and a number of individuals and community groups have been in touch already who wish to be part of this.
- Kent TV can provide an outlet for a range of local talent, from music to acting and from journalism to presenting.
- It is also an outlet for the wealth of existing material within KCC, for example wildlife watching and community safety messages.
- Kent TV will showcase the best of Kent, particularly for tourism and inward investment purposes, working closely with organisations such as Kent Tourism Alliance and Locate in Kent. This medium will enable us to reach out to Kent residents and to people all over the world.
- It will enable us to maximise the benefits to Kent of major events, such as 2012 Olympics.
- Kent TV will provide a showcase opportunity for local businesses.
- Increased educational opportunities are key to this channel. With over 600 schools, the potential for shared learning and master-classes focussing on particular topics is being explored with education colleagues. This medium can open up a whole new range of opportunities for children at school and outside school.
- Sharing professional training opportunities is also possible, e.g. social work or teaching.
- Critical to the longer-term funding of Kent TV, over time it will reduce KCC's reliance on paper communications, thereby saving money and supporting our green agenda.
- The potential for advertising and sponsorship revenue is significant. This is addressed in paragraph 4.

2.2 Outline proposal

- Kent TV will be delivered as a broadband channel and will be available 24 hours a day 7 days a week locally, nationally and internationally, wherever a broadband internet connection is available. This is a preferable option to any presence on Sky TV at this stage for several reasons:
 - It will reach a wider potential audience
 - It reduces costs
 - Broadband is the future of television and this is demonstrated by the much publicised increase in advertising money spent on broadband rather than traditional television.
- The proposal is for a pilot to run for two years from 1 September 2007 to 31 August 2009. If the channel continues after this point, KCC will re-tender.
- Viewing figures are hard to predict accurately with such a new channel, but 50,000 viewers per month is felt to be achievable within the first few months, increasing thereafter. The channel is aimed at all ages.
- An independent company will be commissioned to deliver this channel. The tender process began in November 2006 and we are currently in the final stages of contract negotiation and the successful company will be announced shortly.
- The schedule will be varied but will focus on tourism, education, information, news, user-generated content, democratic participation etc. Any news element will

be delivered independently from KCC. The channel will also maximise existing content where possible, both from KCC and other organisations where this is appropriate.

- As well as a live streaming option, viewers will be able to utilise a range of video on demand options from an archive that will increase over time.
- The channel will maximise the use of current and emerging technologies, such as podcasts on mobile phones, ipods and other MP4 players. There is also the potential for Kent TV to be streamed on television screens in KCC buildings that the public access, e.g. libraries and schools, and in public places, such as shopping malls.
- The technology is developing and improving constantly and the technology now exists to watch broadband television through your normal living room television. More and more people have access to broadband e.g. virtually all schools in Kent now have access, and the offers being provided by various companies, such as mobile phone companies, means the cost of accessing broadband is becoming cheaper and more competitive. Broadband is also accessible through games consoles now e.g. Xbox 360 and Playstation 2. Kent TV will utilise the progress in this technology.
- The quality of the channel and the content will be continuously monitored through processes outlined in the provider contract. This will be undertaken by the Board of Governors (see below). There will also be a moderating process for all user-generated content, which will be run by the provider company.
- To ensure the independence of the channel, particularly in terms of content, a Board of Governors will be established that will consist of representatives with an interest or level of expertise in Kent and/or the media. The exact make-up of this Board is yet to be confirmed. The role of the Board will be to essentially represent the interests of everyone in the county by monitoring the channel's performance against targets and standards, ensuring the channel delivers good value to the people of Kent, ensuring the channel is impartial and arbitrating on complaints from viewers in the last resort.
- KCC will work with a range of partners in order to deliver Kent TV and maximise its benefits to Kent and beyond, including other public sector organisations such as Kent Police, Kent Fire & Rescue, NHS, voluntary organisations, district and borough councils etc., along with private sector partners.

2.3 Risks

2.4 The risks are low, particularly compared to the enormous opportunities Kent TV offers. The main potential risks are outlined below:

- 1) Income generation (see paragraph 4) may not meet expectations initially. This is low risk as we have already received significant interest in sponsorship and the company providing Kent TV will have a role in generating income.
- 2) Maximising viewing figures. This is also low risk as the channel is very broad so will appeal to a range of people locally, nationally and internationally. The quality of the channel will be high and we will obtain feedback, thereby ensuring the channel is meeting public demand. This will be key to overcoming this risk and ensuring viewing figures are high.
- 3) Reputation. KCC has received some negative publicity for investing in Kent TV. However, when balanced against the positive communications and support received directly from community groups, individuals and the voluntary and private sector and national government, this risk is perceived as low overall. Once the channel is up and running, the public and everyone can judge for themselves. Constant feedback from

those people watching the channel will be sought and will influence the future direction of it.

- 4) Maintaining the site. The technical specification that forms part of the contract with the provider has clear requirements in order to ensure the site is maintained and that a risk of the site being down for any period of time is low. KCC will retain ownership of all the content on the site and all the relevant financial checks will have been undertaken on the provider company.

3. Funding

3.1 KCC is initially investing £600k per annum for the two year pilot and this was agreed by County Council in February 2007. However, we are confident that a significant proportion of this will be covered by advertising and sponsorship. This has been validated by those companies who remain in the tendering process. We would hope for the channel to become self-funding over the first two years and then generate income thereafter if the channel continues beyond the pilot. Expressions of interest from various Kent-based organisations looking to contribute as sponsors have already been received.

3.1 The successful company will have a role in securing sponsorship and advertising and this will be within guidelines determined by the Board of Governors. KCC will also maximise this potential where possible and appropriate according to the same guidelines.

3.2 By investing in Kent TV, KCC will over time be able to reduce investment in paper communications, which will help fund the channel. We will also optimise the investment in all our web-based communications.

4. Summary

4.1 As originally stated, the case for Kent TV is very powerful and the opportunities for what can be delivered through this channel are enormous. The digital age is upon us and the time is right for KCC to make the commitment to Kent TV that will both transform our communication processes and raise the profile of Kent locally, nationally and internationally.

5. Recommendations

Cabinet are asked to:

- 1) Agree the implementation of the Kent TV pilot
- 2) Delegate to the Leader and Chief Executive the final approval of the provider company

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