

Consultation Response

Watch this Space: a new strategic direction for UK media – green paper and public consultation

Department for Culture Media and Sport

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About this consultation

The Government's *Watch this Space* Green Paper considers the future of UK television and media as viewing habits change and more content is delivered online. Issues covered include the role and prominence of public service media, the future of television distribution and regulation, media literacy, and the use of digital terrestrial television (the system many people know as Freeview) after the current licence period ends in 2034.

The questions most relevant to Age UK concern how any future changes to television distribution could affect people who rely on familiar TV services, including older people who may face barriers linked to affordability, accessibility, digital skills, confidence, connectivity or the availability of practical support.

In this response, we use 'IPTV' to refer broadly to television delivered through an internet connection, rather than through digital terrestrial television such as Freeview.

Key points and recommendations

- Television is an essential service for millions of older people, many of whom rely on it for news, information, and in some cases company. Changes to the way TV is distributed and broadcast have far-reaching social implications that go well beyond technical delivery and can have a profound impact on people's lives. The Government must work on the principle that no one should be cut off or left behind.
- A move to internet-only television must be treated as a digital inclusion and equalities issue, not simply as a broadcasting or infrastructure change.
- The Government should publish a funded transition plan before setting a switch-off date. The plan should show how people will afford the connection and equipment they need, how services will be made simple to use, what practical support will be available in people's homes, and what assisted or adapted access options will exist for people who cannot use a standard IPTV set-up independently.
- The Government should set 'readiness criteria' before any final decision about a transition timetable is made. These should test whether measures are in place to ensure people can afford the service, use it at home without confusion, unaffordable costs or avoidable risk, find public service media easily, get help when something goes wrong, and avoid unfair charges, confusing subscriptions or scams.
- As industry will save significant amounts of money through the switchover, we believe there is a very strong moral argument that providers should meet the costs of supporting those in need during and after the transition.
- The transition plan should make clear how the costs arising for individuals will be paid. Many older people do not have an existing broadband connection and have older appliances, meaning they could incur significant costs from any change to IPTV or risk being cut off. Age UK believes older people in this

situation should receive free broadband and/or a new TV that is compatible with modern systems – it is unfair to place this potentially significant burden on low-income pensioners.

- In addition, both household-level support and the wider system costs needed to make IPTV work safely for everyone must be properly funded. These costs should not be pushed onto older people, families, carers or voluntary organisations by default, for example through higher bills.
- Government should consider stronger regulatory or legislative safeguards for cases where voluntary industry commitments are not enough to protect access to television.
- The transition should be planned as a cross-sector programme with clear roles for key players to work together, and identify who is responsible for supporting older people and others at risk of exclusion.
- Government should lead a practical TV transition support scheme, which could be delivered by trusted local and voluntary sector partners. It should help people set up equipment, use simple and accessible services, manage accounts or passwords where needed, and get help when things go wrong. This work must be planned, commissioned and funded anew, rather than added onto existing services without extra capacity. Support for people at risk of exclusion should be planned, funded and accountable, rather than left to informal help.
- IPTV transition support should link to a properly funded national digital inclusion programme. This would help people who want to do more online build access, skills and confidence, while keeping non-digital routes to information and support available for those who need them.
- Where households need support with more than one digital transition, Government should consider how help can be coordinated so people are not asked to manage repeated, separate changes without joined-up support.

About Age UK

Age UK believes every older person should be included and valued. We're working locally, nationally and internationally to change the way we age. Together with our partners, we're changing the day-to-day experience of getting older through essential services and local support. In the UK, the charity helps more than seven million older people each year by providing advice and support, including through our national advice line and our friendship services. It also researches and campaigns on the issues that matter most to older people, aiming to put older people at the heart of public policy and shift the way ageing is treated and represented.

All campaigner quotes in this response are taken from an Age UK digital survey conducted in May 2026.

Introduction

Age UK welcomes the Green Paper's focus on ensuring audiences can continue to access trusted and high-quality television content as viewing increasingly moves online. Our response focuses specifically on the risks and support needs for older people.

For many older people, especially those who are offline, living alone, on a low income, disabled or less confident with technology, television remains a trusted source of news, companionship and connection. Many over-65s still consume television in traditional ways. Ofcom's Cross-Platform Media Tracker 2024 found that 95% of people aged 65+ watched broadcast TV, 94% viewed television programmes or films on a television set, and 46% had not used paid-for on-demand streaming services in the previous 12 months. (See [Ofcom Cross-Platform Media Tracker 2024 adults data tables](#))

Age UK wants to expand opportunities for older people who would like to benefit from digital services, while ensuring that any IPTV transition also protects people who cannot use digital services independently, do not wish to do more online, or need ongoing non-digital and assisted routes.

Government leadership and cross-sector coordination will be essential if any future transition is to work well for older people. Further decisions should not be made until equality risks have been assessed and a credible transition plan is in place. The guiding principle should be that no one is cut off or left behind, with particular attention to people at greatest risk of exclusion who may need support to continue accessing television safely, affordably and with confidence.

Any transition plan must show how older people will be able to afford and use any new equipment, access support from people or organisations they trust, and avoid carrying the costs of transition by default. Voluntary sector support must be planned and properly funded.

Consultation questions

- ***Question 1: Overall views on the future of television and media in the UK.***

While television habits are changing and more content is being delivered online, many older people still rely on broadcast television. For those with lower digital skills, existing TV services can feel familiar, be simple to access and do not usually require broadband, accounts or digital confidence. Any future changes to TV distribution must recognise and meet the needs of audiences who are not currently digitally included.

Ofcom figures show how important broadcast television remains for older audiences. In 2024, 95% of over-65s watched broadcast television. People aged 65 to 74 watched an average of 299 minutes of broadcaster television a day, while people aged 75 and over watched 341 minutes. This contrasts sharply with younger audiences: only 48% of 16 to 24-year-olds tuned into broadcast television weekly, down from 76% in 2018, and they watched an average of just 20 minutes of live television each day. For many older people, television is not simply entertainment, but also a source of trusted news, routine,

reassurance, companionship and connection. Any transition to internet-only television should therefore be treated as a digital inclusion and equalities issue, not simply as a broadcasting or infrastructure change. (See [Ofcom Media Nations 2025: UK report](#))

More recent Ofcom Public Service Media Tracker data supports this picture. It found that 36% of people aged 65+ in the UK had not watched TV catch-up, on-demand or streaming services in the previous 12 months. This is a broader measure than paid-for streaming, but it reinforces the point that a sizeable minority of older people are not yet using catch-up, on-demand or streaming services, even though these are likely to become more important if television is delivered mainly through the internet. (See [Ofcom Public Service Media Tracker 2025/26 adults main survey tables](#))

Government research found that 17% of households continued to rely on Freeview for their TV services in 2023. These households were more likely to include older people, disabled people and people living alone. They were also more likely to have lower incomes, to include women, or to be located in the north of England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. This means any move away from digital terrestrial television could have disproportionate impacts unless it is carefully planned and supported. (See [DCMS, Future of TV Distribution, 2024.](#))

Older people have a range of digital access, skills, confidence and support needs and engage with the digital world in different ways. Age UK analysis of people aged 65+ in England found that 15% are digitally included, 47% are partially digitally included, while 25% are partially digitally excluded and 13% are digitally excluded.ⁱ

Concerns about the TV transition are not limited to people who are completely offline, because IPTV may create barriers even for people who use the internet confidently in other parts of their lives. For example, Jackie, an Age UK campaigner aged 67 who used to work at BT and describes herself as 'very confident' online, told us: *"I worked at BT so had a lot of ground training on web and software so I was very lucky"*. Yet when asked what would help her to do more online, she said: *"I'm very worried about the TV Freeview being turned off and having to use purely internet TV. Both from the aspect of navigating it but also reliability, fibre broadband and, living rurally, the signal."*

Other campaigners were less confident about using digital television itself. Helen, aged 70, who describes herself as 'somewhat confident' online, told us: *"I'm also not confident in using the digital TV set and tend to stick with standard channels as I worry I'll not be able to get back to where I want to be."*

IPTV readiness cannot be assumed simply because someone has internet access or uses some digital services. Needs will vary, as these two examples demonstrate - from concerns about rural broadband reliability and navigating unfamiliar services, to anxiety about using digital TV equipment. Any future system will need to work reliably, simply and affordably in people's homes, with practical support available when things go wrong.

- **Questions 14 and 15: Views on the potential transition timelines and whether another timeframe is preferable.**

The choice between 2034 and 2044 should not be considered in isolation. The more important question is whether the right support and safeguards would be in place before any transition happens. No date should be set in practice unless there is clear evidence that older people, especially those most at risk of exclusion, would be able to keep watching television without being left behind.

As set out in response to Question 1, older people continue to use broadcast television much more heavily than younger audiences, and many households still rely on Freeview. Many older people are online only in limited or supported ways, while a significant minority remain digitally excluded altogether, so readiness cannot be judged by broadband coverage or headline internet use alone.

A provisional date may help focus planning, but it should not become fixed unless the evidence shows households will be ready and properly supported, and certain criteria have been met to ensure no-one is cut off. Previous transitions show that this kind of change needs careful planning so nobody is left behind, everyone knows what to expect, and people have the support they need to adapt safely without bearing the cost and stress of transition themselves. Any transition should only go ahead once there is clear evidence that people will be able to manage the change in practice, which of course does include having a reliable broadband connection, but goes much further.

'Readiness criteria' for a transition should be developed with input from relevant organisations, including those with expertise in ageing, disability, poverty, rural connectivity, consumer protection and digital inclusion. From Age UK's perspective, the key questions centre on whether households can afford the connection, whether equipment and services are accessible, whether public service media remains easy to find, and whether practical support is available. This support should include funded voluntary sector support and a plan for people who cannot, or do not wish to, use digital services independently.

- ***Questions 16 and 16a: Whether the Green Paper has captured the key challenges around supporting audiences to adopt IPTV and similar technologies, plus further rationale.***

Age UK agrees that the Green Paper identifies important challenges, but should frame these more clearly as public policy, equality and digital inclusion challenges. While there will be many benefits and opportunities to seize, the transition to IPTV will make access to a universal, trusted service more complicated for older people who currently rely on DTT because it is familiar, simple to use and does not require digital confidence.

The Green Paper also recognises that some audiences will need more support. This includes older people, disabled people, people on low incomes, people in rural areas and those with lower digital confidence or skills. Digital inclusion is not binary. A person

may be able to use one familiar device or app, but still struggle when television access depends on accounts, passwords, subscriptions, device compatibility or troubleshooting. This matters because IPTV readiness cannot be assumed from general internet use alone.

Broadband availability is only one part of readiness. People also need to be able to afford and use the connection, equipment and services in their own homes. Some will need help at the point of transition, such as choosing suitable equipment, arranging installation or setting up the service. Others may get started without difficulty, perhaps because someone technically confident sets it up for them, but need more support later with passwords, updates, contracts, scam risks or knowing where to turn when something goes wrong. Existing digital support schemes cannot simply be assumed to be enough. Any transition plan should test whether support is available everywhere people need it, can be accessed more than once, and can provide practical help in people's homes if desired.

These are not theoretical barriers. When we asked Age UK campaigners about their views on digital technology in May 2026, David, aged 83, who is 'somewhat confident online', said he finds it hard *"trying to get TV channels."* Deirdre, aged 81, describes herself as 'somewhat confident online' but said that getting a new television after 15 years was *"a shock"* because *"it is a computer shouting at me with overbright icons."* Another older person described struggling with *"signing into everything especially TV channels"*.

An equitable transition should distinguish between two types of cost. First, there are the direct costs that may fall on individual households. These could include broadband contracts, new or adapted equipment, installation, set-up support, and the risk of being persuaded to pay for subscription-based services they did not want or need. These costs should not be pushed onto older people on low incomes, people who are digitally excluded, or those who need help to adapt. The Government and regulators need to think carefully about how to provide broadband or equipment to older people on low incomes, who may not be able to afford it and would otherwise not require it. As industry will save significant amounts of money through the switchover, we believe there is a very strong moral argument that providers should meet the costs of supporting those in need during and after the transition.

Second, there are the wider system costs of making IPTV work safely and inclusively for everyone. These include accessible design, reliable customer support, consumer protection, offline information routes, assisted and adapted access options for people who cannot use a standard IPTV set-up independently, and properly funded voluntary sector support. These costs should be built into the transition from the start, rather than treated as optional extras or left to families, charities or excluded consumers to absorb.

Any cost-benefit analysis and equality impact assessment should therefore ask not only whether IPTV is cheaper for broadcasters or infrastructure providers, but who pays for the transition in practice, who benefits, and who carries the risk if the system does not work well for everyone.

- ***Question 17: Ranking the listed strategic priorities.***

If a ranking is required for question 17, Age UK would put “delivering for all audiences” first. Given older people’s high reliance on broadcast television, continued reliance on Freeview, and the scale of partial or complete digital exclusion among older people, universal service provision must be the starting point for any transition. Reliability follows closely, because television remains an important route to trusted news, public service media and shared national information. Public service media sustainability, competition and innovation are also important, but their benefits will only be realised fairly if they are designed around inclusive outcomes.

- ***Question 18: What would be most important, in the event of an IPTV transition, to ensure everyone can still access television from home.***

In the event of an IPTV transition, everyone must be able to access television from home in a way that is affordable, reliable, usable and accessible. However, the barriers will not be the same for every older person. For some, the main issue will be the affordability of broadband, equipment or subscriptions. For others, it may be the usability of a new television, remote control, app or interface, or the interaction between the television, router, broadband connection, passwords and other household technology.

The Government support needed should be considered at three levels: legislating for basic standards that improve the transition for everyone, planning and resourcing targeted practical help for people who need more support (including assisted routes for those who cannot use a standard IPTV set-up independently) and offering wider digital inclusion opportunities for those who could benefit from building their skills on an ongoing basis.

Some basic safeguards should be built into both the services people will use and the way the transition is managed, so that it is easier, safer and clearer for everyone. For example, wherever possible, new equipment should work with existing televisions. Services should be easy to navigate, public service media should remain simple to find, and people should be able to get help when something goes wrong. Information about costs, contracts and subscriptions also needs to be clear and trustworthy. Clear advice will also be needed when people buy or replace equipment, so they are not left to navigate technical claims, unnecessary upselling or unsuitable products on their own.

These good practice standards are necessary, but they will not be sufficient on their own. A one-off communications campaign or generic signposting will not be enough. Some people will need information in non-digital formats. Others will need practical help at home, for example choosing equipment, understanding costs, setting up a router or account, or learning how to use a new remote or app. Support may also be needed later, when services fail or settings change. Many older people would need trusted local help, including face-to-face or in-home support where appropriate, plus repeated opportunities to build confidence over time.

This is also reflected in the experience of people supporting older users. One campaigner told us: *"I was a volunteer for Age Cymru for around 4 years and many [older people] I visited needed a lot of help with their digital devices. One lady could not change channels on her TV because she didn't understand how to use the remote..."* This example shows that even basic television use can become difficult if the equipment, remote control or instructions are not intuitive.

Campaigners' comments show why this support needs to be practical and patient. One respondent said: *"Recently received a new television but hit problems installing it."* Anthony, aged 72, describes himself as very confident online, but said that *"new TVs now need setting up with WiFi before you can use it."* Geoffrey, aged 82, who also describes himself as confident online, said he had *"more problems with streaming...with the television"* and would like help. These examples underline that support needs to cover ordinary household set-up and troubleshooting, not just broader encouragement to go online.

The transition plan should therefore be based on better segmentation of need. This should help identify people who are most likely to need intensive support, rather than only reaching those who are easiest to contact. However, segmentation should guide outreach and planning, not become a rigid test for who is offered help. Individuals should still be able to ask for support themselves, and to choose the form of help that best fits their circumstances.

Criteria for support should reflect the different barriers people may face. For some, the main issue will be cost. Others may need help because their broadband is unreliable, their equipment is hard to use, or the service is not accessible to them. Some people will be at greater risk because they live alone, have no regular informal support, or are more anxious about scams and unexpected charges. Where wider digital inclusion support would be useful, people should be offered it on a voluntary basis. It should not become a condition of keeping access to television. These support arrangements should be developed alongside wider safeguards before any firm switch-off date is set.

The move to IPTV would also make trust and consumer protection issues more important. While IPTV is used to watch television, not browse the internet, viewers may still have to create accounts, manage passwords, verify their identity, respond to provider messages, choose subscriptions or resolve problems online. These extra steps are difficult for many people with high levels of digital skills, so will undoubtedly create confusion or anxiety for some older people, especially if support is remote or communications are unclear. The Government should set clear expectations and service standards, so people know where to go for support and the timescales by which it would be delivered. This could include how to check a charge or query a bill, technical support if equipment does not work properly, including technicians to check equipment free of charge, and somewhere to answer simple queries. Offline options are essential for people who cannot use online routes independently.

Before any firm switch-off date is set, the Government should demonstrate proven solutions on affordability, usability and accessibility. It should also develop practical assisted and adapted access options for people who cannot use a standard IPTV set-up independently, cannot afford broadband, have unreliable connectivity, or need a very simple television experience. There should be no cliff-edge switch-off.

The Government should also consider households that rely on free-to-air satellite services, particularly in rural areas or places with weaker terrestrial reception, so that people are not required to navigate repeated transitions without support.

The transition plan should explicitly address the needs of people who remain offline, or who are only partially digitally included. In relation to television, this means keeping simple and trusted ways to receive public service media, news and information without requiring people to manage complex apps, accounts or troubleshooting alone. This reflects the wider need to retain non-digital routes to essential information, advice and practical help as more public services move online. It also points to the need for wider digital inclusion programmes, so people who want to do more online can build the skills, support and confidence to do so.

- ***Question 20: Anything else to add on the future of TV distribution.***

The move from terrestrial television to IPTV should be treated as part of a wider managed transition to a more digital society. It should not be approached as a narrow technical change, or as a set of decisions that can be left to individual industries to resolve separately. If the move is not properly planned, some older people could lose easy access to a service they rely on every day. However, it's also an opportunity – with the right support, it could also help some people build digital confidence in ways that extend beyond television.

There are useful lessons from other digital transitions, including the digital landline switchover and the earlier digital TV switchover. The Government and regulator should lead from the start and identify risks early. People need clear information they can trust, and support should be funded, not assumed.

An IPTV transition is likely to be more complex than the previous digital TV switchover. For many older people, terrestrial television and Freeview have worked through familiar equipment. IPTV would make television access more dependent on broadband, a suitable device, and people's ability to manage set-up, accounts, or troubleshooting at home. Support should help people get connected and set up, but it should also build confidence over time. It must also protect people who cannot use digital services independently, or who need ongoing assisted and non-digital routes.

The next stage of policy development should set out the national delivery model. It should explain how the programme will be funded, who will be accountable, how success will be measured, and how risks will be monitored before and during transition. If evidence shows that audiences are not ready, the timetable should be paused or revised. The wider system should be designed so people are not left to manage complicated online steps on their own. Accounts should be simple, help should be easy to find, and support should be available when someone cannot complete a task online.

Where households need support with more than one digital transition, this should be coordinated wherever possible. Older people should not be asked to cope with separate changes to television, broadband, telephone services or other essential systems without clear, joined-up support.

The transition plan should set out clear safeguards on trust, scams and consumer protection. While the transition to IPTV is not the same as general internet use, people may still have to deal with accounts, provider messages, subscriptions, passwords and online support. Older people should not be left to work out alone whether a message, call or request is genuine. Nor should they have to judge, without help, whether a contract, charge or subscription is fair. These risks should be treated as core parts of the transition plan, not as issues to be managed after problems arise.

- ***Question 30: Evidence of equality impacts arising from the consultation proposals.***

The proposals raise significant equality issues because the groups most likely to rely on Freeview, need support with an IPTV transition, or experience digital exclusion are not evenly distributed across the population. These include older people, disabled people, carers, people living alone, people on low incomes, people in poorer health, people with lower digital confidence, and those living in areas or homes with weaker connectivity.

These factors often overlap, increasing the risk that a transition could deepen financial difficulty, loneliness, accessibility barriers and digital exclusion.

Freeview reliance is particularly important from an equality perspective. Government research found that the 17% of households that continued to rely on Freeview for their TV services in 2023 were more likely to include older people, disabled people and people living alone. They were also more likely to have lower incomes, to include women, or to be in the north of England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. This suggests that any switch away from terrestrial television could have disproportionate impacts unless it is designed and delivered in a way that protects people most at risk of exclusion. (See [DCMS, *Future of TV Distribution*, 2024](#).)

An equality assessment should look beyond broadband availability. It should assess whether the transition could create barriers to affordability, safe use, problem resolution, access to public service media, trusted support and independent use for people who cannot rely on family or informal help.

It should also segment audiences by likely support need, rather than treating older people or digitally excluded people as single groups. This would help identify who may only need clear information, who may need practical set-up or troubleshooting support, and who may need ongoing assisted or non-digital routes. People should still be able to request support if they are struggling, even if they do not fall neatly into a pre-defined group.

The equality assessment should also identify evidence gaps, including how many older people would need in-home support, how many could not afford additional costs, and how many would need ongoing assisted access rather than one-off help. This should inform the cost-benefit analysis, to find out who pays, who benefits, who carries risk, and what it would cost to reach people with different levels of support need.

ⁱ Age UK analysis of wave 11 of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, collected in 2023 to 2024, weighted and scaled using 2024 Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates for England