

**Minutes of the 96th meeting of
the Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland
held hybrid (at Landmark House, Belfast and via Microsoft Teams)
on Thursday 12th June 2025**

Present

Colm Murphy	ACNI Chair
Aodhan O'Donnell	ACNI Member
Jackie Neill	ACNI Member
Paul Wickens	ACNI Member
Michael Wilson	ACNI Member
Karen Baxter	Ofcom Board Member for Northern Ireland
Maria McCann	Content Board Member for Northern Ireland
Carrie Matchett	Communications Consumer Panel member for Northern Ireland

In attendance

Jonathan Rose	Northern Ireland Director
Bimpe Archer	Regulatory Affairs Manager
James Stinson	Regulatory Affairs Manager
Judith Carville	Regulatory Affairs Manager

NextGen NED observer

Other Ofcom colleagues (via Teams)
Channel 4 representatives (item 11 only)

Apologies

Jane Hillis	Regulatory Affairs Advisor
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Item 1: Welcome, apologies and declaration of Members' Interests

1. The Chair welcome members to the meeting and thanked the NextGeneration NED observer for attending in person.
2. Apologies were received from Jane Hillis.
3. No conflicts of interest were recorded.

Item 2: Minutes of the 95th meeting held on 12th March 2025 and Actions

4. The Minutes of the 95th meeting were approved.
5. Members agreed an ongoing action to invite officials from the Department for the Economy to a future Committee meeting. All other actions from the previous meeting were agreed as completed.
6. Members noted the plans to recruit for the vacant seat on the Committee after the summer, with a view to having the seat filled for the December meeting.

Item 3: Interim Committee business and Issues since last meeting

7. The Broadcasting sub-group lead outlined the Committee's draft responses to Ofcom's consultations on PSB quotas and changes to the BBC Operating Licence regarding Radio Foyle, which had been circulated for comment before submission.
8. The Committee agreed it would not respond to Ofcom's consultation on politicians as presenters.
9. The Committee welcomed the recent Public Service Media event hosted by Ulster University and noted the Broadcasting sub-group's upcoming meeting with Ofcom's project team to discuss the Annual report on the BBC.
10. The Committee noted the transfer of the Belfast local TV licence from Northern Visions to That's TV and also noted plans for local news reporting on the channel.
11. The Connectivity sub-group lead noted the Committee's response to Ofcom's consultation on the Postal USO and suggested the Committee may wish to agree common principles to ensure a consistent theme to future consultation responses.
12. The Committee asked for an updated list of relevant upcoming Ofcom consultations to help plan their work.
13. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to respond to Ofcom's Access Review consultation after the Connectivity event being hosted in Belfast the following week.
14. The Committee noted the publication of Ofcom's AI strategy and asked for AI to be added as agenda item at the October meeting.

Item 4: Committee discussion on remaining Agenda items

15. Members discussed the points they wished to raise on Items 8 and 11.

Item 5: Board member's update

16. The Board member reflected on the Board's recent meetings, highlighting discussions on the ongoing implementation of the Online Safety Act and the Media Act; Ofcom's future role in data centre regulation and the appointment of a new Chair for Channel 4.
17. The Board member also noted her recent (separate) meetings with the Economy Minister, the Chair of Northern Ireland Screen, and Channel 4 representatives, all of which had been very beneficial discussions.

Item 6: Content Board update from Northern Ireland member

18. The member reflected on the Content Board's most recent meeting, highlighting discussions on Ofcom's Broadcasting Standards work, the impact of kitemarking and AI on news provision, and the forthcoming Media Act consultation on local radio news.

Item 7: Communications Consumer Panel update from Northern Ireland member

19. The Member noted plans to refresh local stakeholder engagement, and to host a Panel meeting in Belfast in due course. The next NI Consumer Hub meeting would focus on Online Safety.
20. The Committee discussed the notion of a 'Minimal Digital Standard of Living', and the Member agreed to circulate relevant documents.
21. The Committee noted the concept had got political traction in Scotland and Wales, but not as yet in Northern Ireland, and members noted that the Department of Finance's Digital Transformation team would be good contact point.

Item 8: Resilience

22. The Chair welcomed the Networks & Communications team who gave a brief introduction to their paper, focussing on the experience of the red storm Éowyn in January on the fixed and mobile networks in Northern Ireland.
23. The team explained Ofcom's role in dealing with major network outages and how Ofcom is plugged into government's emergency response planning at a national and local levels.
24. The team also outlined the specific challenges facing electricity and telecoms networks in the aftermath of the red storm, especially in remote areas.
25. The Committee discussed the lessons being learned from the storm, as well as recent outages that affected Spain and Portugal as well as Heathrow Airport.
26. The Committee was keen to understand how Northern Ireland would be better prepared for next winter. The team outlined the ongoing work of DSIT nationally and Emergency Preparedness in NI and how Ofcom was part of those conversations. They also noted practical steps being taken, such as stock-piling of spare parts for telecoms infrastructure.
27. The Committee encouraged Ofcom to use its soft powers to help consumer preparedness, noting especially the need for better public information and for telecoms providers be able to identify their vulnerable customers.

[Karen Baxter left the meeting]

Item 9: Public Policy update

28. The Committee noted the paper, and especially the series of Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees Ofcom had appeared before in recent weeks and covering a wide range of subjects.
29. The Committee noted the relationship between the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill and the National and Information Systems Directive.
30. The Committee asked about a recent media report questioning the availability of 5G coverage, and noted Ofcom's forthcoming relaunch of its mobile coverage checker which will provide more accurate coverage and performance information for consumers.

[Maria McCann left the meeting]

Item 10: Any Other Business

31. The Committee asked if Ofcom can share the final Northern Ireland Media Literacy mapping report by Prof Paul Moore with members.
32. The Committee asked how Ofcom was reacting to the racially charged violence that was happening and which tools it now has to compel action by social media platforms. Members were provided with a brief outline of the additional safety measures consultation which includes proposals for services to deal with content on their services during such disorder.

Item 11: Channel 4 presentation & discussion

33. The Chair welcomed the Channel 4 representatives to the meeting and thanked them for the presentation provided in advance.
34. The Committee were given a briefing by Channel 4 (Jo Street, Kevin Blacoe & Michael Logan) on recent engagement and commissioning activities in Northern Ireland.
 - Channel 4 highlighted the work it had done on relationship building with the Indie sector in Northern Ireland over recent months, including a roadshow event in March attended by 26 companies.
 - Channel 4 highlighted structural changes to commissioning teams which means there is now a “commissioning lead” for every genre in every nation.
 - Channel 4 also highlighted a ringfenced commissioning pot of money, circa £35m, as well as development and skills funding for each of the nations.
35. In the discussion which followed, the Committee raised several issues with the Channel 4 representatives:
 - What measures had been put in place to address disappointing level of commissions from Northern Ireland in recent years.
 - C4 said spend had increased dramatically for the last calendar year on the back of a major drama but that yearly spend could fluctuate depending on the volume and type of commissions from year to year.
 - C4 said there had been a number of structural and organisational changes in C4 to facilitate more commissioning in the nations. This includes having nations targets written into commissioning editors’ objectives. C4 is also carrying out detailed tracking of the number of ideas that are pitched to senior executives. C4 said this would also help identify blockers and that executives at the highest level were committed to tackling these, where they occur.
 - What work was being done to develop returnable series in NI?
 - For information about the number of development projects being funded in Northern Ireland and whether these were “meaningful”. How many make it to broadcast?
 - C4 said it was doing what it can to help fund the development of ideas that would lead to returning series. It emphasised that development funding was not a “sop” and that a number of projects across several genres were currently in this development stage.
 - C4 said it was also carrying out audience research to better understand what authentic representation looks like for audiences in the nations.
 - When a Northern Ireland company is given development funding, but the programme isn’t taken up by C4, whether those projects can be taken elsewhere?
 - C4 said it is happy for these ideas to be taken elsewhere.
 - Whether C4 had a regional breakdown of usage of the C4 streaming service by nation?

- C4 to take away and feed back to the committee.
- What a digital first strategy means for audiences?
 - C4 said it was compelled to commission streaming friendly content and that it was putting more marketing heft behind launches, building brand loyalty and familiarity with audiences.
 - C4 said it was seeking to be relevant to younger audiences while continuing to serve older viewers. Emphasised that audiences still watch programmes on linear.
 - C4 emphasised it was going through a lot of change presently and that a new chief executive would have their own vision. It was important that the new chief executive understood the nations strategy.
- Whether relations with the Indie sector had improved on the back of recent engagement?
 - C4 said it was working closely with NI Screen and was open to feedback from the sector. There had been a “reset” in relations. C4 said those that focussed on specific genres would do well and it was doing what it could to help the sector navigate change.
- What C4 is doing in schools in NI with its 4Skills initiative?
 - Work on this initiative continues. They will visit five schools in Belfast, Derry and elsewhere in 2025, highlighting careers in digital, TV and film production.

36. The Chair thanked the Channel 4 representatives for the open and honest discussion.

37. The meeting was declared closed.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

38. The next scheduled Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 2nd October.

Approved:



Date: 02.10.2025