

MINUTES OF THE SIXTY-SECOND MEETING OF THE OFCOM ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND HELD AT RIVERSIDE HOUSE ON 22nd NOVEMBER 2017

Present

John Varney	Chair
Graham Creelman	Member
Emma Davison	Member (via video conference from Warrington)
Becky Hogge	Member
Caroline Roberts-Cherry	Member (via video conference from Warrington)

In Attendance

David Edwards, Assistant Corporation Secretary
 Steve Gettings, Corporation Secretary and Director – England
 Chris Holland, Communications Consumer Panel
 Emma McFadyen, Principal, Governance & Accountability
 Colleagues from Channel 4 Corporation (C4C) (item 8)
 Other Ofcom Colleagues

1.	<p><u>Introduction and declarations of interest</u></p> <p>The Chair welcomed all present to the sixty-second meeting.</p>
2.	<p><u>Minutes of the meeting held on 27th September 2017 and matters arising</u></p> <p>Subject to minor amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 27th September 2017 were approved.</p>
3.	<p><u>Regulatory political update</u></p> <p>Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting and members had received a paper to brief the Committee on recent and current Government and legislative issues.</p> <p>It was noted that DCMS was considering responses to its recent consultation on design of the broadband USO and an announcement on its approach was expected shortly. There was discussion of “garden” towns and villages, expected to be built across England, and necessary provision of digital infrastructure and connectivity. It was noted that the Department for Communities and Local Government was reviewing planning policies (a recent consultation had included a proposal to require local authorities to set out how provision of high quality digital infrastructure would be delivered). It was noted that the Digital, Culture, Sport and Media Committee was conducting an inquiry on the subject of Fake News.</p> <p>The Committee was updated on Ofcom’s work to improve the accessibility of on-line digital programme service (ODPS), with a consultation expected shortly and prior to new rules being introduced by the Government. It was noted that the Ofcom Chairman had recently commented publicly on the need for on-demand platforms to improve their accessibility.</p>

	In addition to the consultation, Ofcom would be publishing related research on provision of accessible ODPS.
4.	<p><u>Ofcom Annual Plan</u></p> <p>Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting and members had been provided with a paper and Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan 2018/19, signed-off by the Ofcom Board and due for publication shortly. Ofcom would welcome a response to its consultation on the Proposed Annual Plan.</p> <p>The Committee welcomed the specific references in the Plan to challenges in England. Issues discussed included Fake News online and protection of consumers and the impact of unlicensed services on licensed broadcast services; prominence of customer service, complaint handling and tackling nuisance calls on Ofcom's agenda; value in links and reporting on delivery of last year's Annual Plan, members noting Ofcom's separate publication of its Annual Report; cyber security and resilience of national transmission networks; EPGs, PSB prominence, content discovery and aggregation.</p> <p>Ofcom's project to review the EPG code and PSB prominence would be considered as an agenda item at a future meeting of the Committee.</p>
5.	<p><u>Net Neutrality</u></p> <p>Members had been provided with a paper and an Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to talk about net neutrality. The focus was on 'zero-rating' by ISPs, the practice of providing free access to certain websites, currently offered by some UK mobile network operators and whether this was problematic.</p> <p>There was discussion of issues including the importance of distinguishing zero-rating from bundling; EE's offer of free Apple music, ie music streaming for customers without 'eating' into data allowances; communications providers acceptance of net neutrality; termination charges; and the retention of current regulation post-Brexit.</p>
6.	<p><u>Post</u></p> <p>An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to brief the Committee on recent developments in Post. Issues raised in discussion included the level of customer satisfaction in England, which was close to levels in other parts of the UK but a difference being that English regions did not appear to be subject to the parcel surcharging experienced elsewhere. A member commented that they thought Ofcom's customer satisfaction data had some differences compared to industry figures. Ofcom would continue to monitor Royal Mail's</p>

	performance on efficiency, quality of service and consumers' experience of the postal sector.
7.	<p><u>Communications Consumer Panel update</u></p> <p>Members had been provided with a summary note on the recent activity of the Panel/ACOD and Chris Holland provided additional context. He highlighted the Panel's recent research publication <i>Access to broadcast and on-demand content: Time to catch up!</i> (on the provision of access services: subtitles, audio description and signing). The research findings would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting.</p> <p>There was brief discussion of other current Panel interests, including the scope of the line rental cut, from April 2018, for customers who only take landline from BT; and a desire to see proportional billing in instances of under-performing broadband services.</p>
8.	<p><u>Channel 4</u></p> <p>Colleagues from C4C joined the meeting and spoke about Channel 4's role in supporting the independent production sector; its Nations and regions quota, rising to 9% of volume and spend from 2020, and its strategy to achieve that; spend in the English regions; and engagement with different communities. The latter was of particular interest to the Committee, keen to see disadvantaged communities and diverse communities represented on screen.</p> <p>Issues discussed included the challenges of securing advertising revenues; the culture at C4C; sustaining scripted productions outside London; and value, or otherwise, in having programme commissioners based in the regions.</p>
9.	<p><u>Content Board update</u></p> <p>Members were updated on the recent discussions of the Content Board, including content-related work in Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan 2018/19; standards cases; Ofcom reviews of children's programming and of outside London programming guidance; on-demand accessibility; and Facebook. It was noted that a member had attended an Ofcom stakeholder engagement event to obtain views on the state of the production sector in the Nations and regions and to understand the impact of the current guidance on the delivery of regional productions and programming.</p>
10.	<u>AOB</u>

	Members noted that interviews had been held to fill a vacancy on the Committee and that a new appointment was expected to be made in the New Year.
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Chairman.....

Date.....