



**MANCHESTER**  
CITY COUNCIL

**Manchester Digital Development Agency**

Manchester City Council  
Lower Ground Floor  
117-119 Portland Street  
Manchester  
M1 6ED

T. 0161 255 8111

[info@manchesterdda.com](mailto:info@manchesterdda.com)

[www.manchesterdda.com](http://www.manchesterdda.com)

f.a.o William Garrood, OFCOM. Email: [William.garrood@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:William.garrood@ofcom.org.uk)

## **Response to the OFCOM document: “A new approach to public service content in the digital media age”**

Manchester Digital Development Agency (MDDA) is part of Manchester City Council and has a remit to operate across the city-region, covering all ten districts that make up Greater Manchester. MDDA was established in 2003 with the mission:

*“To make Manchester a leading world class digital city, having one of the most competitive broadband infrastructures in Europe, attracting and sustaining investment in ICT and e-commerce across all sectors of the economy, generating new businesses, developing new learning cultures, promoting social inclusion and providing all residents with the skills and aspirations to play a full role in the information society.”*

MDDA very much welcomes the document and is pleased to be able to provide this initial response. We strongly agree with the contention made in section 1.14 that public service content delivers social and economic benefits and that this would not necessarily be realised unless there is intervention. In some ways this is even more important and relevant for wider digital media which has the potential to empower and engage people as never before, for example through promoting social networking and user generated content.

We share the concerns (outlined in 1.16) about “market shortfall” in terms of diversity and quantity and would suggest that this is also about **quality** and that there should also be concerns about the ability of the market to deliver the quality of content and experience that we would want to see widely available.

The MDDA has been involved in supporting and developing a range of community based digital content projects in partnership with the voluntary sector, media bodies and projects (including with the BBC and ITV) and local businesses from the creative, digital and media sectors. The experience of this work forms a key element of the new “Digital Vision and Strategy for the Manchester City-Region” which is being coordinated by the MDDA and was published as a consultation draft in Feb. 2007. We have attached a copy to this response for information and reference. At the core of this new vision is the focus on:

*“creating a dynamic digital economy and a digitally inclusive city-region which supports an enhanced quality of life for everyone who lives, works and studies here”.*

This is why we would endorse the recognition by the OFCOM document of the importance of developing participative approaches and driving “community activity and mediation” (highlighted in section 1.20). Many local initiatives are able to develop new, imaginative and creative approaches to generating “public service content in the digital media age” but which

are often overlooked by national agencies and policy initiatives. Local examples which we believe could be used as exemplars of innovative public service content include:

- Let's Go Global ([www.letsgoglobal.tv](http://www.letsgoglobal.tv)) a community web TV initiative;
- Community Reporters ([www.mcin.net](http://www.mcin.net)) a partnership project between the Manchester Community Information Network (MCIN), the BBC and MANCAT (FE college) to train up local people as digital content producers;
- Radio Regen ([www.radioregen.org](http://www.radioregen.org)) a community radio network linked to regeneration initiatives and developing user generated digital content.

We believe that there is great potential to draw upon this local expertise to support the commitment outlined in the document to develop media literacy (section 1.30), especially through the idea of a “public service navigator”.

Overall we believe that this contributes to the compelling case made by the document that the PSP should be based outside of London, which would enable it to add real value to regeneration impacts and “helping to contribute to creative clusters in that location” (section 5.44). Given the talent pool, the creative milieu and the strategic media investment that is there in the Manchester city-region we believe that the PSP should be located here. This would not only enable it to draw upon the experience and expertise that exists locally but also enable it to maximise its impact in terms of adding value to the growing digital and creative sector both locally and regionally.

The MDDA is working closely with MIDAS, Manchester's Investment Agency, to support the development of the digital and creative sector, in close liaison with key players including both the BBC and ITV. We would like to propose that we organise a high level briefing here in Manchester later in the year and invite OFCOM to present the approach outlined in the document to city-region and regional audience. We will be following this up with you in the very near future.

We hope the attached copy of the consultation draft of the Digital Strategy for the City-Region will also be helpful in informing you of the wider context in which we are working to develop this agenda at a local level. At this stage we would like to highlight a number of other issues which will be relevant to ongoing discussions following this response to the March 23<sup>rd</sup> deadline for the OFCOM document. We will be submitting further ideas which we hope will be useful over the coming months.

## **1. Digital Switchover:**

‘Digital Switchover’ will impact on this region in 2009. Current proposals are to provide those without interactive Digital TV at that time with a simple “digi-box” (for free) that will not have any real interactivity or a cash voucher (possibly for £30) towards more expensive options. This is missing a major opportunity to ensure that everyone affected by the switchover is able to have fully interactive Digital TV as a key element of a broader digital inclusion strategy. We are aiming to establish a Digital Switchover Task Force for the city-region which will work in partnership with the appropriate government agencies, including the DigiTV National Project, suppliers and community interest groups to tackle this problem and enable the city-region to be a test-bed for solutions to deal with this challenge.

## **2. The importance of “high-speed two-way broadband networks”:**

The draft Digital Strategy sets out a vision that will enable the city-region to remain competitive in an increasingly globalised and digital world economy. Manchester needs to be at the forefront of current developments in advanced e-infrastructures and e-services and

can lead the way, as the UK is currently lagging behind in terms of investment in advanced e-infrastructures. While national pro-competition policies have been driving access prices to existing broadband down to among the lowest in the world much more needs to be done to leverage competitive advantage for this to help us attain this vision.

Many cities and regions in most of the EU 15 countries are investing in the advanced e-infrastructures that will provide “super-broadband” (operating at speeds from 100 times to more than 1000 times faster than current services in the UK). These are future-proofed open networks that allow high density services including High Definition Digital TV, On-Demand Media Services and Advanced Telephony. Such infrastructure is increasingly likely to attract inward investment away from cities/regions that cannot match this and put these cities, including Manchester, at a serious competitive disadvantage in terms of their ability to attract investment and sustain growth, especially in the digital, media and creative sectors. At the moment, for example, 100Mb connectivity is widely available in the Netherlands and Scandinavia for 30-50 Euro per month while the equivalent cost in the UK is between £1,000 and £10,000 per month which demonstrates just how far behind the UK is in danger of becoming.

A new ‘premier league’ of super-broadband cities is emerging across the world, in Europe this includes cities such as Amsterdam (currently investing in super-broadband going into 450,000 homes and businesses), Barcelona, Cologne, Dortmund, Paris, Reykjavik, Stockholm, Vienna and Zurich. Manchester has a clear choice – to ‘break the mould’ of the existing UK experience and establish itself as the only real UK contender to play a leading role in this ‘premier league’ or, alternatively, to have a lower profile and risk facing a deteriorating competitive position in terms of investment, innovation and jobs. The Manchester city-region has a strong commitment to the former approach and intends to move forward in this area as quickly and as creatively as possible.

### **3. Links to other UK initiatives**

As part of the government’s focus on tackling the “digital divide” and promoting digital inclusion there is a major national initiative called Digital Challenge which has a national network of ten regional ‘pathfinders’, including Manchester, known as the DC-10, and one of these, Sunderland, is the national exemplar. The OFCOM document has been circulated around the DC-10 and it may be useful to consider how their input might be developed as the consultation process develops. See: [www.digitalchallenge.gov.uk](http://www.digitalchallenge.gov.uk)

### **4. European initiatives and networking**

Manchester is a founder member of the Telecities network, which represent more than 150 of the largest cities in Europe, ([www.telecities.org](http://www.telecities.org) part of Eurocities – [www.eurocities.org](http://www.eurocities.org) ) which also involves several other DC-10 members. The OFCOM document has also been circulated across the network and we would be interested in being involved in discussing how European examples of good practice might be useful within the future consultation process. In addition the UK experience is of great interest to many Telecities members and we would also like to be involved in considering how we could help to disseminate this across the network, e.g. inviting OFCOM to contribute to future Telecities events.

Dave Carter  
Head, MDDA.  
[d.carter@manchesterdda.com](mailto:d.carter@manchesterdda.com)  
[www.manchesterdda.com](http://www.manchesterdda.com)  
23.3.07