



# 700MHz Clearance – Management of transitional coverage issues

Statement on updates to the Code of Practice on  
Changes to Existing Transmission and Reception  
arrangements

Statement

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# About this document

This document is a Statement on an updated Code of Practice on the management of transitional issues during the preparation for the clearance of the 700MHz spectrum band. It follows the Consultation published in July 2015.

In November 2014, Ofcom set out its decision and planned timescale to clear the 700MHz frequency band for mobile use. This band is currently used for digital terrestrial TV, programme making and special events, and TV White Spaces services. Clearance of the 700MHz band is due to be completed by 2022 or potentially up to two years sooner.

In order to achieve this transition, a programme of upgrading will take place on the UK's digital TV transmission infrastructure.

The updated Code of Practice is designed to ensure broadcasters and transmission companies make clear arrangements to keep any potential disruption to viewers and listeners to a minimum during the transition stage of 700MHz clearance.

Ofcom is publishing the updated Code of Practice alongside this Statement, which will come into immediate effect.

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## Section 1

# Introduction

- 1.1 The licences held by the Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) multiplex operators include a condition requiring the licensees to comply with a Code of Practice on Changes to Existing Transmission and Reception Arrangements (the Code). The Independent Television Commission originally drew up this Code to provide guidance to the broadcasters on how to minimise the impact on analogue reception of the initial launch of DTT in 1998.
- 1.2 In 2005 the Government confirmed that digital switchover (DSO) would occur across the UK on a region-by-region basis between 2008 and 2012. The programme of switchover involved engineering works being carried out at every one of the UK's television transmitters.
- 1.3 During the period between the start of DSO preparation work in 2006 and the end of DSO roll out in 2012, the implementation of DSO had the potential to cause some interference to the normal reception of the analogue terrestrial services (BBC1, BBC2, Channel 3, Channel 4/S4C and Channel 5), the pre-switchover DTT services, and the six DTT multiplex services as they were broadcast after switchover on a region-by-region basis.
- 1.4 Therefore, Ofcom updated the Code in 2007 to reflect the work involved in DSO and to provide guidance to the broadcasters on the priorities they should adopt when planning and carrying out DSO.
- 1.5 In 2009, Ofcom confirmed the UK would conform with the European position on clearing the frequency channels 61 to 69 (known as the 800MHz band).<sup>1</sup> This required making further changes to the UK's frequency plan. These changes were largely incorporated at the same time as switchover, but some of the work needed to be carried out in regions that had already completed switchover (the "DTT Clearance Retrofit Programme"). Ofcom updated the Code again in 2010 to reflect the work associated with 800MHz clearance.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.6 In November 2014, Ofcom announced that the UK would align itself with the emerging European approach to clearing the 700MHz band.<sup>3</sup> This will involve making further changes to the frequencies used by some of the UK's transmitters, and moving services broadcast within this band to alternative frequencies.
- 1.7 Ofcom believes that it is important that any disruption to viewers caused by the implementation of 700MHz clearance is minimised, whilst enabling the broadcasters to implement this complex project in a timely and cost effective manner. It is therefore pertinent for Ofcom to update the wording of the Code once again.
- 1.8 The consultation document published in July 2015 set out Ofcom's proposals for how the Code should be revised to achieve these objectives. The revised Code is intended to provide clear guidance to the DTT multiplex licensees about how they should seek to minimise the impact of 700MHz clearance on current DTT viewers. The Code relates to transitional changes during the implementation of clearance

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<sup>1</sup> <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/800mhz/statement/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/guidance/tech-guidance/codes\\_guidance/cop/](http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/guidance/tech-guidance/codes_guidance/cop/)

<sup>3</sup> <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/700MHz/statement/>

only, and does not concern the long-term or permanent coverage of DTT multiplexes once clearance is complete.

- 1.9 Ofcom considers that this is not a matter which involves any fundamental change in policy and is not proposing any change to the conditions in the multiplex licences to reflect the changes to the Code.
- 1.10 This document presents our conclusions on amendments to the Code of Practice. Section 2 summarises the points made by stakeholders on the Consultation, and our responses to stakeholders' comments.

## Section 2

# Summary of responses

- 2.1 We received six separate responses to the consultation, two of them confidential. Two of the responses were from individuals, and four from industry bodies. The list of respondents and non-confidential responses are published on the Ofcom website.

## Stakeholder comments and Ofcom response

| Stakeholder comments   | Ofcom response   |
|--|--|
| <p><u>Interim multiplexes</u></p> <p>Digital UK, Mr Gilliver, VLV and two confidential respondents had comments relating to the interim multiplexes and impact on services carried over newer MPEG-4/DVB-T2 technical standards.</p> <p>Digital UK and the confidential respondents believed that the interim multiplexes should receive appropriate protection for at least the initial minimum licence term of December 2018. Digital UK noted the commitment that has been made on the basis of the minimum licence term for the interim multiplexes and in support of the expansion of DVB-T2 on the platform. It encouraged Ofcom to acknowledge the interim multiplexes in section 4 and other relevant parts of the Code.</p> <p>VLV also commented that making the 600MHz band available for displaced services may potentially disrupt the HD and other services currently in the spectrum, and said that the future evolution of these services using DVB-T2/MPEG-4 technologies should not be compromised by this change.</p> <p>Mr Gilliver considered that the wording in paragraph 2.6 "The basis on which we made the 600MHz band available was to support the interim use of this spectrum for DTT multiplexes using the DVB-T2/MPEG-4 technology to encourage its uptake by consumers" implies that services for consumers who have not "uptaken" this technology will be endangered.</p> | <p>The Code relates to the management of the temporary disruption that will occur during the implementation of clearance, and does not seek to address any permanent or long term changes to DTT services, including those carried on the interim multiplexes.</p> <p>However, Ofcom is engaging with the multiplex operators and other relevant stakeholders on their future strategies for the DTT platform, including the evolution of relevant technical standards and DVB-T2 migration.</p> <p>Alongside this Statement, we have also published a consultation on clearance timing and future use of the centre gap. Issues relating to the future of the interim multiplexes are covered in this companion consultation, which includes proposals for varying the frequencies in the interim multiplexes' licence and allowing them to broadcast in these revised frequencies temporarily.<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Mr Gilliver's point relates to the policy of how the 600MHz band was awarded, and is therefore out of scope for this statement. The 700MHz clearance programme should not require viewers to replace their set top boxes or televisions.</p> |

<sup>4</sup> <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/maximising-benefits-700MHz-clearance/>

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| <p><u>Consumer support</u></p> <p>Several stakeholders, including Digital UK, VLV and confidential respondents, provided comments on what consumer support should be put in place for viewers during 700MHz clearance. Digital UK believe that it would be appropriate for all the communications and support activity relating to these changes to be fully funded by the 700MHz clearance programme, as it said that all the reception changes contemplated by the Code are a direct consequence of the decision to clear the 700MHz spectrum for other uses. VLV suggested that it would be valuable for consumers to be kept fully informed of the work in their respective regions to minimise confusion.</p> <p>Digital UK also said it is important that vulnerable households are identified and remedial action is planned in a comprehensive but efficient way. A confidential respondent queried whether there would be provisions to ensure viewers, specifically vulnerable consumers, do not bear the costs of the change themselves.</p> | <p>Funding for consumer support is matter for Government. However our aim is that viewers do not experience significant disruption as a result of clearance. We are therefore working with Government and relevant stakeholders to help ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to support viewers during the transition process.</p> <p>We have therefore added a clarification in section 8 which specifies that licensees should work with any viewer support scheme Government has put in place in order to ensure viewers receive the appropriate guidance and advice.</p>   |
| <p><u>TVWS single transmitter policy</u></p> <p>Digital UK and a confidential respondent commented that the categorisation of viewers in section 4 of the revised code potentially conflicts with the approach adopted in TV White Spaces, where typically only one planned transmitter is protected per pixel. Digital UK said that therefore Category 2 viewers would not arise unless the equivalent coverage available from an alternative transmitter is specifically included for protection in the TV White Space databases, or the alternative service referred to in the draft Code cannot be relied upon to be available for use by a household.</p>  | <p>Ofcom’s TV White Spaces statement published in February 2015 states that the methodology behind this approach continues to allow for two (or more) different transmitters serving a pixel to be taken into account, in order to allow for cases where clear evidence is available on multiple transmitting station usage.</p> <p>We also note that the Code seeks to provide guidance on addressing the disruption caused during the transitional stages of clearance, and is not intended to address any long-term changes in disruption beyond the implementation of clearance. The process for managing the impact of these changes will be separate to those outlined in the Code.</p> <p>Therefore, we do not consider that the approach outlined in section 4 is incompatible with the single transmitter approach to identifying the transmitter most</p> |

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|  | likely to be in use set out in the February TV White Space statement.  |
| <p><u>Permanent coverage changes</u></p> <p>VLV said that they would appreciate a timely statement from Ofcom that the remaining spectrum will be able to accommodate all current services completely with no loss of quality of service and coverage and no erosion of technical standards, noting that clause 2.6 and the opening sentence of clause 4.1 of the revised Code imply some doubt.</p> <p>Digital UK note that, since this Code covers transitional changes only, any permanent changes to coverage arising from the new frequency plan, including shifts between transmitters, will need to be managed by a separate process.</p> | <p>Given the extensive nature of the infrastructure changes, it would not be possible to completely avoid disruption to consumers' television services as a result of clearance. However, we aim to ensure that clearance does not cause significant disruption to viewers. We are also committed to developing a frequency plan that allows for the delivery of the objectives outlined in paragraph 2.5 of the revised Code.</p> <p>We agree with Digital UK that addressing the impact of any permanent changes to coverage will require a separate process, and will work closely with the relevant stakeholders through the 700 MHz clearance technical groups such as the DTT Frequency Planning Group (DFPG) and Clearance Planning Oversight Group (CPOG) to develop this process.</p> |
| <p><u>Streamlining processes</u></p> <p>Two respondents had comments on our intention to develop a more streamlined and proportionate process for determining a course of action where loss of service to priority 1 and 2 viewers is predicted. Digital UK welcomed the fact that Ofcom is seeking to streamline the approach using modern electronic tools. However Mr Gilliver requested clarification over the proposed 'streamlined' process, saying that such a process "may be less onerous".</p>   | <p>The purpose of revising the previous approach was to allow for the opportunity to adopt a more efficient, while still rigorous, approach. In practice, the approach as outlined in the previous Code of Practice was disproportionately burdensome for both Ofcom and the broadcasters. We will develop this new approach in conjunction with the broadcasters through forums such as DFPG and CPOG to ensure that the new process will be rigorous and fit for purpose.</p>  |

- 2.2 With the amendments to the Code in response to stakeholder comments, minor editorial improvements, and clarifications above, Ofcom is satisfied that the updated Code provides the appropriate guidance for multiplex licensees to manage transitional issues resultant from the implementation of 700MHz clearance and future clearance events.
- 2.3 Ofcom is publishing the updated Code of Practice with effect from today.