

MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-NINTH MEETING OF THE OFCOM ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND HELD AT RIVERSIDE HOUSE ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present

Emma Davison	Member (Chairing the meeting)
Aaqil Ahmed	Member
Matthew Littleford	Member
Alan Nunn	Member
Caroline Roberts-Cherry	Member
Mark Smith	Member

Apologies

Paula Carter	Chair
Richard Spencer	Communications Consumer Panel Member for England

In Attendance

Amanda Britain	Communications Consumer Panel Member for Scotland
Monisha Shah	Content Board Member for England
Tim Suter	Ofcom Board Member
Katie Pettifer	Public Policy Director (items 1-9)
Emma McFadyen	Director, England
David Edwards	Governance & Accountability Team
Other Ofcom Colleagues	

1.	<u>Introduction and declarations of interest</u> Richard Spencer had been appointed recently as the Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) Member for England. He and Paula Carter had sent apologies and Emma Davison would chair the meeting. There were no interests to declare.
2.	<u>Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2019 and matters arising</u> It was noted that the Chair of the Committee, absent on this occasion, was content with the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2019. The minutes were approved by members.
3.	<u>Members' open session</u> It was noted that in August the Chair had signalled Committee interest in learning more about the results of Shropshire 5G farming trials, reported in the press, and in being kept informed about the outcome of the Government competition for future rural tests of 5G. The Committee would return to 5G trials at a future meeting. Discussion of potential health effects of 5G was also of interest to members. Members confirmed the Committee's interest in holding meetings outside London, with options including the Ofcom offices in Baldock, Birmingham and Warrington. It was noted that Channel 4 would attend the next meeting. The broadcaster was in the process of establishing its national headquarters in Leeds and the city was suggested as another potential location. The Executive, in consultation with the Chair, would map next years' meetings with out-of-London locations where appropriate.

	<p>Members were keen to receive feedback on the Committee's impact on Ofcom's work. Diversity, social mobility and disengaged consumers were suggested as debates to which the Committee could add value, in addition to projects with Nations dimensions. When available from Ofcom teams, feedback would be shared with the Committee.</p> <p>It was noted that a Post update had been scheduled for the next meeting. In terms of forward agenda planning, the Draft Ofcom Annual Plan 2020/21 would provide a steer for discussion in a January conference call for Committee members.</p>
4.	<p><u>Ofcom Board update</u></p> <p>The Committee noted recent topics discussed by the Ofcom Board. These included a six-monthly 'state of the market' review and an update on negotiations between the Government and the mobile network operators (MNOs) on a plan to improve mobile coverage (the 'mobile deal'); and the latest developments in the DCMS Supply Chain Review, concerning network security and resilience of infrastructure.</p>
5.	<p><u>Consumer advocacy in the telecoms sector</u></p> <p>Members were briefed on the DCMS consultation on <i>Reforming Consumer Advocacy in Telecoms</i> for England, Wales and NI. DCMS was seeking views on three options: replicating arrangements in energy and post, by appointing Citizens Advice as the new statutory advocate; expanding the funding and remit of the CCP; and creation of a new arm's length body.</p> <p>There was discussion of issues including Citizens Advice, its structure and operation at a local level and its resources to handle telecoms work; the extent to which reform in telecoms advocacy would be a priority for the new Government; and the remit of a telecoms advocacy body.</p>
6.	<p><u>Connected Nations report</u></p> <p>Members were updated on work to produce Ofcom's next annual <i>Connected Nations</i> report that tracks progress in fixed and mobile services in the UK and summarises the role Ofcom plays in helping to further improve them. In addition, Ofcom published two smaller updates a year, the most recent in September based on May 2020 data and on the key changes in coverage since the last report.</p> <p>Members discussed issues including the availability of data, eg on the percentage of premises covered by fibre and 5G; reporting on 4G; mobile coverage along rail routes.</p>
7.	<p><u>Communications Consumer Panel update</u></p> <p>Members noted a paper setting out recent work by the Communications Consumer Panel (CCP).</p>

	<p>Members were updated briefly on the Panel’s plans to set up four Hubs, one for each of the Nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and one for the English Regions. The intention was to strengthen the consumer and citizen voice across the UK by ensuring input from local areas into communications sector advocacy. Panel members representing the England, NI, Scotland and Wales were well placed to convene, quarterly, a wide range of stakeholder representatives in their respective Nations.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p><u>Public Policy update (including Government and Parliamentary matters)</u></p> <p>Members were updated on key UK Government and Parliamentary developments since the last Committee meeting.</p> <p>It was noted that Ofcom was continuing to build on its preparations for regulation in the event of a no deal Brexit and was considering priorities and approach if the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC) was not transposed.</p> <p>Also noted was the Government’s consultation proposing that Ofcom take on responsibility for regulating video-sharing platform services, at least until an online harms regulator was in place, and Government ambitions and £5bn funding for “gigabit-capability” in remote parts of the country.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p><u>700 MHz clearance update</u></p> <p>Members were updated on the positive progress of Ofcom’s 700 MHz clearance programme, spectrum that has been used by terrestrial TV and for programme making and special events but to be used in the future for mobile data. The programme remained ongoing and was on course to conclude in April 2020.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p><u>BBC Annual Report and News Review</u></p> <p>Ofcom would be publishing its second Annual Report and Performance Report on the BBC in late October 2019. The Committee was briefed on Ofcom’s approach to this year’s report. This would be to follow-up on the main findings from last year’s report; report compliance against all BBC operating licence conditions, for the first time; and draw on the work carried out by the News and Current Affairs Review which would be published at the same time.</p> <p>Members queried the implications for the BBC where it had not delivered on its obligations. It was too early to tell in some respects, since it would take time for some of the BBC’s actions to filter through, but one option could be to strengthen some licence conditions and that would involve public consultation. Issues raised by members included gender gaps, eg the low proportion of women aged 55 on screen; and the attitudes of older audiences to diversity.</p>

	<p>The review of BBC News and Current Affairs focussed on the issues of relevance; distinctiveness and quality; and trust. There was brief discussion of complaints about a recent edition of BBC Breakfast concerning due impartiality. Other issues discussed included the expression of political viewpoints; and the diversity of England and how well it was served by the BBC.</p>
11.	<p><u>Ofcom Annual Plan 2020/21</u></p> <p>Ofcom was seeking early input to its Draft Annual Plan 2020/21 from the Advisory Committees. Expectation was that Ofcom would retain its existing nine priority work areas but it was noted that Brexit could result in changes to the plan.</p> <p>Issues raised by members included the importance of driving an inclusion and diversity agenda; realistic consumer expectations concerning 5G and fibre broadband; the importance of fairness for consumers; broadcaster and independent producer gender pay gaps; the impact of BFI Diversity Standards and potential learning for broadcasters like the BBC.</p> <p>The draft Annual Plan would be published in December for consultation over a ten-week period. In January 2020 there would be events in each of the Nations to engage with stakeholders and the final Plan would be published in March 2020.</p>
12.	<p><u>Information item</u></p> <p>Telecoms and broadcast complaints: The paper was noted and welcomed.</p>
13.	<p><u>AOB</u></p> <p>There was no other business.</p>