

A DIGITAL DAWN FOR WHITEHAVEN

Stage one switchover successfully completed

Whitehaven in Cumbria made broadcasting history today, becoming the first town in the UK to start switching to digital-only television services.

An initial group of five digital terrestrial channels started broadcasting at 2.37am. Following the second stage of switchover in four weeks' time (Nov 14), a total of 20 Freeview channels will be available to 25,000 homes in the Cumbrian town and surrounding communities.

Ford Ennals, Chief Executive of Digital UK, said: "This is a big day for Whitehaven and for UK broadcasting. Switchover is a complex engineering project and I'm delighted that after many years of planning, the first stage went well. For thousands of households, today delivers a first taste of the additional choice and interactivity that digital television provides. In just four weeks' time, their old four channel terrestrial line up will have been fully replaced with 20 free channels and digital radio."

The first Freeview channels are being broadcast using airwaves freed up by turning off the BBC Two analogue signal. The first digital services are BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC News 24 and CBBC. A further 15 channels, including ITV and Channel 4 digital services, will replace the remaining analogue services from November 14. The same process will be followed region by region across the UK from 2008-2012 extending coverage of Freeview channels to 98.5% of households, up from 73% today.

Mr Ennals added: "This is just the first stage of switchover. Our research suggests more than nine out of ten households are ready¹. We know some have yet to convert their analogue television sets to digital. Others may need help, advice or practical assistance installing or getting used to using new equipment. Our priority today and in the coming weeks will be to remind late converters of the final deadline on November 14 and making sure plenty of help is available."

Digital UK Help Centres at four locations across the Whitehaven switchover area will continue today, providing advice and practical assistance. So far this week, hundreds of people have visited the centres, run in partnership with Age Concern Northwest Cumbria.

The Digital Switchover Help Scheme², established to provide help to people over 75 or with a disability, has so far received more than 2,000 requests for help with equipment and installation assistance for digital switchover.

Peter White, Chief Executive of the Help Scheme said: "The Digital Switchover Help Scheme is here to provide practical support to the over 75s and people with disabilities, and I'm pleased that we have been able to help so many people.

"This is the first area to receive assistance through the Digital Switchover Help Scheme. Our team has been receiving positive feedback from residents on the help they are providing, and we will continue to help eligible people and ensure they have a smooth transition to the digital age. For anyone living in Copeland who has yet to apply to the scheme, and who is eligible, we urge you to do so as soon as possible to ensure you are ready for the final switchover on November 14."

Ends; notes follow –

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1. GfK NOP conducted 57 face to face interviews between October 12 and October 13. Results as follows:

Aware of switchover	100%
Aware of what to do to prepare	95%
Aware switchover happens in October	98%
Have digital television	92%
Have digital television on all sets	75%
Feel "ok/comfortable" about switchover process	95%

2. **The Digital Switchover Help Scheme** is designed to help those who have not yet switched to digital, and will provide the equipment necessary to convert one television and help with installation. Households with one or more occupants aged over 75 or with a significant disability or who are registered blind or partially sighted are eligible for the scheme. There will be a one-off, subsidised fee of £40. For eligible households on income-related benefits, the help will be free.

Switchover will increase people's choice by making digital terrestrial television (commonly known as Freeview) available to all parts of the UK. One in four households cannot currently receive Freeview channels. Of the other digital platforms, Sky satellite services and BT Vision are available in Whitehaven, but cable is not.

How switchover happened

- At 2am on October 17, BBC Two ceased broadcasting in analogue to Whitehaven, and the first group of Freeview digital channels: BBC1, BBC2, BBC Three, BBC News 24 and CBBC became available.
- During this transitional stage, analogue ITV1 has passed to button 2 on remote controls to make way for the first group of digital channels. This is necessary due to limited spectrum availability.
- On November 14, the remaining analogue channels will also be permanently switched off. Every home in the area will then be able to receive 20 Freeview channels, including ITV2, E4 and BBC Four, plus digital radio, via an aerial.
- The rest of the country will follow the same two stage process, carried out transmitter by transmitter, between 2008 and 2012.

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