
SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Cluster:</u>	City Development and Regeneration
<u>Date:</u>	03/02/2026
<u>Title of Update:</u>	STV North License
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Purpose of Briefing

This briefing provides Elected Members with an update on actions undertaken following Council instructions regarding STV's proposed changes to the STV North regional news service and Ofcom's associated licence consultation.

Summary

Officers have undertaken significant activity since October 2025 to fulfil Council instructions, including issuing formal representations, engaging with Ofcom, gathering evidence on economic and community impact, and coordinating regional responses. Officers are preparing the Council's consultation submission ahead of the deadline of 9 February 2026.

Actions Undertaken by Officers

- Made formal representations on the STV North licence at local, regional, and national forums.
- Noted the discussion held on 16 January in the Scottish Parliament with Ofcom present, providing additional clarity on the regulator's rationale.
- Gathered data on potential job losses and supply-chain impacts.
- Reviewed available financial information relating to STV North.
- Responded to queries from Elected Members.
- Ensured written representations were evidence-based and informed the Council's emerging consultation response.
- Circulated responses received from STV Group (9 January), the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (15 January), and other correspondence to Members.
- Met with Ofcom officials on 2 February, alongside the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

Timeline of Key Events

- **1 October 2025** – Council Meeting: Instruction to the Chief Executive to make representations to STV, Ofcom, Scottish Government and UK Government.
- **10 December 2025** – Council Meeting: Instruction to the Chief Officer – City Development and Regeneration to provide updates to Members.
- **16 December 2025**: Ofcom launches its consultation on revised licence proposals.
- **January 2026**: Letters received from STV Group and UK Government; circulated to Members.
- **14 January**: Deadline for submission of Notices of Motion; one submitted regarding STV.
- **21 January**: Requisition received for a Special Council Meeting on STV.
- **27 January**: Invitation received from Ofcom Scotland to meet with Officers.
- **2 February**: Meeting held with Ofcom, hosted by the Chamber of Commerce.
- **4 February**: Council Meeting and Requisitioned Special Council Meeting scheduled.
- **9 February**: Consultation closes.

Correspondence Issued and Responses Received

The Chief Executive issued letters on the 8th January 2026, to the following noting the instruction of council:

- **STV Group.**
- **Ofcom**
- **Scottish Government**
- **UK Government**

Responses:

- **STV Group (9 January)**: Acknowledged concerns; attached STV's formal submission.
- **UK Government / DCMS (15 January)**: Recognised concerns and confirmed engagement with Ofcom.
- **Ofcom Scotland (27 January)**: Offered meeting; attended on 2 February.

Officers have engaged the NUJ, Regional Economic Partnership, and Culture North East, all of whom intend to respond to the consultation.

Ofcom Consultation – Key Issues Highlighted

Officers' draft response sets out the following key points:

1. **Opposition to increased sharing** of up to 70% of the STV North 6pm bulletin, which would materially weaken distinct regional coverage.
2. **Risk to public service broadcasting purpose**, particularly at peak time.
3. **Questioning financial assumptions**, noting strong reported group profits and positive STV North accounts.
4. **Strong public demand** for a distinct regional service based on polling and long-term viewing behaviour.
5. **Concerns over weakening recently renewed licence obligations** (effective January 2025).
6. **Significant redaction** of STV's financial evidence limiting public scrutiny.
7. **Disproportionate impact on rural and island communities**, undermining equal treatment across Scotland.
8. **Notable economic impacts**, including potential job losses and freelancer displacement, being mapped through the REP.
9. **Proposals appear to reflect corporate cost-reduction**, rather than public interest need.
10. **Council position:** retention of a fully distinct North service at 6pm and continuation of separate regional news provision.

Meeting with Ofcom – 2 February 2026

At this meeting, Ofcom officials outlined the rationale for consulting on licence changes, citing:

- The broader changes in the broadcasting environment;
- High cost of news production;
- Changing audience behaviour;
- STV's financial pressures, and Ofcom's view that risks to licence viability must be addressed.

Ofcom emphasised that the consultation is a call for evidence rather than opinion. They acknowledged the strength of feeling locally and recognised that STV's communications have contributed to public concern but were clear that any challenge to the proposals must be supported by fact-based, verifiable evidence.

Officers reiterated Council and regional concerns, including:

- Need for a robust evidence base demonstrating viewer benefit.
- Risks to editorial plurality, especially regarding North East stories of national importance (e.g., energy transition).
- Requirement for greater financial transparency.
- Insufficient evidence that digital alternatives are viable substitutes for linear regional distinctiveness.
- Need for clearer safeguards to protect regional representation.

Next Steps

- Officers will continue to coordinate messaging with Regional Economic Partners and key stakeholders.
- Final Council consultation response will be submitted to Ofcom by 9 February 2026.
- Officers will provide further updates to Members as required.

Committee Instructions (for reference)

1st October Council

Minutes:

The Council had before it an urgent notice of motion by Councillors Yuill, Allard, Malik and Brooks in the following terms:-

“That this Council:

1. Recognises the importance of the North East and North of Scotland regional news services provided by STV North / Grampian TV over 60 years.
2. Notes the undertakings given by STV, at the time it took over Grampian TV in 1997, that the separate North East and North of Scotland regional news programmes would be maintained.
3. Deplores the announcement by STV that it intends to end its STV North news programming and the reported loss of 60 jobs associated with this.
4. Notes that Aberdeen City Council's Employability Team, through Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE), is ready to support individuals facing the loss of their jobs.
5. Agrees that the Council will seek to work with others, including the National Union of Journalists, to make the case for the retention of STV North news programming and, in particular, instructs the Chief Executive to make representations to this effect to STV, Ofcom, the Scottish Government, and UK Government.”

The Council resolved:-

to approve the urgent notice of motion.

10th December Council

Minutes:

The Council had before it the minute of meeting of Aberdeen City Council of 1 October 2025.

The Council resolved:-

- (i) To approve the minute; and
- (ii) To request the Chief Officer – City Development to provide an update to Members on the latest situation with regard to the urgent motion on STV