

TV is Changing... A Leaseholder's Guide to Digital TV

Note: - One of ARMA's key roles is to provide its members with technical support. However, from time to time, technical or other issues arise where guidance for lessees as well as their property manager is deemed appropriate. Such guidance is contained in these Lessee Advisory Notes (LANs) which ARMA members can copy and distribute to their clients and lessees as appropriate.

WHAT IS DIGITAL?

Television is changing. Between 2008 and 2012, it will be going completely digital, bringing us all better choice and new services. This means that to watch television in the future, your TV set will have to receive digital signals.

You may be one of the 70% of UK households who already have digital TV from Freeview, Homechoice, ntl, Sky or Telewest. However after the switch to digital, every TV set and video recorder you want to use will need to cope with digital signals.

If you are a leaseholder living in a flat, you probably use a communal aerial system to receive television. If so, the move to digital only broadcasting may have a further impact on you; the communal TV system in your building will probably need to be upgraded before you can receive digital television in your home.

There are more than 4 million homes in the UK that get TV via a communal aerial system. Estimates suggest that only one in four of these systems can receive digital today. The others will need to be upgraded.

TIMETABLE FOR SWITCHOVER TO DIGITAL

TV Region	Proposed Date
Border	2008
West Country	2009
HTV Wales	2009
Granada	2009
HTV West	2010
Grampian	2010
Scottish TV	2010
Central	2011
Yorkshire	2011
Anglia	2011
Meridian	2012
Carlton/LWT	2012
Tyne Tees	2012
Ulster	2012

WHY IS A COMMUNAL AERIAL SYSTEM DIFFERENT?

Most communal aerial systems will need some updating to receive digital television signals.

In addition most leases do not allow you to put up your own satellite dish, if satellite digital service is your preferred option. You should never try to install a dish without first checking with your managing agent if one is allowed by the leases, and if allowed whether permission will be given.

If your communal system needs updating your agent and/or landlord will be considering what form this updating should take. The costs of the updating will fall upon leaseholders from their service charges, so your agent will be considering the options bearing in mind the cost and the preferences of leaseholders.

Most agents will want to consult leaseholders about what kind of digital choice they prefer, but it will not always be possible to suit everyone and keep costs within what leaseholders are willing to pay.

- Some communal systems can be upgraded to receive digital terrestrial services (Freeview) by replacing a few parts and using the existing cabling. But this will not let you receive digital cable or satellite services.

- Some communal systems will need to be totally replaced, particularly if the cabling is old or in a poor condition.

- If a total replacement is needed, a new system can give residents the full range of digital television platforms (digital terrestrial e.g. Freeview and digital satellite e.g. Sky) as well as other services (broadband, home shopping, closed circuit television and public services). This is called an Integrated Reception System and is the most expensive option.

- If leaseholders want the option of SkyPlus then additional new cabling is required at extra cost.
- If there is only one aerial connection in your flat at present and you want several sets to receive digital signals then additional cabling will also be required at extra cost.

SOME QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

Q. How do I know if the system in my building has been upgraded for digital?

Your landlord or agent will be able to tell you.

Q. What if my landlord has not upgraded our system?

If your landlord is required by the lease to provide a communal aerial system, then upgrading will have to take place. Bearing in mind the costs involved for leaseholders and the timetable for switchover above, the landlord or agent will want to upgrade at a time that best meets the differing views of leaseholders.

Q. Who will have to pay for any upgrade?

If you are a long leaseholder you will have to pay for any upgrade as part of your service charge. You will be charged even if you have decided to put up your own dish with or without consent.

Q. How do I ensure that my landlord installs a system that gives me choice?

Your landlord or agent will take account of the views of different leaseholders when deciding how to upgrade your communal system. However it is not usually possible to please everyone all the time and the agent will have to take a decision in the end.

Q. Can I take steps by myself to upgrade the system?

No you cannot upgrade the communal system yourself. However, landlords may permit tenants to install their own outdoor dish or aerial, but you will need written consent and in some cases planning consent. If you install a satellite dish or cable without permission you will be in breach of your lease. Even if you install your own dish you will be required to pay your proportion of the cost of upgrading the communal aerial.

Q. Will I Be Able To Get Digital TV on an Indoor Aerial?

If your TV gives good pictures from an indoor aerial you may be able to get digital services. The current power levels for digital broadcasts and the lack of equipment designed for set-top reception means that this will not be an option for every one. An indoor aerial will not provide the same signal strength as an upgraded communal TV system.

Q. Could I be faced with a blank screen?

If your communal system is not upgraded by the timetable set out above, then it is possible that you may be left without a signal when analogue transmissions cease.

Q. What about foreign based digital TV?

Some stations are available on satellite both free and by subscription. However they are on a variety of different satellites and may require a larger dish than normal to receive them. Specialist advice will be needed if such channels are required.

Q. Will I get any help with going digital?

The Government will offer help toward the conversion of one television set for people aged 75 years and over and people with significant disabilities. If you are eligible you will be sent more information well before your area goes digital.

GOING DIGITAL : YOUR CHOICES

There are several ways to get a digital TV signal and you will need to decide the best option for you. The choices are:

Through a Digital Satellite

- Subscription based service from Sky
- A free to view service has also been launched by Sky called FreeSat

Through a Digital Cable

- Subscription based service from ntl, Telewest or Wightcable
- You will need to ask your cable operator to see if you are in a digital cable coverage area

Through an aerial-Digital Terrestrial

- Free to view service from Freeview
- Additional subscription based services from Top Up TV

- Some areas will not be able to get digital terrestrial TV until after switchover so you will need to ask your retailer to check your postcode to see if you are in a Freeview coverage area or you can look on the website www.digitaltelevision.co.uk

Through a telephone line-DSL / Broadband

- Although still limited to certain areas, subscription based services are available from HomeChoice
- You will need to ask the service provider to see if you are in a coverage area

Before making your choice do check with your landlord or managing agent to ensure that your communal system can support what you buy...

ADAPTING YOUR CURRENT TV SET

Virtually all televisions can be used with any set top box (a digital terrestrial, cable, satellite or DSLbox) to receive digital TV. However you get your digital TV signal you will need a digital box.

To watch digital television on the set you have today this is what you need to do:

1. Consider the different digital TV choices above.
2. Check the coverage area for the option that you want.
3. Check with your landlord or managing agent what will work in your home.
4. If you want cable or satellite options and your landlord allows you to install them, speak to the operator to arrange an installation.

Or

1. If you have chosen to get digital through your aerial get a set top box and plug it into the "scart" socket on the back of the set.
2. Start watching digital television.

Don't forget, every TV set in your home will need adapting. If you live in a flat linked to a communal TV system and there is only one access point in the home, you will need further assistance from the provider you have chosen.

Remember you will still be responsible for paying for a TV licence and if you (rather than your landlord) have taken out a contract with a digital TV provider, you will be responsible for paying for the service.

You can take the opportunity to buy or rent a new television set. If you choose a new analogue set it will need a set top box to receive digital signals. Or a new digital set with an integrated digital receiver will give you access to Freeview's free digital terrestrial services (but not satellite or cable), if you are in a coverage area and if your building's communal system can receive it. When you are shopping look for the digital tick logo.

VIDEO RECORDERS

You may also need to look at your video recorder. If you want to record one digital programme whilst watching another you will need to think about getting a digital recorder. More information about recorders is available from www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk or any retailer displaying the digital tick logo.

I WANT DIGITAL TV - WHAT TO DO NEXT?

If you live in a building that has a communal TV system:

- 1 Ask your landlord or managing agent whether your communal TV system has been upgraded
- 2 Talk to your landlord or managing agent about their plans and about what you want
- 3 Talk to your residents association if you have one. If not you might want to talk to your neighbours to find out what they think. Form a joint view of what you want

WHERE TO GET ADVICE AND MORE INFORMATION

If you have more questions, or need more help, you can get assistance from:

- Digital UK www.digitaluk.co.uk.
- The Digital UK information line is 08456 50 50 50.
- www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk

Look for the Digital Switchover Logo ("digital tick") on products and services. It will indicate products and services that will work now and after the switch to digital. If you see the logo in your local retailer, they will be able to provide you with further information.

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