

Minutes of the 101st meeting of the Advisory Committee for Scotland

Hybrid meeting in person and virtually over Microsoft
Teams on 10 September 2025

Present

Jess McBeath	Chair
Ashe Hussain	Member (Online)
Polly Tolley	Member
Cameron Speirs	Member
Caroline Di Stefano	Member
Stephen O'Donnell	Member

In attendance

Peter MacMahon	Content Board Member for Scotland - Agenda Items 16-25 only
Helen Froud	Communications Consumer Panel (CCP)
Sital Patel	Ofcom's Next Generation NED Observer

Stefan Webster	Ofcom Scotland
Ross Hamilton	Ofcom Scotland
Lyndsey Scott	Ofcom Scotland
Dion Barnaby	Ofcom Scotland

Mark Geddes	South of Scotland Enterprise – Agenda Item 6 only
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Michael Gardiner	South of Scotland Enterprise – Agenda Item 6 only
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Tabitha Mudaliar	Totally Tabi – Agenda Item 6 only
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Tom Bishop	South of Scotland Enterprise – Agenda Item 6 only
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Other Ofcom colleagues

Welcome, introductions, conflicts, and apologies

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Glenn Preston, Debbie Hughes, Caroline Di Stefano and Bob Downes. The Chair also welcomed new member, Stephen O'Donnell, to the Committee.
2. It was NOTED that an attendee may have a conflict of interest within the session due to their recent consultancy work with the South of Scotland Enterprise. Recusal could be used if necessary.

Minutes of the 100th meeting held on 12 June 2025

3. The minutes of the 99th meeting were APPROVED by the Committee. In the discussion of actions which arose from the February meeting, it was NOTED that:
 - There was no further update on the action from the last meeting, which involved sharing the Committee's Annual Report for 2024 with Ofcom's Board, Chief Executive and other Advisory Committee Chairs.
 - The Chair asked that any actions that had not been completed from previous meetings would be carried over to the next meeting for discussion and to maintain the record.
 - A list of key political personnel was shared with the committee prior to the meeting as requested at the previous meeting.
 - An Ofcom Scotland colleague noted Ofcom's Mobile Coverage lead is going to view connectivity projects being undertaken on Scotrail in the north of the country by the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT). The colleague also noted that there is more work going on regarding the incorporation of data from such projects into Ofcom's work.
 - A member asked about Ofcom's ability to get more information on government-funded trials of infrastructure projects like that being run by Scotrail. An Ofcom Scotland colleague noted the intention to work collaboratively with the Scottish Government to ensure efforts are joined up and that the data being collected can be better integrated.

Director's Report / Public Policy update

4. The following key points were NOTED:
 - The former Public Policy Director at Ofcom has now moved to become the Group Director of the Strategy and Research group.
 - The recent reshuffle by the UK government, including how the different changes in minister may affect Ofcom's work and relationship with departments like Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and the Scotland Office.
 - The UK government is also working on its proposed Statement of Strategic Priorities for Telecoms, which is out for consultation until the 18th of September. This covers post – one of Ofcom's key remits – so we will likely have correspondence with DBT on this.
 - The Committee discussed the recent subsea cable outage in Orkney and Shetland. Members asked whether there had been any information provided by communications providers about their approach to backup and resilience in these sorts of situations, and what Ofcom's responsibilities would be in these situations. An Ofcom Scotland member stated that the outreach around this only took place recently, and that we were waiting on a response. They also highlighted our powers under the Telecoms Security Act but noted that there were

wider concerns among the population about switchover from copper lines to VOIP that this incident brought to the surface.

- The discussion moved onto the broader point of resilience, and whether this was something that should be a more important consideration for discussions in the ACS, particularly considering Scotland's unique geography. An Ofcom Scotland colleague pointed out that discussions about resilience could also be linked to growth, and that there is ongoing work to understand rural outages. It was agreed that a future meeting should explore resilience matters in Scotland more generally.
- A member noted research undertaken by the CCP that spoke to individuals' experiences with resilience and said they would share with the committee.
- There was discussion around Consumer Scotland's response to Ofcom's statement on reforms to the universal postal service and the evolution of its engagement with Ofcom.
- A member raised the issue of age assurance and the uptake in VPNs following the implementation of Highly Effective Age Assurance provisions under the Online Safety Act and asked how this was being monitored. Ofcom Scotland colleagues confirmed that we are monitoring trends in this space, with early indications suggesting a positive impact in reducing children's exposure to harmful content.

5. Moving to the Public Policy update, a colleague from the Public Policy team (PPT) highlighted a few key points noting:

- There was further information provided about the cabinet reshuffle, including the movement of the former Secretary of State for DSIT, Peter Kyle, moving to DBT. The colleague noted that there were still some ministerial briefs being finalised and that Ofcom was waiting to understand the full picture.
- A member asked whether a change in minister would likely have any major impact on the patterns of work. The Public Policy team colleague highlighted that it could lead to a change in specific priorities, depending on the minister.
- A member questioned whether the upcoming state visit from the US President would have any impact on government policy movements or change in tone in messaging from the government, to which the PPT colleague responded that this was unlikely.
- A member asked how Ofcom's recent report into the future of Public Service Media, *Transmission Critical*, was being received. An Ofcom Scotland colleague noted that broadcasters had largely been appreciative of the paper and the recommendations made by Ofcom. This is likely to play an important role in the upcoming conversations that PSBs have with the UK Government, as well as the BBC's Charter Review.
- The Chair NOTED that the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 criminalises the non-consensual creation of deepfake pornography, but this is only applicable to England and Wales.

Verbal updates

6. A member advised that the Committee had responded to Ofcom's Telecoms Access Review (TAR) 2026 consultation.

7. A member provided an update on a scheme that has been started by Virgin Media O2 (VMO2) that is being run with Citizens' Advice Scotland that involves issuing devices and data to those without them to improve access.

8. A member updated on the recruitment process for in-house production at Channel 4, noting that branded content could be an area for development and growth in Scotland.

9. A member raised the recent debate in Westminster on the future of terrestrial television, which was brought by David Mundell MP, member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale. There were lots of contributions to this debate from Scottish MPs, particularly considering its impact on rural communities. An Ofcom Scotland colleague added that this was something raised in *Transmission Critical* as part of the PSM review, with questions remaining about what a move away from terrestrial TV could mean for those who are digitally excluded.

10. The Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) member also provided an update, stating that they are still awaiting appointment of a new member for Scotland. There will also be stakeholder hubs on 30 September (on the postal service) and 1 December (online safety), and all are welcome to attend. They have also been considering strategy more broadly to online safety and how to respond from a consumer perspective.

Additional Safety Measures Consultation

11. Members of the Ofcom Scotland team updated the Committee on Ofcom's measures on Online Safety. They outlined the proposals in the ongoing consultation on *Additional Safety Measures* building on the codes in place regarding Illegal Harms and the Protection of Children and focussed on three areas: Tackling harms at source; Stopping illegal content going viral; and affording further protections to children.

12. A discussion followed on the following topics:

- recent UK Parliamentary scrutiny and media coverage of the Protection of Children measures;
- The meaning of 'imminent harm' in relation to livestreaming. Ofcom Scotland team to follow up as defined in the consultation;
- The importance of user risk assessments;
- Futureproofing the regime;
- End-to-end encryption and related provisions around what is technically feasible. Ofcom Scotland colleagues to share previous Technology Notices consultation on this;
- The Safety tech sector in Scotland; and
- The role of proportionality in Ofcom's approach to enforcement and the focus on services with the greatest risk of causing harm.

13. The Chair said that they were of the view that the Advisory Committee would not respond to the consultation because there was not a Scottish-specific angle to the proposals.

South of Scotland Enterprise

14. The representative for the South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) outlined some background to the discussion, including how the independent production sector in Scotland was currently going through difficulties by raising practical examples from talent based locally.

15. The representative from Totally Tabi spoke to their own experience as a freelancer, highlighting how local freelance work in the area had declined significantly. They currently broadcast weekly for a local charitable station and following changes to local commercial radio provision, they are now the main local station and radio news providers in Dumfries. This comes with challenges, as the terrain around the area makes it difficult to ensure high-quality connection for all. An Ofcom Scotland member highlighted some of the changes in the community radio sector that had recently been implemented.

16. One of the representatives from SOSE spoke more about the area around Dumfries and Galloway. They noted that, although the area was largely rural, there were lots of large businesses that were not near settlements (e.g., holiday parks) who struggle to get connectivity despite large seasonal attendance. A committee member pointed out that this had been discussed at the Scottish Government Digital Connectivity Roundtable at Ofcom's offices in June, with similar problems seen in regions like Orkney and Shetland when there is an increase in population density (from cruise ships) and a concurrent decline in connectivity. The work of the Scottish Futures Trust in this area was discussed.

17. A SOSE representative raised the challenges of acquiring an understanding of mobile coverage. An Ofcom Scotland colleague discussed the powers that Ofcom has to deal with the issue of network quality, and methodology to assess adequate coverage. Ofcom's updated Mobile Checker considers the way that people use their phones now, providing a more accurate picture of user experience.

18. A representative from SOSE spoke about the observed decline in the presence of BBC Scotland in the region, with not a lot of content being commissioned from the South of Scotland region. Another noted that there had also been an energy project that had seemingly gone under the radar for BBC coverage.

19. They also discussed data centres as a potential area of growth, and something that the region could perhaps take advantage of. This is something that SOSE are looking at, including the potential benefits of developing clusters around data centres to maximise their benefits to local creative industries, while also tying into bigger picture developments in the technology sector across Scotland and the UK.

20. An Ofcom Scotland colleague discussed the regulation of broadcasting, which focused on how Ofcom can give broadcasters flexibility to ensure that they can best serve audiences and keep PSBs relevant. This requires a balanced strategy that keeps audiences at the centre of discussion, while creating an environment that brings companies to Scotland, allows them to set up and grow in the region. They offered to take a look at what the BBC are doing to better service parts of Scotland and circulate any key points of discussion.

21. A SOSE representative asked about Ofcom's futureproofing approach towards technologies such as AI and highlighted the importance that there is coverage of upcoming trends and not just existing technologies.

22. The Chair concluded the session by asking that the Scotland team take away the points raised in the discussion and continue to engage with SOSE representatives on these.

Mobile Investment Programme

23. Ofcom colleagues presented their paper on the Mobile Investment Programme, covering the range of recommendations on improving mobile coverage and network reliability across the UK. They covered the different considerations beyond just measuring geographical coverage and noted the different metrics which could provide a more nuanced understanding of problems across signal strength and consumer value.

24. Ofcom colleagues noted barriers to investment, giving the example of train wi-fi coverage, but mentioned the example of the Starlink/Scotrail trial to improve on-train wi-fi as a positive example.

25. Committee members asked about the balance of prioritising the most basic level of connectivity for all members of the public over improving existing provisions, and about the consideration of rural places, noting some locations within Scotland might lack both mobile coverage and decent broadband. An Ofcom colleague noted upcoming mergers and how this may cause some

substantial benefits, including the upgrades that will be taking place across the newly merged Vodafone/Three network.

26. A Committee member asked a follow-up on the 8-year timeline of the Vodafone/Three merger, noting this was a long time. They also noted the rural locations they had committed to upgrading were not specified geographically. An Ofcom colleague responded that, given positioning of existing sites, it was likely some of these locations would be in Scotland, and that improvements were expected to be noticeable over the course of this timeline.

27. A Committee member NOTED the previous discussion from stakeholders from across Dumfries and Galloway and highlights their concerns about infrastructure for data centres and seasonal demand across holiday parks. An Ofcom colleague highlighted there's not a 'one size fits all' solution and providers can work directly with businesses to find the appropriate solutions.

28. A Committee member asked how Ofcom could improve coverage and asked about the role of competition and/or Government funding. An Ofcom colleague highlighted that Ofcom did have Spectrum licencing options but also had to take a proportionate approach to avoid market distortion. They outlined the role Ofcom plays as a convener, and its role of setting expectations across all stakeholders.

29. A Committee member highlighted coverage on ferries as an area that has a particular Scottish concern.

Connected Nations Scotland Report 2025

30. Ofcom colleagues provided an overview of the plans for this year's Connected Nations report, noting that the data was currently in the process of being analysed and that this year will include the publication of Nations reports, open data files and an interactive dashboard. Additional content this year will include a standalone look at 5G when considering mobile, and commentary on both telecoms security and outages.

31. Committee Members asked a range of questions covering the mixed use of relative and absolute figures used in the report, the reporting of not-spot areas and the combined fixed/mobile picture, whether outages will be covered in the Scotland report and how consumers could better understand local build plans. The final question was around the impact of the report and how it could be promoted post-publication.

32. Members NOTED the approach to this year's report and the responses to the questions.

Communications Consumer Panel/ACOD update

33. Members had been provided with a 'For Information' written paper and the Committee NOTED its content.

Ofcom Contact Centre Information

34. Members had been provided with a 'For Information' paper with Scotland's data and the Committee NOTED its content.

Any Other Business

35. There was no 'Any Other Business' noted by the Committee.

Date of the Next Meeting

36. The next scheduled Committee meeting would be on 2 December 2025.