

**Minutes of the 92nd meeting of
the Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland
held hybrid (at Landmark House, Belfast and via Microsoft Teams)
on Thursday 20th June 2024**

Present

Carrie Matchett	ACNI Chair
Aodhan O'Donnell	ACNI Member
Colm Murphy	ACNI Member
Jackie Neill	ACNI Member
Michael Wilson	ACNI Member
Paul Wickens	ACNI Member
Karen Baxter	Ofcom Board Member for Northern Ireland
Maria McCann	Content Board Member for Northern Ireland (via Teams)

In attendance

Jonathan Rose	Northern Ireland Director
James Stinson	Regulatory Affairs Manager
Bimpe Archer	Regulatory Affairs Manager
Jane Hillis	Regulatory Affairs Advisor

NextGen NED observer (via Teams)

Representative from the Communications Consumer Panel (via Teams)

Other Ofcom colleagues (via Teams)

Apologies

Judith Carville	Regulatory Affairs Manager
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Item 1: Welcome, apologies and declaration of Members' Interests

1. A Committee member explained they had been asked to act as interim Chair for the first half of the meeting in the ACNI Chair's absence, after which the ACNI Chair would arrive and resume Chairing.
2. The interim Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
3. Apologies were received from Judith Carville.
4. Karen Baxter and Maria McCann advised they would have to leave the meeting early.
5. Members did not have any new interests to declare.

Item 2: Minutes of the 90th meeting held on 5th December 2023 and Actions

6. The Minutes of the 91st meeting were approved.
7. Members noted the Actions Table from the previous meeting and agreed all actions were complete.

Item 3: Interim Committee Business & Issues since last meeting

8. The interim Chair invited updates from the Connectivity & Consumer and Broadcasting subgroups:
Broadcasting
9. The subgroup lead reported on behalf of the Broadcasting subgroup:
 - Channel 4 relicensing: continued to be a matter of concern, principally in relation to the proposed Out of England production quota.
 - Local Media Review: the subgroup would now be meeting with the Project Team after the General Election.
 - Channel 3 & 5 relicensing: all companies have accepted the terms.Connectivity & Consumer
10. The subgroup lead reported on behalf of the Connectivity & Consumer subgroup:
 - Noted the Committee's responses to Ofcom's work on the Postal USO and End of Contract Notifications.
 - The subgroup expected to respond to Ofcom's review of the Alternative Dispute Resolution schemes.Other Business
11. The NI Director explained the impact of the General Election purdah period on Ofcom's publications schedule. Committee members agreed that a publications schedule for the rest of the year would help the Committee to plan its workflow.
12. Several Committee members had attended a recent Ofcom Making Sense of Media event in Belfast. The Committee agreed that the members' contribution to that event's discussion of Ofcom's three-year Media Literacy strategy would constitute the Committee's response to that consultation.
13. A Committee member had attended the biannual NI Telecoms Stakeholder Forum hosted at Openreach NI in June and reported on the topics discussed including The Access Review, One Touch Switch and PSTN switch-off.
14. The interim Chair noted that a new Communications Consumer Panel member for Northern Ireland should be in post for the Committee's next meeting.

Item 4: Committee discussion on Agenda items:

15. Members discussed the key issues to raise with the Making Sense of Media and BBC Annual Report teams in items 9 and 11.

Item 5: Content Board update from Northern Ireland Member

16. The Content Board member reported on the Board's recent meeting and highlighted several items which had been discussed.
17. The Content Board member assured the Committee that Content Board's work on Channel 4 relicensing was a priority, given its importance to the devolved nations. Members agreed that the main focus should be on how the audience in NI was being served by Channel 4, and whether local independent production companies were getting a fair share of commissions.
18. It was noted the Media Act will also have an impact on how Channel 4 meets its remit and quotas.
19. The Content Board member outlined the scope of Ofcom's forthcoming Public Service Media Review.
20. She explained that an Election Committee had been convened to deal quickly with any broadcasting complaints in relation to the General Election. Guidance on election coverage had also been issued to broadcasters. Members asked to see the guidance.
21. Maria McCann left the meeting.

Item 6: Board update from Northern Ireland Member

22. The Board member reported on the Board's recent meeting and highlighted several items which had been discussed.
23. The Committee discussed the initial post-election period and how it might impact on Ofcom's work.
24. It was noted that Channel 4 relicensing had been the subject of significant discussion at the last two Board meetings, which reflected the strong feelings on Channel 4's past and future performance in the devolved nations.

Item 7: Online Safety Report

25. The Committee Chair joined the meeting. She thanked the interim Chair for leading the meeting.
26. Bimpe Archer introduced her paper and highlighted progress on Ofcom's Illegal Harms work, and the recent Making Sense of Media event in Belfast.
27. The Committee discussed the importance of Ofcom continuing to engage with local stakeholders, and members suggested a number of relevant organisations to engage with.
28. The Chair noted that the Committee would not be formally responding to Ofcom's Protection of Children consultation but would continue to follow the issues for stakeholders in Northern Ireland in particular.

Item 8: Communication Consumer Panel Update

29. The Chair welcomed an executive representative from the CCP.
30. The CCP colleague explained the Panel was currently recruiting for a new NI member who would hopefully be in place by the time of the next Committee meeting.
31. The Committee noted that the planned meeting of the NI Consumer Hub meeting had been postponed until after the General Election.

32. The Committee discussed Ofcom's work on Alternative Dispute Resolution and agreed it would be beneficial for the Consumer & Connectivity subgroup to be mindful of the CCP's work on this subject.
33. The Committee supported further work being carried out on the Minimum Digital Standard of Living. Members suggested that NI would be a good testbed, given the very high availability of full fibre broadband and the average disposable income in NI being significantly lower than the rest of the UK.
34. On PSTN switch-off, the Committee noted BT's postponement of the migration to VOIP until the end of 2027. The Committee echoed the Panel's concern that consumers who are migrated later in the process will not be 'left behind' while the PSTN network degrades. The Committee also noted trials of the battery back-up solution for landlines.

Item 9: Making Sense of Media (MSOM)

35. The Chair welcomed a senior member of the MSOM team.
36. The MSOM team member thanked Committee members for their contribution to the recent Making Sense of Media event in Belfast and outlined the key points of Ofcom's draft three-year Media Literacy strategy.
37. The Committee discussed the strategy and offered the following advice:
 - There should be more specific detail on how success of the strategy would be measured.
 - The strategy should be clearer on how best practice for Media Literacy would be shared.
 - Because a variety of organisations are involved in delivering Media Literacy, the strategy could be clearer on who does what.
 - The strategy itself needed to be communicated properly to all the relevant stakeholders.
 - The inclusion of more examples of Media Literacy work being undertaken would help.
 - Ofcom should consider whether 'Media Literacy' was a well enough understood term for the work being done.
 - Queried what is reasonable to expect the larger platforms to deliver and if they could help with the wider issue of media literacy funding around the UK.
38. The Chair noted the Committee's passion and support for Ofcom's MSOM work and invited the team to come back to the Committee next year for an update on progress.

Item 10: Northern Ireland Director's report

39. Jonathan Rose introduced his paper to the Committee.
40. Jonathan advised the Committee that, due to the General Election purdah period, the NI team were having to scale back some engagement work.
41. The Committee asked for further information on BT's plans for a 'middleman solution' for PSTN switch-off for vulnerable/specialist needs consumers.
42. There was discussion on the potential licensing of Irish radio stations on DAB in NI which was now possible under the Media Act.
43. Karen Baxter left the meeting.

Item 11: BBC Annual Report

44. The Chair welcomed Ofcom colleagues working on the BBC Annual Report. The team invited the Committee's advice on what to include in the NI section of Ofcom's report.
45. The Committee offered a number of suggestions:
 - Sought a more evaluative assessment of developments in Northern Ireland, focusing on the areas of most importance to audiences.

- Encouraged Ofcom to highlight BBC NI content beyond high profile programmes such as *Blue Lights*, and also to focus on the outcomes of investments and the improvements that had resulted.
- Highlighted the difficulty in finding NI content on the BBC iPlayer and asked for figures to help make comparisons on audience reach.
- Discussed the BBC's centenary and the potential it gave for further successful audience engagement across Northern Ireland.
- Recognised the transition from the old Operating Licence to the new one but stressed the importance of the report setting a benchmark this year against which future changes can be measured.
- Encouraged more granular audience measures, especially as audiences move increasingly from linear to digital platforms, and also looking at underserved audiences.
- The Chair agreed to speak to the Project Director separately about the tracking of BBC's co-commissioning for network productions and the impact on local opt-out programming for Northern Ireland.

Item 12: Public Policy update

46. The Chair welcomed a member of the Public Policy team to the meeting and thanked them for an insightful paper.
47. The Chair noted the Committee's thanks to Kate Biggs who had been Interim Public Policy Director for the last year and welcomed back Kate Davies who had returned to the role.
48. The Committee discussed the manifestos of the local political parties in relation to any issues of relevance to Ofcom.
49. The Committee discussed the potential impact on Ofcom's work that a change in government at Westminster could bring.

Item 13: Media Act

50. The Chair welcomed the team who introduced themselves and gave a brief introduction to their paper, noting that the Media Bill had passed through the pre-election 'wash-up' to become the Media Act.
51. The Committee discussed various aspects of the Act that could impact on NI audiences, especially the future prominence and availability of TV channels.
52. On radio regulation, the Committee questioned the vague definitions of 'out of region' services and 'locally gathered' news, and how these could be interpreted by radio stations.

Item 14: Any other Business

Chair's Business

53. The Chair reported back on a productive annual meeting with the other National Advisory Committee Chairs, and Ofcom's Chair and Chief Executive in May. Issues discussed included Channel 4 relicensing and the review of the Postal USO.
54. The Chair attended a DRCF AI & Digital Hub event at Stormont in May.
55. The Chair met with Ofcom's Network & Comms Director, Lindsey Fussell, in Belfast earlier this month and discussed a number of consumer issues including Post and End of Contract Notifications. On the latter point, the Chair noted her own experience of an End of Contract Notification for a mobile contract which appeared out of line with Ofcom's rules. The matter was being considered by the relevant Ofcom team.

