

Minutes of the 92nd meeting of the Advisory Committee for England, held at Riverside House and via Teams on 5 June 2025

Present

Paula Carter	Chair
Richard Bellamy	Member
Caroline Gardner	Member (via Teams)
Edleen John	Member
Mauro Mortali	Member
Kavya Sharma	Member
Andrew Squires May	Member

In attendance

Angela Dean	Ofcom Board Member for England
Grant Davis	Communications Consumer Panel Member
Stephen Darke	Director, England
David Edwards	Governance Manager
A colleague from Action with Communities in Rural England (mins 21 – 22)	
Other Ofcom colleagues	

Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting, held at the Ofcom office in London, including Grant Davis present as observer from the Communications Consumer Panel (CCP). A special welcome was extended to the new Members, Richard Bellamy, Kavya Sharma and Andrew Squires May, attending their first meeting.
2. Robert Hammond, CCP Member for England, and Dekan Apajee, Content Board Member for England, usually attended as observers. Both had sent apologies.

Declaration of Members' Interests

3. No additional interests were declared.

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2025 and matters arising – Minutes 91(23)

4. The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2025 were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair as an accurate record.
5. As part of work to implement part 5 of the Media Act 2024, publication of Ofcom's consultation related to the introduction of new requirements for local analogue commercial radio had been delayed. The consultation¹ would be shared with Members in due course.

¹ [Consultation: Local news and information on analogue commercial radio - Ofcom](#)

6. Since the last meeting a Member had taken part in a discussion about the Telecoms Access Review, with Ofcom colleagues and some members from Ofcom's other national Advisory Committees.

Ofcom Board update

7. Angela Dean highlighted some recent topics discussed by the Board (minutes and notes of meetings being available on the Ofcom website). The Board had met three times since the last Committee meeting, in March, April and May.

8. Recently the Board had discussed matters including requirements for local analogue commercial radio stations to provide 'locally gathered' news (Media Act 2024 implementation); noted that Ofcom had been working on improvements to its mobile coverage checker (to be relaunched shortly²); regulation of UK data centres; upgrade of Ofcom's spectrum licensing platform; online safety (OS) and Protection of Children codes of practice, which had been had been published within the statutory deadline; and plans to publish an Additional Safety Measures consultation to build on initial OS Codes of Practice. The Committee noted that the Board had approved Ofcom's budget and Plan of Work for 2025/26.

Content Board update

9. Members noted recent topics discussed by the Content Board (minutes being available on the Ofcom website). The Content Board had met twice since the last Committee meeting, in March and April, and had discussed Ofcom's work to implement Part 2 of the Media Act 2024, on PSM prominence and availability; kitemarking of online journalism; highlights from the Content Board's Editorial Standards work; AI and news providers; Ofcom's Media Literacy 3-year strategy and its Channel 4 work programme.

10. The Committee touched on news issues including the veracity of online news; the intersectionality of local news and local democracy; fact checking; social media and influencers as news sources; and trust in news. Ofcom had provided [written evidence to the Lords Digital Committee's Future of News Inquiry](#) and this would be shared with Members, in addition to Ofcom's most recent annual [News Consumption Survey](#).

Consumer Panel update – ACE 7(25)

11. Grant Davis reported on recent CCP activity and current priorities (minutes of meetings being available on the Panel's website). Grant flagged that the Panel had responded to Ofcom's [Consultation: Review of the universal postal service and other postal regulation](#); continued to have concerns about VoIP migration (a related National Telecare Communications Campaign had been launched earlier in the week); potential increase in PSTN/ degraded legacy network faults experienced by consumers; and seemingly low uptake of social tariffs amongst consumers who were eligible.

Public Policy update – ACE 8(25)

12. A range of issues were flagged by the Executive. These included publication of Ofcom's [Protection of Children Statement](#) in April and the laying in Parliament of draft codes of practice under the Online Safety Act on the same day, setting out the statutory

² [Mobile Checker - Ofcom](#)

duties providers face and the measures they must take to fulfil them. The Data (Use and Access) Bill was progressing through its various stages in Parliament³. The Bill contained provisions relevant to OS related to coroner access to data (in the event of the death of a child), a regime to allow researcher access to data, and the criminalisation of creation and requesting of non-consensual intimate deepfakes. Members noted recent local elections, including new mayoralities in England. Paula Carter commented that the new Committee chair would wish to take a view on how best to reach out to England’s Metro Mayors.

Media Nations – ACE 9(25)

13. Members noted that the proposed structure of the Media Nations 2025 report, expected to be published at the end of July, would follow that of previous years, with a UK report (very similar to the position for England but the report would seek to draw out some England data) and accompanied by individual Nations reports for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

14. The Committee highlighted that ethnic and cultural diversity were particular features of England but noted that, despite Ofcom efforts to ensure representative data, sample sizes could make meaningful analysis difficult. It was further noted that a key trend continued to be away from linear to online viewing although SVOD growth was beginning to plateau. The Media Nations 2025 report would be circulated to Members in due course.

BBC Programme Update, including Annual Report and Periodic Review – ACE 10(25)

15. Members were briefed on Ofcom’s BBC work programme, in particular its Annual Report on the BBC which would include a section on BBC performance in each Nation. Some key developments in England during 2024/25 were summarised, covering spend and commissioning, creative initiatives in the North East, BBC resource put into local journalism in England, activity in Bradford (City of Culture 2025), and network TV production and audio production outside London. It was noted that this year’s Annual Report would include a Periodic Review of developments over the past five years.

16. Queries raised by the Committee included the BBC’s activity outside London, whether that meant that the people making programmes were local or remained London-based and where editorial decisions were being made. Members raised underserved audiences and stressed young people’s lack of engagement with BBC output and flagged the potential of Radio 5 Sports Extra to showcase minority sports.

A safer life online for women and girls

17. In response to a request from a Member at the previous meeting, colleagues from the OS Group briefed the Committee on Ofcom’s work to create a safer life online for women and girls and which included duties under Section 54 of the Online Safety Act 2023 to produce dedicated guidance for user to user and search services. In February Ofcom had published draft guidance⁴ and planned to publish final guidance by the end of

³ The Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 received Royal Assent on 19 June 2025.

⁴ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/a-safer-life-online-for-women-and-girls>

the year. The guidance focussed on four harms areas: online misogyny; pile-ons and online harassment; domestic abuse; and image-based sexual abuse (a particular focus for enforcement). It also set out nine actions for providers drawing on a 'Safety-by-Design' approach.

18. Members flagged Linq, a recently launched app designed to address image-based abuse with features including screenshot blocking and controls to allow users to grant and revoke access to their content, and noted that victims of harm could also be boys and that misogynistic content was also being circulated amongst and promoted to boys and men.

Natalie Black

19. Natalie Black had joined Ofcom in November 2024, as Group Director, Networks & Communications and as an Executive member of the Ofcom Board. She flagged areas of focus for her Group, including work related to fixed and mobile telecoms, post and network sectors, protection of consumers and promotion of competition, to ensure that infrastructure would work into the future and understand how technology was changing, also leading on AI and its implications, cyber security and resilience.

20. The Committee discussed mobile services, including mobile capacity and an apparent disconnect between coverage metrics and users' actual experience and suggesting a need for more investment in 5G to replicate 2G/3G coverage. A Member flagged the recent experience of major power outages in Spain and Portugal and suggested that there could be resilience lessons for the UK. The Chair thanked Natalie Black and suggested further discussion in the future.

Action with Communities in Rural England

21. The Chair flagged the Committee's ongoing interest in urban and rural communications services, provision and user experience. Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), a charity that supports rural communities, had been invited to share its views on issues including the availability and quality of broadband, mobile and postal services, to help inform the Committee in its advisory role with Ofcom.

22. A range of issues were raised by ACRE. These included whether rurality should be treated as a protected characteristic, perhaps in a way similar to characteristics protected by equality legislation; past privatisations and market failures and how well rural areas had been served; concern that the existing universal postal service could turn into a rural minimum service; dispersed rather than pockets of limited provision of communications service in rural areas; access to adequate broadband and mobile services remained a concern, e.g. in the context of greater reliance on mobile and other devices for financial transactions and the closure of local bank branches; new technologies that could provide benefits (the Youth Hostels Association use of Starlink satellite internet to improve connectivity was highlighted) but there could be cost issues.

Members' open session and future agendas

23. It was noted that Ofcom had published a report [Exploring how people in the UK are affected by 'digital disadvantage'](#) and this would be shared with Members.

24. AbilityNet, a UK charity providing specialist services and support to create a digital world accessible to all, was suggested as an organisation that the Committee

could usefully engage with. It was further noted that the Consumer Panel had recently discussed direct-to-device (D2D) services with colleagues in Ofcom's Spectrum Group and this could be of interest to the Committee. D2D services were delivered by satellite to mobile and other SIM-enabled devices.

25. Discussion at the two Committee meetings later in the year would likely include Ofcom's draft Plan of Work for 2026/27, the Connected Nations report and Channel 4's activity in England (an annual discussion with the broadcaster). The location of future meetings would be confirmed as soon as possible, Leeds or Bradford being suggested as an out-of-London venue.

Information items

26. Broadcast, Postal and Telecoms complaints data (England) – ACE 11(25): Paper noted.

Any Other Business

27. Paula Carter's appointment as Chair had been extended until 31 July 2025. Following the recent appointments to fill Committee vacancies, a process would begin shortly to select and appoint a new Chair from amongst Members.

28. Stephen Darke and Angela Dean thanked Paula Carter and all present commended her excellent chairing and contribution to the work of the Committee and to Ofcom over the past six years.

Date of the Next Meeting

29. The next scheduled Committee meeting would be held on 9 October 2025.