

## **THE FUTURE OF BORDER TELEVISION NEWS**

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:** Cllr Elaine Woodburn, Leader  
**LEAD OFFICER:** Terry Chilcott, Corporate Director (Quality of Life)  
**REPORT AUTHOR:** Ian Curwen, Senior Communications Officer

**Summary:** This report outlines the proposed changes to the provision of regional news on ITV1, which would see the Border TV news service submerged into that of ITV Tyne Tees. Such a change is likely to have a major impact on the coverage in this region.

<b>Recommendations:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) That this council notes the report and formally offers its opposition to the proposed changes to Border TV news.</li><li>2) That, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, this council asks the Senior Communications Officer to write to OFCOM, ITV and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport formally outlining this opposition.</li></ol>
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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 On 12 September 2007, ITV Plc announced proposed changes to regional TV news coverage in England, which would see the number of ITV regional bulletins reduced from 17 to nine, with a halving of news budgets. In Copeland, this would mean that Border TV news would be abolished, and our news would form an opt-out as part of the Tyne Tees news provision. The opt out is only guaranteed until 2014, at which point news services could be further reviewed.
- 1.2 Under Border Television's current 'Channel 3 Regional Licence', at least 90% of their regional television coverage must be made within the Licensed Area, namely the Border Television region.

### **2. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES**

- 2.1 Border Television's news coverage, which has been seen in this area for over 40 years, is now under threat due to proposed changes outlined recently by ITV Chief Executive and Executive Chairman, Michael Grade.
- 2.2 Under the proposed changes, ITV Border's flagship news programme, Lookaround would be axed within two years to be replaced by ten minutes of local news slotted into a nightly news programme broadcast by Tyne Tees, based in Gateshead. The audience figures for its regional news programme, Lookaround, show that it is one of the highest rating of any BBC or ITV region in the country (as a proportion of the population).
- 2.3 Such a move would inevitably lead to a degeneration of coverage of this area as all news stories within the region would have to be fitted to within the ten minute slot for local news, likely to be for the whole of the current Border TV region. In addition to this, the news production resources available to this area are also likely to decrease, leading to less coverage.
- 2.4 The move would lead to a situation where Cumbria is the only county in the country without its own news service, receiving only the opt out from Tyne Tees. This will clearly lead to a loss of

identity, when all the news we receive in this region is broadcast from, and primarily focussed on the North East, and its large cities – Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Sunderland.

- 2.5 Such a change could also have a major impact on the economy, firstly, due to the decline of the broadcast facilities at the Border Television studios, which would be downgraded, and secondly, as this area struggles for air time against its larger rivals. Major events such as the Maritime Festival are unlikely to get the coverage they do now, and smaller events such as the Egremont Crab Fair are unlikely to see coverage at all.
- 2.6 A decrease in provision and air time for news from Cumbria is likely to lead to the coverage of only major stories, which have previously tended to focus on the more negative stories, such as news of job losses rather than on more positive news. It will also be harder for Copeland to be featured in the ten minute slot, as the time will be filled only with the most major stories. Therefore only major Copeland stories are likely to feature.
- 2.7 Border Television has given extensive coverage to recent emergencies in the county, such as the flooding in Carlisle and the Foot and Mouth disease outbreaks. In these instances, the broadcaster has provided a public service by giving people the latest up to date news and public information on the problems, as they unfolded. It is unlikely that this would be the case, were the news team located in the North East, with a ten minute opt out. In such circumstances, local knowledge, access to the area, and the ability to devote the schedule to this news, are a must.

### **3. OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED**

- 3.1 Copeland Borough Council could oppose such as move, highlighting the impact it would have on the standard of news in the area, the loss of identity for Cumbria, and the potential economic impact on the area.
- 3.2 Copeland Borough Council could choose not to voice an opinion on this matter, and leave other community representatives to have their say. This is not the preferred option because of the major negative impact the change could have for Copeland, west Cumbria and the county as a whole.

### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 It is important for Copeland Borough Council to have its say on the proposals for one of the most dramatic changes to news coverage in this country for many years. It is clear that a move of news provision to the North East, as an opt out on the Tyne Tees service, would not serve this area well. ITV has a duty to provide public service broadcasting, and local news is a vital aspect of that. These changes do not meet this duty. Therefore Copeland Borough Council should oppose the move, and lobby the key bodies to try and stop such a change taking place.

#### **List of Consultees:**

Martin Jepson, Head of Legal and Democratic Services  
Terry Chilcott, Corporate Director (Quality of Life)  
Georgina Ayling, Interim Head of Finance and Business  
Development and Section 151 Officer  
Hilary Mitchell, Head of Policy and Performance  
Leila Cox, Communications Officer  
Cllr Elaine Woodburn, Leader of Copeland Borough Council.

#### **Background Papers:**

None