

Minutes of the 96th meeting of the Advisory Committee for Wales held at the Cardiff Office on 6th March 2025

Present

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| Amanda Rees | Member (Chair for this meeting) |
| Geraint Strello | Member |
| Karen Lewis | Member |

In attendance

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| Ruth McElroy | Content Board Member for Wales |
| Rachel Burr | Consumer Panel Member for Wales |

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| Philip Henfrey | Director Wales |
| Elinor Williams | Ofcom Wales |
| Ella Breeze | Ofcom Wales |
| Meleri Evans | Ofcom Wales |
| Rhys Llewelyn | Ofcom Wales |
| Beth Owen | Ofcom Wales |
| Ffion Hughes | Ofcom Wales |

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| Jo Street | Channel 4 Director of Commissioning, Nations & Regions |
| Kevin Blacoe | Channel 4 Head of Partnerships & Skills |
| Briony Robinson | Channel 4 Public Affairs Lead |

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Welcome, introductions, conflicts and apologies

The Interim Chair welcomed attendees to the 96th meeting of the Advisory Committee for Wales. Everyone thanked AR for chairing the meeting in the Chair's absence.

It was noted that apologies had been received from Aled Eurig, Clive Jones and Angharad Evans.

It was noted there were no conflicts of interest.

The minutes of the 95th meeting held on 26th November 2024 were approved by the committee.

Members Updates

Ofcom's Board Member for Wales had previously circulated an update paper. Members also noted the following:

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- A member requested that updates on power outages and their impacts be regularly communicated to the committee, and that pressure be maintained on suppliers to address these issues. A member commented that it was important for maintaining Ofcom's reputation in Wales. The judicial decision on politicians appearing in news programme was noted together with the public concern surrounding the BBC's recent decision to remove a documentary on Gaza from its iPlayer.
- It was reported that Ofcom's Content Board had recently discussed the concept of trust in news. It highlighted the challenges in regulating news and underscores the importance of public service media in delivering trustworthy news.

Wales Recent Developments

The Ofcom Wales Director presented his written report and highlighted some key points to note.

- Members noted a recent meeting between Ofcom's Chief Executive and Eluned Morgan, First Minister of Wales. This would set the framework for future engagement at a ministerial level. This includes discussions on the Online Safety Act and Ofcom's consultation on its guidance on protecting women and girls online. It was noted that younger people had been involved in two stakeholder meetings that have helped the team to better understand online experiences in a Wales context.
- The recent decision by the Communications Consumer Panel to hold a recent out of London meeting in Cardiff was welcomed. It was also noted that the world's first space-based video call using a standard 4G/5G smartphone took place in Wales. Ofcom's spectrum teams played a crucial role through the Innovation and Trial licensing regime.
- A member asked about the next steps in the PSM Review. It was noted that Ofcom Wales was working with Creative Wales to convene an industry event in April to focus on Welsh solutions for Welsh problems. In the ensuing discussion the importance of competition and the need for a plurality of supply in the Welsh context were noted. A member queried whether the PSBs had the right answers for reaching and engaging audiences, particularly those underserved by the PSBs
- A member flagged the importance of ensuring prominence for Welsh content and the challenges posed by algorithmic curation on platforms that favored English content.
- A member flagged the importance of ensuring new ideas and new approaches were reflected in ongoing discussions on the future of public service media. A member flagged the importance of constructive challenge and having a sense of urgency to address the sustainability of public service news and its impact on democracy in Wales.
- The importance of media literacy was noted particularly in the context of its place in the new curriculum in Wales. A member flagged the importance of

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ensuring that everyone can engage with media and digital tools. A member highlighted the importance of involving academics and researchers in discussions on the potential impacts of social media to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues.

Public Policy

An Ofcom colleague highlighted key points including:

- **Parliamentary Interest:** There continues to be significant parliamentary interest in Ofcom's work. A recent drop-in event for MPs and their teams was successful, with several new MPs from Wales, showing a high level of interest. It was noted that Ofcom engages regularly with the Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms
- **Growth and Regulation:** Ofcom is focused on demonstrating how good regulation can support economic growth and innovation. Key areas include fiber investment, public service media rules, and spectrum management. Efforts are also being made to reduce regulatory burdens on small businesses. A member highlighted engagement with Media Cymru in relation to economic growth and innovation.
- A member flagged the importance of the creative industries being recognized as one of the eight growth-enhancing sectors and the need to ensure that the regulation of Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) continues to support this growth.

Public Service Media Review

Ofcom colleagues presented an overview of the timetable and responses to date to the PSM Review. The committee then asked the team questions and gave advice on the following:

- **Connecting with audiences:** The significant challenge in engaging with all audiences, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, was recognised in the discussion. A member commented that Public Service Media (PSM) needs to develop positive strategies and interventions to connect with these groups, which are disproportionately significant in Wales. The importance of providing trusted and accurate news was noted in the discussion. A member flagged the need to address the Welsh democratic deficit by ensuring that news content is accessible, appealing, and engaging for the audience in Wales. This includes holding policymakers to account and making news content relevant to Welsh audiences.
- **Understanding 'Trust':** There was a discussion on the understanding of the word 'trust' in the context of news. It was noted that people who consume news via social media tend to have lower trust in news.

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- A member flagged that certain genres of content outside of news, particularly those that engage with the realities and stories from the nations and regions, are at risk of not being commissioned. This includes specialist factual content, which is crucial for representation in Wales.
- A member raised the challenge of securing prominence for Welsh language content and overcoming the challenge of algorithms favoring non-Welsh language content.
- A member flagged the lack of a comprehensive assessment of digital skills needs in Wales. While there are examples of good practices, a more coordinated approach is needed to address the gaps and improve digital skills training.
- A member highlighted the need to experiment with children's content and be innovative and entrepreneurial in the approach. This includes considering digital-first launches and counting them against quotas.
- A member suggested that with the Senedd election coming up in May 2026, there is a need to think and plan strategically to ensure that Wales has a say in the broader context of public service media.

Content Board Member for Wales Update

- There was a discussion on the ability of smaller UK broadcasters such as S4C to be pioneering and innovative and to showcase best practice for the wider UK for example, in areas like children's content.
- The committee noted that children's content fund had enabled experimentation and innovation in creating content for young audiences. This fund allowed for the development of new talent and the creation of content that might not have been possible otherwise.
- A committee member commented that smaller PSM providers, like S4C, face challenges when negotiating with global online channels. Access to data analytics regarding audience reach and consumption of PSM content on digital platforms is crucial. Without this information, broadcasters cannot effectively strategize or improve their content.
- A member commented that Wales is a showcase for collaboration between PSMs to support long-term sustainability and reach. The framework agreement between BBC and S4C is an example of such collaboration, but there is room for improvement and innovation.
- A member suggested that PSMs have been slow in evolving their digital strategies to reach audiences on new platforms and remain relevant to audiences.

Channel 4 Nations & Regions Presentation

Within the context of its new licence requirement to produce a commissioning strategy for Wales, the Chair welcomed the Channel 4 team who gave a presentation of recent developments, highlighting the following points:

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- the changes in audience behaviors.
- the downturn in advertising revenue.
- the launch of its new commissioning strategy for the nations and regions
- its training strategy in the nations and regions.

The Chair thanked the C4 team for their presentation and noted the consistent views of stakeholders in Wales made during the recent relicensing process. With that process concluded the Committee raised several issues with Channel 4, including:

- Skills in Wales: The committee sought to understand why Channel 4 had believed that the skills in Wales were insufficient to enable their digital strategy.
- Costs of Commissioning: A member sought clarifications on the costs of commissioning programmes in Wales and asked if there was specific data or evidence that supported Channel 4's view that production costs were higher in the nations and regions.
- Strategy for Wales: the Chair asked whether Channel 4 had a specific strategy for Wales, including specific objectives, key performance indicators (KPIs), and timescales for delivery.
- Sector Engagement: The Channel 4 team were asked about their plans to improve engagement and feedback with the production sector in Wales and how that would be sustained into the future.
- Representation & Audience Engagement: the Channel 4 team were asked about the specific measures and strategies to ensure greater representation of Wales on Channel 4 and improved engagement with audiences in Wales.
- Presence in Wales: the committee raised its concern about the lack of Channel 4 staff based in Wales, questioning why none of its roles outside of London were allocated to Wales. They wanted to understand the rationale behind this decision and its implications for the perception of Channel 4's commitment to Wales.

Summing up, the Chair reflected the importance of Channel 4 having a clear strategy for Wales to strengthen relationship in Wales, particularly with no physical presence here. The Chair thanked Channel 4 for a constructive and positive session. The committee looked forward to hearing again from Channel 4 on their progress.

Post USO Reform

Ofcom colleagues circulated a paper to recap the consultation published on January 13th regarding proposals to reform the universal service obligation on Royal Mail. The paper noted the following points:

- Delivery Frequency of Second- Class Letters: The proposal suggests changing the delivery frequency of second- class letters from six days a week (Monday to Saturday) to alternate weekdays (Monday to Friday). This change is based on recent user needs research, which indicates that most postal users are comfortable with this adjustment. The delivery of first-class letters would

continue to be six days a week with next day delivery.

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- **Quality of Service Targets:** The proposal includes changes to the quality-of-service targets for both first class and second-class mail. The headline targets would be slightly reduced, and new turn-of-mail targets would be introduced. These changes aim to reflect postal users' preference for reliability over speed of delivery.
- **Access Letters Obligation:** The proposal suggests amending the access letters obligation to align with the alternate day delivery model. This change would allow Royal Mail to realize potential savings.
- The consultation is set to close on April 10th, and a statement outlining the decisions will be released in the summer.

The committee asked the team questions about the research and their engagement plan for Wales.

- A member asked about the feedback received from consumers regarding the proposed changes. The team noted that there were no significant differences identified in the research or engagement with stakeholders in Wales compared to the UK average. **Engagement in Wales:** The team was asked about specific engagement efforts in Wales. They said they were reaching out to various stakeholders, including NHS Wales and consumer bodies, and welcomed further suggestions for engagement.
- The discussion concluded with a discussion on the methodology used in the research and the importance of considering the nuances of Internet access and usage among different groups.

Communications Consumer Panel Member for Wales Update

The Panel visited Wales in February, which provided an opportunity to hear from the Welsh Language Commission, Older People's Commissioner and the digital inclusion team at Welsh Government. The visit was seen as highly beneficial. It was also noted that:

- **One Touch Switch Concerns:** The panel raised concerns about the unification of address data, which affects the One Touch Switch service. Issues arise when address data does not match up properly, impacting people without permanent addresses or those frequently moving. The panel discussed the need to identify which consumers are most affected and potential solutions.
- **2G/3G Switch Off:** The number of complaints regarding the 2G/3G switch off has been low in Wales. However, there is a need to understand the experiences of those affected and whether they are proactively reporting issues. The panel is in contact with organizations like the Older People's Commissioner and Citizens Advice to gather more information.

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- Premium Rate Services Regulation: The panel discussed the regulation around premium rate services, formerly managed by the PSA. There is significant interest in the responses to the consultation on this topic.

In the discussion that followed it was highlighted for members that Ofcom would be consulting on the provision of local news in radio services. A member raised the importance of greater clarity on what constitutes local, national, and international news, and how these definitions apply in a Welsh context.

Members highlighted the impact of Global's recently announced strategy for nations and regions and its implications for Welsh language audiences. Members raised concerns about the potential negative effects and advised on the need for creative solutions to fill the gap left by Global and emphasized the importance of sustainable funding models for Welsh language content.

Channel 4 KPIs: The panel noted that Channel 4's key performance indicators (KPIs) being primarily focused on performance metrics. This reflects Channel 4's need to prove its commercial viability and the member flagged the importance of balancing commercial success with public service obligations.

Members discussed the importance of engaging with stakeholders in Wales, including holding face to face meetings with stakeholders, with advance notice given to members.

Resilience and Mobile RAN Update

An Ofcom colleague provided an update on Ofcom's Mobile Network Resilience Statement published in September 2024 following a call for input. The report highlighted that the issue of mobile network resilience, particularly in the context of power outages cannot be solved by a single institution or sector alone. There is significant interdependency across sectors and stakeholders, and a collaborative approach is necessary to address the challenges.

A member flagged that while battery backups can provide short-term resilience, they are not sufficient for prolonged power outages, such as those lasting several days or weeks. There was a need to distinguish between short-term and long-term solutions. The importance of finding proportionate solutions was discussed. This includes considering the feasibility of connecting generators to mobile sites and the logistics of deploying such solutions quickly. The need for a balanced approach that considers both the costs and the impact on consumers was emphasized.

A member highlighted a need for Ofcom to potentially intervene and set expectations for mobile providers to deliver proportionate and effective solutions.

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The dynamic nature of the environment, influenced by climate change, was acknowledged in the resulting discussion. The need for ongoing conversations and future planning to adapt to changing conditions was emphasized. Ofcom was advised to consider how to incorporate these factors into its future work and policy proposals.

Forthcoming Consultations and Publications

Members were updated on the upcoming consultations on local news provision as part of Ofcom's work to implement the Media Act.

Complaints data for Wales

- Members noted that all complaints are channeled through a central team, which keeps track of the data. This centralized approach allows for effective analysis and identification of patterns, such as multiple complaints about the same issue from different parts of the country.
- Publishing data on complaints helps consumers to be informed and empowered to make better choices. This transparency also motivates organizations and companies to address the issues and improve their services.

Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Date of the Next Meeting

The next scheduled Committee meeting would be held on Tuesday 10 June 2025. Followed by meetings scheduled for Wednesday 1st of October and Tuesday 9th of December.