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“18 months to transform the schedules” as Channel 4 calls time on Big Brother

Press Release

- **Original drama budget to be boosted by £20 million from 2011**

Channel 4 is planning the most significant creative transformation in its history after deciding not to renew its rights deal for Big Brother when its contract ends in 2010.

The decision will free up to 200 first-run hours in peak time across Channel 4 and E4 from 2011, as well as many millions of pounds for original commissions across Channel 4's network of TV channels and online services.

Announcing that next year's series of Celebrity Big Brother and Big Brother would be the last on the network, Director of Television and Content, Kevin Lygo, said Channel 4 would take the opportunity to review its commissioning strategies in all genres.

Lygo said the decision not to recommission Big Brother had been dictated more by creative considerations than commercial ones. He explained: “Big Brother is still profitable for Channel 4 despite its reduced popularity and there could have been the option to renew it on more favourable terms. That's what a purely commercial broadcaster would have done, but Channel 4 has a public remit to champion new forms of creativity. That remit to push the boundaries has been an essential part of the weird chemistry behind Big Brother's success, but it's now what is telling us that the programme has reached a natural end point on Channel 4 and it's time to move on.”

“Cancelling Big Brother does not solve Channel 4's funding issues; this year we've nearly £125 million less to spend on programmes than we did a couple of years ago and budgets for next year may have to be reduced further. However, assuming advertising revenues stop deteriorating at some point, we should have greater flexibility in how we spend our commissioning budget; the significant sums that have been committed to Big Brother in the past should now be available to boost budgets in genres, such as drama, that have had to be cut back sharply during the downturn.”

Julian Bellamy, Head of Channel 4, added: “Big Brother will leave a huge hole and filling it will involve the most fundamental creative overhaul in our history. We've 18 months to transform the schedule; today's announcement is our biggest-ever creative call-to-arms to producers to come forward with their very best ideas.”

Because of the longer lead times involved, Channel 4 has already begun reviewing its drama commissioning strategy and is intending to allocate an additional £20 million annually from the money freed up by cancelling Big Brother to commission more drama across Channel 4 and E4 from 2011 onwards.

Lygo said these extra funds would be focused on delivering more event dramas for Channel 4, following the success of mini-series such as **Red Riding** and **The Devil's Whore**, as well as seeking more quirky, returnable series aimed at younger audiences for Channel 4 and E4, in the mould of **Shameless** and **Skins**. Channel 4's drama ambitions also extend to finding a long-running comedy drama and continuing to commission ambitious single films that can sit at the heart of campaigning seasons.

To underline its increased commitment to drama, Channel 4 has announced new commissions for transmission in the second half of 2010 and beyond. These include: a four part serial from BAFTA winning director Shane Meadows, **We Were Faces**; a four part adaptation of William Boyd's best selling novel **Any Human Heart**; and, a new four part Peter Kosminsky drama, **Homeland** - *see separate release*.

Lygo said: "Channel 4 is at its best when it does things that others don't or won't. This is a fresh opportunity to reach out to audiences underserved by drama on the more mainstream channels. We don't want to be prescriptive about themes or formats; we just want the most creative ideas from Britain's best new and established drama talent."

Bellamy stressed Channel 4 was not looking for a like-for-like replacement for Big Brother but for lots of new ways to refresh the schedule. He said the channel was hoping to commission some entertainment-led stunts and events to maintain a sense of fun about its summer schedule. He said Channel 4 would also be looking to increase its commitment to comedy across its network of channels, with an ongoing emphasis on new writing and performance talent, as well as to commission a greater number of shows with strong cross-platform elements, such as **Embarrassing Bodies**.

Bellamy concluded: "Big Brother has been our most influential and popular programme over the last decade. It's been hugely innovative in its own right, has provoked a really astonishing level of public debate and has been an underappreciated showcase for social diversity and youth culture. Its success has also helped support an extraordinary range of creativity across Channel 4; inevitably we're both excited and ever-so-slightly terrified by the prospect of getting by without it.

"We're very grateful to everyone at Endemol who has worked so hard to keep the show fresh and engaging for so long and to the viewers who have remained loyal to the programme and who will be disappointed by our decision. The final series will be an opportunity to give Big Brother an appropriate send-off and celebrate one of the most extraordinary programmes not just in the history of Channel 4 but of TV in general."

Notes to editors

- A Big Brother fact sheet is available from Channel 4 Press Front Desk; 020 7306 8444; press_front_desk@channel4.co.uk

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