

Ofcom Board minutes 5 March 2025

Publication minutes of the three-hundred and twenty-second meeting of the Ofcom Board held on 5 March 2025 at Riverside House, London SE1 9HA and via Microsoft Teams

Present

Michael Grade	Chair
Tamara Ingram	Deputy Chair
Richard Allan	Non-Executive Member
Karen Baxter	Non-Executive Member
Natalie Black	Executive Member and Group Director, Networks & Communications (via Teams)
Melanie Dawes	Executive Member and Chief Executive
Angela Dean	Non-Executive Member
Bob Downes	Non-Executive Member
Lindsey Fussell	Executive Member and Interim Group Director, Online Safety
Will Harding	Non-Executive Member
Clive Jones	Non-Executive Member
Ben Verwaayen	Non-Executive Member

In attendance

Martin Ballantyne	General Counsel
Veronica Branton	Corporation Secretary
Francesca Carter	Deputy Corporation Secretary (via Teams)
Sharon Malley	Governance Manager
Yih-Choung Teh	Group Director, Strategy and Research (Item 7)
Melissa Tatton	Group Director, Corporate (Items 7 and 10)
Iqbal Marikkar	Director, Corporate Strategy (Items 7 and 10)
Atif Moghal	Interim Finance Director (Item 7)
Almudena Lara	Online Safety Policy Development Director (Item 8)
Elizabeth Holloway	Legal Director (Item 8)
Jessica Zucker	Online Safety Policy Development Director (Item 11)

	Action
<p>Item 1: Welcome and declaration of members' interests</p> <p>1. The Board noted Bob Downes's new declaration of interest.</p>	
<p>Item 2: Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2025 – 321(25) and matters arising.</p> <p>2. The minutes of the Ofcom Board meeting held on 5 February 2025 were APPROVED as a correct record.</p> <p>3. A summary of progress against action points was NOTED.</p>	
<p>Item 3: Chair's report</p> <p>4. The Chair updated the Board on his recent activities, including his meeting with the interim Chair of the Competition and Markets Authority and Ofcom's letter to the BBC on its recent documentary on Gaza. He updated the Board on progress with the appointment of the Chair of Channel 4.</p> <p>5. The Board NOTED the verbal report.</p>	
<p>Item 4: Chief Executive's report – Board 11(25)</p> <p>6. Melanie Dawes presented paper 11(25) on her activities, including Ofcom's work on the Upper 6 GHz band, forthcoming publications, recent litigation decisions and online safety work. Constructive conversations with the Government on its growth agenda continued. She updated the Board on potential future trips to meet stakeholders in various of Ofcom's sectors, as well as the developing approach to online safety issues in the US and how this married with Ofcom's duties under the Online Safety Act.</p> <p>7. The Board discussed the difficult investment climate for telecoms, including the potential for cross-border consolidation, and agreed that an update would be presented to a future Board meeting.</p> <p>8. The Board discussed the recent judgments in two cases against Ofcom, both looking at issues of due impartiality. One case had upheld Ofcom's position that impartiality should relate to a programme or a series of linked programmes, rather than a channel's entire output. The other judgment had found against Ofcom in a case where a politician had presented news as part of a current affairs programme. The Board noted Ofcom's proposed response to the decision, which included consulting on changes to the Broadcasting Code so that the rules would be clear for all parties in future.</p> <p>9. The Board NOTED the report.</p>	<p>NB/Corp Sec</p>
<p>Item 5: Risk and Audit Committee update – Board 12(25)</p> <p>10. Angela Dean updated the Board on the meeting of the Risk and Audit Committee held on 26 February 2025. She said the Committee had received an internal audit report on broadcast licences, which had received a rating of substantial assurance and congratulations had been passed to the team. The</p>	

<p>final audits for the year would be on spectrum and information and data management. Next year's first half audit plan had been approved and would cover online safety fees, cyber security insider threat, and personal security. The Committee was considering Connected Nations, procurement and risk management for the second half of the year. The external audit for the Annual Report and Accounts was now underway.</p> <p>11. The Committee had discussed a deep dive on changes in technology, markets and consumer behaviour, and updates on pensions and environmental reporting.</p> <p>12. The Board discussed the update, including data sovereignty and security.</p> <p>13. The Board NOTED the update.</p>	
<p>Item 6: Annual review of the Strategic Risk Register – Board 13(25)</p> <p>14. Angela Dean presented paper 13(25) on the Strategic Risk Register. She said the Risk and Audit Committee had discussed the paper at its February meeting and had requested more information on how individual mitigations related to the overall picture of risk across Ofcom. The Committee recommended to the Board a change to the target risk rating for the Trusted Regulator strategic risk from Low Likelihood/High Impact to Medium Likelihood/High Impact.</p> <p>15. The Board APPROVED the paper including the change to the target risk rating of the Trusted Regulator strategic risk.</p>	
<p>Item 7: Ofcom programme of work 2025/26 – Budget and Plan of Work – Board 13(25)</p> <p>16. Yih-Choung Teh and Melissa Tatton presented paper 13(25) on Ofcom's Budget and Plan of Work 2025/26. The Board noted that the consultation on the Plan of Work had been constructive and had allowed smaller stakeholders to engage with Ofcom on its programme. The consultation document had anticipated views well and so no major changes were being proposed. 2025/26 would be the first year of the new Three-Year Business Plan (3YBP) and a brief summary of the plan would be published alongside the Plan of Work to provide context. The Board noted the importance of highlighting Ofcom's activity in supporting growth in the 3YBP.</p> <p>17. Melissa Tatton stated that the 3YBP, approved by the Board in November 2024, had included a prudent financial plan, including efficiencies to ensure Ofcom would be able to deliver on its priorities in a flat cash environment. Since then Ofcom had received a more positive answer on the overall spending cap from the Government with our proposal for 2025/26 approved in full. This allowed for inflation as well as investment in new areas such as online safety and the Media Act.</p> <p>18. The original baseline budget, including efficiencies, totalled £217.6m. With the 2025/26 budget cap approved in full this left headroom of up to £11.5m. The proposed draft budget was formed of the baseline budget, plus core investment and contingency of £6m and Online Safety contingency of £3.2m,</p>	

<p>leading to a total budget lower than the cap but still allowing investment. Choices for investment would be prudent in recognition of the lack of certainty on funding in future years and being mindful of the impact on tariffs. Investment options were being assessed for value for money and return, with a focus on derisking Spectrum, making Ofcom more resilient through a transformation programme, and investing in target Policy areas.</p> <p>19. The Board discussed the Plan of Work and Budget, including the investment opportunities and the aims of the transformation programme. The Board noted the impact of the budget on regulated industries.</p> <p>20. The Board APPROVED the paper including that the final Plan of Work would be signed off by Melanie Dawes and Yih-Choung Teh and that the Budget for 2025/26 would be £226.8m.</p>	
<p>Item 8: Update on protecting children from harm online: April statement – Board</p> <p>21. Almudena Lara presented paper 14(25) on Ofcom’s Protecting Children from Harms Online Statement. She said Ofcom was on track to meet the statutory deadline for publication of the statement and that the new regime would introduce more robust age checks, safer algorithms, better moderations and more support for children using in-scope services.</p> <p>22. The Board noted that this was a high profile issue and that stakeholders held strong views in favour of both stronger regulation to protect children and also less intrusive measures. Ofcom was sensitive to these positions and would continue to focus on implementing the regime as set out in the legislation. It was agreed that a briefing on the comms plan would be provided to Board members.</p> <p>23. The Board discussed the paper and the potential responses platforms may adopt, including changing or removing their minimum age provisions. The Board noted that platforms were required to enforce terms such as age limits consistently.</p> <p>24. The Board discussed how the success of the regime would be measured, including through the use of research among children and parents.</p> <p>25. The Board NOTED the proposed approach to the statement and the steps to publication.</p>	LF
<p>Item 9: Board and Committee review report 2024/25 – Board 15(25)</p> <p>26. The Chair presented paper 15(25) on the outcomes of the 2024/25 Board and Committee review. The Board discussed the paper and noted that an external evaluation would be carried out in 2025/26.</p> <p>27. The Board NOTED the paper.</p>	
<p>Item 10: Corporate Governance Framework – 2024/25 review – Board 16(25)</p> <p>28. Veronica Branton presented paper 16(25) on the annual review of Ofcom’s Corporate Governance Framework. She said the substantive changes related to the Financial Authorities Framework and they were being recommended</p>	

<p>for approval following discussion with the Risk and Audit Committee.</p> <p>29. The Board noted that Ofcom’s governance structure included several advisory committees and it was agreed that a review of the effectiveness of the structure would be presented to a future meeting.</p> <p>30. The Board APPROVED the revised Corporate Governance Framework and the Codes of Conduct for the Advisory Committees, the Content Board and the Communications Consumer Panel/Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People to be effective from 1 April 2025.</p>	Corp Sec
<p>Item 11: Disinformation and Misinformation Committee appointments and Terms of Reference – Board 17(25)</p> <p>31. Richard Allan presented paper 17(25) on appointments to the statutory Advisory Committee on Disinformation and Misinformation and draft Terms of Reference. The Board discussed the role of the committee, which would be research-led, and asked that revised Terms of Reference be brought to the next Board meeting for approval, alongside the proposed appointments, bringing out the objective and evidence focussed approach proposed for the Committee which could provide practical advice on protecting people against specific types of harm.</p> <p>32. The Board NOTED the paper.</p>	
<p>Item 12: Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland – approval of member – Board 18(25)</p> <p>33. The Board APPROVED the appointment of Dr Colm Murphy as the Chair of the Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland from 10 March 2025 until 9 March 2028.</p>	
<p>Item 13: Annual Health and Safety reports – Board 18(25)</p> <p>34. The Board APPROVED the 2024 Health & Safety Annual Update and the Health and Safety Strategy.</p>	
<p>Items 14-17: Standing items</p> <p>35. The Board NOTED the following information items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-executive member updates – paper 19(25). Karen Baxter said that Northern Ireland had experienced significant power outages following Storm Éowyn and that communications resilience had appeared poor. She would be discussing this further at the forthcoming meeting of the Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland. • Quarterly performance report – paper 20(25). • Board work programme – paper 21(25) and publication schedule – paper 22(25) • Minutes of the Advisory Committee for Wales of 26 November 2024, Communications Consumer Panel of 16 January 2025, and Content Board of 21 January 2025. 	

<p>Item 15: Items in the Diligent Board reading room</p> <p>36. The Board NOTED the Plan of Work 2025/26 consultation document, the full Corporate Governance Framework and the Codes of Conduct for Advisory Committees, CCP/ACOD and Content Board.</p>	
<p>Item 16: Any other business</p> <p>37. The Board noted that this was Lindsey Fussell’s final meeting as a member of the Ofcom and recorded its sincere gratitude for her contribution over the years.</p>	
<p>Item 17: Date of the next meeting</p> <p>38. The next scheduled Board meeting would be held on 2 April 2025.</p> <p>39. The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.</p>	

Approved: _____
Chair