

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**GAELIC COMMITTEE - 13 November 2008**

Agenda Item	3.
Report No	G/27/08

**LAUNCH OF BBC ALBA**

**Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service**

**Summary**

This report provides details on the development and access of the new Gaelic channel – BBC ALBA, launched in September 2008.

**1. Background**

1.1 BBC ALBA, the new Gaelic channel, was launched on Friday, 19 September 2008.

1.2 BBC ALBA is a free-to-air channel. As a digital channel it can currently be accessed in a number of ways:

- 1) Satellite – Sky subscription. Subscribers buy a package of channels for a minimum period, usually a year, paid through a monthly subscription.
- 2) Satellite – Freesat. No subscription is required. There is a one-off cost of installation.
- 3) Satellite – Freesat from Sky. A Sky box and dish without the subscription. For a fixed payment
- 4) BBC iPlayer – A selection of BBC ALBA programmes are available to watch on BBC iplayer again for 7 days after transmission. These can be accessed through the internet.

1.3 MG ALBA is the operating name of Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (Gaelic Media Service). The organisation's remit, under the Communications Act 2003, is to ensure that a wide and diverse range of high quality Gaelic programmes is made available to persons in Scotland. MG ALBA is committed to securing carriage for all BBC ALBA programmes on all available digital platforms.

**2. Digital Television**

2.1 Cable (Virgin Media) has the highest take-up in urban centres such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. It is unavailable in most rural areas.

2.2 Freeview is the cheapest option for converting television equipment to digital. All that is required is a Freeview box, and in most cases there will be no requirement to upgrade existing aerials. It is available

throughout the country, although there are problems with signal strength in some areas. Signal strength will improve at digital switchover.

2.3 Satellite is available throughout the country.

### 3. Availability

3.1 Ofcom's Communications Market Report of May 2008 showed that 85% of people in Scotland now have digital television. More detailed statistics based on information collected in January/February of this year suggests the picture nationally is as follows:

	Scotland-wide	Highlands and Islands
% of adults that have digital TV at home	85	84
% of adults that have pay TV at home	49	57
% of adults with pay TV that have satellite TV at home	65	92
% of adults with pay TV that have cable TV at home	29	0

3.2 An analysis of the above statistics indicates that in the Highlands and Islands 52% of homes have a Sky subscription and that 27% of homes have Free digital TV – ie access to Freesat.

3.3 It is important to note that as the switchover to digital is progressed this picture is changing on a regular basis as the public buy into various digital systems.

3.4 Until BBC ALBA is available on all digital platforms, including Freeview and cable, people who wish to access the channel will need one of the satellite systems mentioned above.

3.5 In schools and care homes it may be appropriate to give consideration to the educational or community benefits that might be derived from having access to BBC ALBA when procuring digital systems.

#### **Recommendation**

The Committee is invited to:-

- Note the report and accompanying presentation
- Consider what action should be taken to assist the progress of wider accessibility to BBC ALBA.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 4 November 2008

Author: Head of Education Services