

Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland (ACNI) response to Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan 2017/18

1. ACNI welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan for 2017/18. We have had the opportunity to make verbal input during some of our discussions with the team. We are pleased to note that many of the items previously mentioned are now included in the proposed plan.
2. We welcome Ofcom's recognition of the changing policy and regulatory landscape which we are now operating in (ahead of the UK's exit from the EU) and plans to work with relevant international stakeholders to support and protect the interests of UK consumers and businesses. The Committee has previously highlighted the impact of Brexit for Northern Ireland, taking into account the region's border with the Republic of Ireland and the EU.
3. ACNI recognises the efforts made by Ofcom to ensure that policy and regulation take account of devolved nations concerns. As Ofcom takes over responsibility for regulating the BBC, we would ask that this pattern continues in all of the related work streams.
4. We are encouraged by the steps taken to introduce Board Members in each of the Devolved Nations.
5. While much of the work on the structure of Openreach has been done, ACNI is acutely aware of the structural differences in NI compared to GB. While the principles should be the same, we recognise there may be differences in practice because of the small size of Northern Ireland. ACNI is keen to ensure that consumers in Northern Ireland are not at any disadvantage compared to those across the rest of the UK.
6. As an island nation, Northern Ireland citizens will remain quite reliant on post. ACNI is keen to ensure that the work on post is not crowded out of a very busy plan.
7. ACNI believes that Ofcom's work on Parcel Surcharging will be an important contribution to finding a solution for Northern Ireland citizens. However, given the limited mandate for Ofcom in relation to parcels, asks that research data be made available to others who can leverage it to achieve early and better outcomes for users.
8. We 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. Even more so than with other regions, SME's are the backbone of the economy in Northern Ireland.
9. ACNI notes 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.
10. ACNI maintains its view that while promoting competition to allow markets to work effectively for consumers can work for many market areas within the UK, regulatory intervention may be required for certain areas, particularly in rural areas and the devolved nations. ACNI is aware of the good progress made on mobile coverage and the improved access to faster broadband. However, there are still significant numbers of SME's and households who will not have access to these essential services unless there is government-led intervention. ACNI therefore welcomes the

broadband USO and maintains a view that it should be technology-neutral so that all in Northern Ireland can have access.

11. ACNI 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. Either coverage needs to get better much more quickly or stronger steps made to ensure availability of repeaters that are legitimate.
12. We are very impatient about the length of time it is taking to significantly reduce Nuisance Calls. ACNI indicated that it would be beneficial to consumers to see timeframes attached to this objective.
13. ACNI welcomes the proposal to publish better, more granular information on services but urges that information is presented in an easy to understand and clear way. Information is only helpful if understood and if there is a sufficiently competitive market in which to use it.
14. ACNI welcomes proposals on protecting audiences from harmful content in TV, radio and on-demand services, but realises that in areas of converged content more work will be needed to avoid damage.
15. ACNI acknowledges that customer awareness of ADR schemes is low and welcomes Ofcom's target of conducting a review of these schemes to render them more user-friendly and effective.

Ends
6 February 2017