

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTIETH MEETING OF THE OFCOM ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND HELD AT RIVERSIDE HOUSE ON 2 DECEMBER 2019

Present

Paula Carter	Chair
Aaqil Ahmed	Member
Matthew Littleford	Member
Alan Nunn	Member
Caroline Roberts-Cherry	Member
Mark Smith	Member

Apologies

Emma Davison	Member
Richard Spencer	Communications Consumer Panel Member for England

In Attendance

Monisha Shah	Content Board Member for England
Tim Suter	Ofcom Board Member
Katie Pettifer	Public Policy Director
Emma McFadyen	Director, England
David Edwards	Governance & Accountability Team
Other Ofcom Colleagues	

1.	<u>Introduction and declarations of interest</u> The Chair welcomed members and attendees who then introduced themselves. There were no interests to declare.
2.	<u>Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2019 and matters arising</u> The minutes were approved by members. It was noted that Members would take part in a conference call on 30 January 2020 to progress agenda planning and Committee priorities for the coming year. Channel 4 had expected to attend today's meeting to update members on its Nations and Regions output, with a focus on England, but the update would take place at the next Committee meeting on 12 March 2020. With Channel 4's National HQ now in Leeds, the Chair suggested that the March meeting be held there or close by at the University of Bradford, being one member's suggestion. The Chair requested that these options be pursued outside the meeting.
3.	<u>PSB update</u> Members were updated on Ofcom's work programme to review and determine whether PSB objectives remained relevant and fit for purpose in an increasingly online world and to include audience research, analysis of market trends and of whether free universal PSB remained necessary. To facilitate a national conversation there would be events to engage with industry stakeholders and with the public across the UK.

	<p>Issues discussed included the BFI's Young Audiences Content Fund (YACF) to support creation of high quality content for under-18s, Ofcom engagement with YACF being suggested by the Committee; the importance of engagement with diverse and minority groups; willingness to pay the licence fee when subscription services like Netflix were available; getting the language right, ie whether 'PSB' was meaningful to all; PSB-like content on non-PSB platforms; PSB to entertain and to bring people together as well as to inform or educate; England focused Ofcom PSB events and audience research.</p> <p>It was noted that the Committee wished to engage with Ofcom's PSB team and this would be pursued outside the meeting, including participation in stakeholder events.</p>
4.	<p><u>Ofcom Board and Content Board update</u></p> <p>The Committee noted recent topics discussed by the Ofcom Board and the Content Board (minutes and notes of their meetings being available on the Ofcom website).</p>
5.	<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. It was noted that the UK parties had published their General Election manifestos, that Labour proposed to nationalise Britain's broadband network and that the Conservatives wished to fast track the Shared Rural Network (SRN) deal that the outgoing government had agreed, in principle, with the mobile network operators (MNOs).</p> <p>Presuming that the SRN deal would be finalised, Ofcom would then make a final decision on auction design for the 700 MHz and 3.6 GHz spectrum bands. It would also monitor and report on the MNOs' progress in achieving better mobile coverage.</p>
6.	<p><u>Post</u></p> <p>In the context of recent appointments to the Committee, members were briefed on how Ofcom regulates post, its key duties and annual monitoring of the postal market; Royal Mail's five-year strategic plan, published in May 2019 and its half year results 2019/20; Ofcom's post work programme; and its enforcement work.</p> <p>Although no specific issues appeared to affect postal users in England that did not affect those in the remainder of the UK, it was noted that most Royal Mail revenues were generated in England. In relation to postal services, the Chair requested data for England split rural and urban. Regarding post priorities for Ofcom's Plan of Work 2020/21, these were expected to be monitoring, including the parcels market; a review of Royal Mail efficiency; and research to better understand the needs of postal users.</p>
7.	<p><u>Connected Nations</u></p>

	<p>Members were briefed on the key findings from Ofcom's <i>Connected Nations 2019</i> report, due for publication later in the month. This was an annual report to track progress in fixed and mobile services, including new 5G services, in the UK and to summarise the role played by Ofcom in helping to further improve them. In addition to the main report, Nations supplements, including an England report, an interactive report and data downloads would be available. In relation to 5G, it was noted that it was too early to judge what constituted a good service.</p> <p>Issues raised by members included coverage forecasts; value in maps that overlaid broadband and mobile coverage, postal services in addition if possible; overlay of consumer complaints data, which could make another interesting comparison; the 'very disconnected' and it being noted that some premises would not qualify for Broadband USO; and the importance of fixed, mobile and postal services to SMEs. A member suggested a rural focus for a future Committee meeting.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p><u>Broadband USO</u></p> <p>Members were briefed on the progress of delivery of the Broadband USO. From 20 March 2020 consumers would, based on eligibility criteria including a cost threshold of £3,400, be able to request a connection from BT or KCOM if they did not otherwise have access to a decent, affordable broadband service.</p> <p>The Chair raised the issue of consumer awareness of Broadband USO, which the Executive confirmed was likely to include both general and more targeted information, the latter for households most likely to be eligible. Another member raised the importance of audit/reporting measures, to ensure that the cost of USO connections were not overestimated.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p><u>Members' open session</u></p> <p>The Chair reported briefly on a recent meeting she had attended with the Ofcom Chairman and Chief Executive together with the chairmen of the Advisory Committees (ACs) for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Useful Ofcom feedback had been provided on the advice given by the four ACs and there had been a discussion about PSB. The Chairmen of the ACs had agreed to remain in contact.</p> <p>Issues highlighted by members included migration from the PSTN network to VoIP and what this could mean for telecoms resellers; Ofcom's role in relation to private 5G networks, eg in factory or campus settings, and to 5G "network slicing". The Chair commented that it could be useful to hold a technologies-related discussion at a future meeting.</p> <p>Although regulation of social media was not currently part of Ofcom's remit, there was brief discussion about video sharing platforms (VSP) and the exploitation of minors. It was noted that the Government had issued a consultation proposing Ofcom as the VSP regulator, at least on an interim basis until a future online harms regulator was established.</p>

10.	<p><u>5G and health</u></p> <p>Members were briefed on recent developments related to how radio waves used to deliver 5G mobile services might affect health, following a number of claims about adverse risks made on the internet and in stories from various media outlets. It was noted that Public Health England (PHE) had said that there was no indication that 5G would create new health issues and that current electromagnetic field limits remained applicable. It was further noted that in view of its responsibility for authorising civil spectrum use, Ofcom planned to conduct surveys around some of the early 5G site deployments and would publish the results. There was brief discussion about the need for public information/ education about 5G and who would provide this, eg PHE or Ofcom or DCMS.</p>
11.	<p><u>General Election – overview on Ofcom’s regulatory duties</u></p> <p>Members were given an overview of Ofcom’s duties related to election advertising, party election broadcasts and General Election coverage on radio and TV. It was noted that when a complaint was made that raised a substantive issue during an election period, eg concerning due impartiality, and, if upheld, might require redress before the election, it would be considered by Ofcom’s Election Committee. It was noted that Ofcom would act quickly to determine the outcome of any such complaints.</p>
12.	<p><u>Ofcom Plan of Work 2020/21</u></p> <p>Members were briefed on the status of Ofcom’s Plan of Work 2020/21. It was noted that the draft Plan had been signed-off for publication by the Ofcom Board and a consultation would commence at the beginning of January and include stakeholder events (the Chair expected to attend the London event on 28 January). The final Plan of Work would be published at the end of March 2020.</p> <p>When published, a link to the draft Plan would be sent to allow members to comment and contribute to a Committee response.</p>
13.	<p><u>Information items</u></p> <p>Consumer Panel update: A paper was noted and welcomed.</p> <p>Telecoms and broadcast complaints: A paper was noted and welcomed.</p> <p>ACE planning: A paper had been provided, to map agendas and with suggested themes for 2020 Committee meetings. It would be discussed further at the January conference call.</p>
14.	<p><u>AOB</u></p> <p>There was no other business.</p>