



An update was also provided on the plans for performance regulation. A consultation on the operating licence will be published in the coming months.

ACNI:

- Noted that the rules on due impartiality and accuracy would mainly apply to news programmes
- Asked about Ofcom's likely approach to setting targets for the BBC and noted that the starting point should be existing licence conditions.
- Noted that Ofcom will produce guidance on distinctiveness.
- Was encouraged that Ofcom was looking at the public purpose for the BBC on learning.
- Noted the difference in representation and portrayal and how these might be measured.
- Made the point that any audience research must have a representative sample size for Northern Ireland.

*Action: Committee to be kept informed on developments around the BBC and to be given the opportunity to provide input as appropriate.*

#### **4. Parcel Surcharging Research: Chris Rowsell, Richard Orpin, Jack Gaches**

The team provided information on Ofcom's research on Parcel Surcharging in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The team noted that the research revealed that the three main reasons for parcel companies to charge extra for delivering to Northern Ireland or Scotland were; population density, transport over water and distance from delivery hub.

ACNI:

- Noted that Ofcom will conduct further research to get more insight into this topic.
- Urged Ofcom to make the research data available to consumers and consumer bodies (such as the NI Consumer Council) to engage with policy makers
- Asked whether online retailers could be encouraged to provide another option (for example Royal Mail) for parcel delivery to Northern Ireland.
- Noted that Royal Mail accounted for the majority of parcels delivered in Northern Ireland and across the UK.
- Commented that there should be no reason for online retailers not to deliver to Northern Ireland as the main parcel operators all provide a service to Northern Ireland (albeit at a higher cost in some instances).
- Noted that the NI Consumer Council is to be invited to attend the next ACNI meeting in March.

*Action: Ofcom to investigate how it might share the research.*

#### **5. Annual Plan: Maureen Edmondson**

The Committee made the following comments on the proposed Annual Plan for 2017/18:

- Noted the changing policy and regulatory landscape which we are now operating in ahead of the UK's exit from the EU and welcomed Ofcom's plans to work with relevant international stakeholders to support and protect the interests of UK

consumers and businesses. This is especially important for given that NI shares a border with another Member State.

- Maintained its view that while promoting competition to allow markets to work effectively for consumers may apply in many market areas within the UK, regulatory intervention may be required for certain areas, particularly in rural areas and the devolved nations.
- Would like to see more of a focus on SMEs within the Plan – particularly in relation to proposals to increase broadband speeds and extend mobile coverage
- Ofcom’s work on Parcel Surcharging and Nuisance Calls will be very beneficial to consumers and would like to see timeframes attached to these. It will also be necessary to make the parcel data available so it can be brought to the attention of policy makers and used to achieve change for consumers.
- Noted comments made at the stakeholder event in Northern Ireland on the low take-up of DAB radio listening and would like this acknowledged in any future Ofcom work on digital radio.
- Welcomed the proposal to publish better, more granular information and urged that information is presented in an easy to understand and clear way.
- Welcomed proposals on protecting audiences from harmful content in TV, radio and on-demand services.
- Stated it would like further information and timeframes on Ofcom’s work to limit restrictions on the use of mobile repeaters given consumers frustration with poor mobile coverage indoors.
- ACNI was encouraged by the steps taken to introduce Board Members in each of the Devolved Nations.
- Acknowledged that customer awareness of ADR schemes is low and welcomes Ofcom’s target of conducting a review of these schemes in order to make them more effective for consumers and SME’s.

Action            *Draft response to be shared with members for comments/approval*

## **6. Government and Parliamentary Update: Mark Sweeney**

Mark gave an update on the Digital Economy Bill. The Bill contains measures relating to Ofcom including appeals reform, the broadband USO, and confirmation of Ofcom’s powers to set rules on switching and auto compensation. The Bill also allows for the appointment of an Ofcom Board Member for Northern Ireland.

Mark also provided further information on recent BBC developments.

## **7. ACNI response to Consumer Council for Northern Ireland’s Forward Work Programme 2017/2018**

The committee considered the Consumer Council’s Draft Forward Work Plan, looking specifically at areas relevant to Ofcom’s work and remit.

The committee made the following comments:

- The Committee noted the Consumer Rights initiative and the focus on increased collaboration between a number of organisations to make it easier for consumers to find consumer information and receive help, where needed. The Committee encouraged the Council to engage in more partnerships of this kind, including those with a UK-wide remit such as Ofcom.

- The Committee noted that price comparison tools for broadband services already exist and suggested “signposting” of these might be an effective way of meeting the Consumer Council’s objective.
- The Committee also noted that Ofcom already does a lot of work promoting information on switching, publishing complaints data etc. This too could be “signposted” by the Consumer Council.
- The Committee suggested a useful additional focus for the Council would be assistance to “vulnerable consumers”.
- The Committee noted the important work the Council has done to highlight the problem of online parcel delivery in Northern Ireland. The Committee suggests the Council should use the research it and Ofcom has gathered to develop a clear strategy that would deliver tangible improvements for consumers. The Committee recommended the Council highlight the issue with government ministers and departments in Northern Ireland and, working with consumer advocacy bodies in Scotland and Wales, lobby the UK government to get a better outcome for consumers.
- The Committee welcomes efforts to raise awareness of ADR schemes and encourages the Council and Ofcom to work together to promote and signpost these from the CCNI website. It is also important that these ADR schemes are seen to be effective in delivering good outcomes for consumers.
- The Committee noted and welcomed the important work the Council does on behalf of consumers in Northern Ireland, where Royal Mail’s Universal Service is important and highly valued by consumers

*Action: Response to be drafted and sent in response to Consumer Council’s proposed work programme*

## **8. CCP Update: Fiona Lennox**

Fiona gave the Committee an update on the Communications Consumer Panel’s latest activities.

She highlighted:

- The panel’s response to Ofcom’s consultation about proposed changes to the General Conditions, particularly on the condition relating to caller line identification (CLI) facilities.
- The Committee was pleased to see the Panel continue its work in this area.
- That the Panel was in the early stages of putting together its Forward Work Plan
- The current vacancy on the Panel for its Member from Scotland.

*Action Information on Communications Consumer Panel Member for Scotland to be sent to ACNI  
ACNI to comment on CCP proposed Annual Plan when published*

## **9. Content Board update: Andrew Colman**

Andrew gave an update on the most recent Content Board meetings.

He noted:

- Updates on DAB and research on religious and other specialist channels.

- The volume of work Ofcom was having to do around the regulation of the BBC. BBC Charter Review and implementation is now a standing item on Content Board agendas.

#### **10. Nations Committee update: Maureen Edmondson**

Maureen gave an update on the most recent Nations Committee meeting.

This included:

- An overview of the governance arrangements that will be put in place when Ofcom board members from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are appointed.
- An update on Ofcom's work on the broadband Universal Service Obligation and the Strategic Review of Digital Communications;
- An update on BBC governance and regulation work in Ofcom; and
- A presentation from Channel 4 on programming from the Nations which was not dissimilar to that received by ACNI.

#### **11. AOB**

The Committee discussed the arrangement between the Home Office and EE for the latter to be the new provider of the emergency services network in the UK. The committee were interested in whether this would apply in Northern Ireland and what effect this move might have on mobile coverage and consumers in Northern Ireland.

*Action: Further information to be provided to the Committee on this issue.*

**Ends**

**Date of next meeting: Wednesday 29 March 2017**