

My response as requested.

## PSB Review

I will keep my representation short. I am an Ambassador for Kent, a Freeman of the City of Canterbury and an independent producer based near Faversham, in Kent, one of the few truly regional independent producers to survive east of Brighton.

Truly local television is important to the democratic process. The fact is that the current dissemination of Public Service Broadcasting in Kent is worse, both in quality and airtime, than when I first came to Kent 40 years ago – and that is an indictment of our regulatory process. Watch the “regional news” these days, and it is predominantly a catalogue of court reporting, of violence and mayhem, gathered as cheaply as possible. And were Ofcom to protect “regional news” on ITV, it still would not address the imminent disappearance from the schedules of other much-valued programmes on local history, current affairs, the arts, music, religion, business and children’s programmes.

The solution? Ofcom’s own research indicates an appetite for truly LOCAL TV. And Local TV can carry local PSB. But PSB must also be universal, which is why Ofcom should recognise that, just as frequencies for Events have been made “a special case”, so LOCAL TV should be awarded space on the “new” spectrum. Why a special case? Because unlike any other applicant for spectrum, the fact that LOCAL TV is a tool of democracy, a service both to “consumer and citizen”, to quote the Secretary of State speaking at the recent Convergence Think Tank, makes it a special case.

I am sympathetic to The Case for Channel 6 (which I attach, and submit) that outlines a federal system, with the exchange of truly local programmes of mutual interest across the country, creating a central spine of a schedule from which each LOCAL TV could opt in and opt out. The technology exists to create this type of service, as your research confirms, but strategic thinking must take place now in order to achieve a planned launch of what would be an important service to viewers and an addition to the democratic process.

The Secretary of State has argued that standards must not drop as we head for Digital Convergence. Unless some initiative such as Channel 6 is put in place, standards and the provision of Public Service Broadcasting, will certainly drop.

There are a number of business models for LOCAL TV that will work – Belfast, Manchester and Kent to name but three – all of them different. But I will restrict myself to Kent TV, for whom I acted as consultant in the run-up to launch. It is currently a Broadband- only service, creating a template for a local television service (for, as the

**Peter Williams Television.txt**

**Secretary of State says, “people, use Broadband and TV for very different reasons”). The catalyst is Kent County Council, who put up £1.4 million over two years; it is run by Ten Alps (who also run Teachers’ TV, which could also find a home on Channel 6), and there is an Advisory Board, of the great and the good.**

**The cost of running LOCAL TV is about £500,000 a year, per station.**

**As a former Controller of Factual Programmes at TVS, I am convinced of the appetite for LOCAL TV (rather than regional TV); the more targeted our programmes at TVS, the bigger the audiences and the better the viewer-reaction. It is no coincidence that, in ITV’s federal system, the finely-targeted magazine programmes for Kent and The Borders, were invariably the highest-rated in the country.**

**LOCAL TV should run side-by-side on Freeview and on Broadband. Freeview is the only way to achieve universal coverage. Ofcom must resist the argument that PSB and LOCAL TV can be left to new technology; it is not the answer, either now or in the foreseeable future. A spine of LOCAL PSB programming, on Channel 6 will ensure a smooth and effective launch as LOCAL TV stations apply for, and are granted, licences to broadcast on Freeview. It will also ensure the continuity of many much-loved and valuable programmes that reflect our heritage, while giving a fresh impetus to democracy in the nations and regions (and to citizens’ participation in that process).**

**Yours sincerely,**

**Peter Williams MBE**

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