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Channel Four Television Corporation's Statement of Media Content Policy 2025

Dear Priya,

I am writing to share Ofcom's review of Channel Four Television Corporation's ('C4C') 2025 Statement of Media Content Policy (the 'SMCP'). Thank you to your team for their constructive engagement on this work.

As this is the first time you will have received this assessment as Chief Executive, I wanted to set out briefly our overall view. While the period covered predates your tenure, our analysis of both C4C's 2025 Annual Report & SMCP, and our own data, indicates that C4C continues to deliver important public value: providing trusted news, maintaining a distinctive editorial voice, supporting the creative economy, and serving younger audiences where they choose to watch. Ofcom recognises and values that contribution.

Our findings also show that the organisation continued to make progress against its *Fast Forward* goals to transform Channel 4 into a digital-first public service streamer, despite facing significant strategic and financial pressures. However, these gains should not obscure the scale of the challenges ahead.

Alongside this, we remain deeply concerned by the disturbing allegations raised in connection with the reality series *Married at First Sight UK.* Serious questions have been raised about contributor welfare and editorial responsibility, which go to the heart of audience trust. We expect C4C to complete the external reviews you have commissioned in response and act on any findings without delay. We will examine the findings of these reviews carefully, alongside any steps taken by C4C in response, and all other evidence made available to us, to determine whether further regulatory action is required. We have committed to conducting a timely review of our own rules and guidance and will not hesitate to strengthen these if we need to.

Your appointment comes at an important moment for the organisation. The broader review of C4C's business and strategy that you have initiated makes this a timely opportunity to reflect on the past year as you set a clear course for ensuring Channel 4's long-term sustainability and its ability to continue to successfully deliver its remit and provide wider public value.

Against that backdrop, our assessment of C4C's performance over the past year provides a useful evidence base.

In support of this, we have further developed our approach to reporting this year, to provide greater insight for audiences and the wider sector into C4C's performance and the basis on which Ofcom holds it to account. We are also considering how our monitoring approach should evolve given the new duties and reporting requirements for the commercial PSBs flowing from the Media Act. We will share our plans with you and the team once that work is complete.

C4C has made some progress on revenue diversification, but a clearer pathway to long-term sustainability is still needed.

In a year when the sector remained under significant strain, C4C maintained revenues of around £1 billion. Digital advertising grew steadily to £346m, accounting for 34% of total revenue and exceeding C4C's own 2025 target. Non-advertising revenues also increased £10m YoY to £105m as C4C continued to diversify its revenue base by moving away from linear advertising revenues. This enabled C4C to broadly maintain its overall investment in content and continue delivering across a range of remit areas.

The sustained growth in digital advertising revenues and the early contribution from C4C's wider investment activity, including the acquisition of Firecrest Films are positive developments. The overall picture however suggests that in the context of a volatile advertising market, C4C has less flexibility to respond to further pressures. The organisation remains heavily reliant on advertising (around 90% of revenue in 2025); revenues were broadly flat for the third consecutive year; the organisation recorded an operating deficit of £9m and ended the year with materially lower net cash reserves of £49m. Although the renewed credit facility offers some reassurance, the core business remains structurally sensitive to cyclical downturns, underlining the importance of building a more resilient financial base. Reducing that vulnerability, while preserving the qualities that make Channel 4 distinctive and valuable in public service terms, will be crucial.

In that context and given these pressures, your current strategic review provides an important opportunity to set out a clearer and more transparent plan for how diversification, operational efficiency and investment priorities will support long-term sustainability, including more specific milestones and measures of success.

Creative performance and progress on the digital-first content strategy remained clear strengths for C4C.

Commissions delivered notable successes in 2025, with new titles including *Patience, In Flight, Operation Dark Phone: Murder by Text* and *Virgin Island,* as well as strong returning series*, such as 24 Hours In Police Custody, Taskmaster* and *Grand Designs* along with *The Great British Bake Off* and *Gogglebox.* Streaming viewing continued to grow with further expansion across digital and social platforms and there were some positive signs of engagement among younger audiences. However, in common with other PSBs, overall viewing and reach continue to decline, and the pressures of audience fragmentation remain acute. Taking these factors into account, the clarity of C4C's future content and distribution strategy will be critical; in particular, setting out how Channel 4 will sustain distinctiveness, translate digital growth into durable audience relationships and measure success consistently and transparently across platforms.

C4C continued to deliver strong public value in key areas of its content duties and remit.

News and current affairs remained a clear strength, with Channel 4 maintaining its news audience and growing viewing time across linear and streaming, bucking wider industry trends. This was reflected in continued industry recognition: with six journalism awards including the RTS *News Programme of the Year* award for the third consecutive year; and accolades for *Gaza: Doctors Under*

Attack from BAFTA, the Media Freedom Awards, the British Journalism Awards and the Rory Peck Awards. We also recognise the ongoing efforts to reach young audiences through more experimental news and current affairs formats across platforms.

More broadly, C4C's delivery remains rooted in the qualities that continue to define its public value and distinctiveness, reflecting cultural diversity, pushing boundaries, and offering a range of perspectives across both broadcast and streaming. Film4 continues to play an important role in supporting bold independent British films. Our research, along with C4C's own, indicates that these characteristics remain closely associated with the Channel 4 brand.

There were some positive developments in C4C's investment in the Nations and Regions, though continued investment, focus and engagement with the production sector will be important.

Overall regional production spend fell 7% (£15.5m) in 2025. While there was some rebalancing of the budget across the nations, with spend increases in Northern Ireland and Wales, this was offset by larger reductions in England and Scotland, underlining the difficult trade-offs involved in supporting production across the UK in the current economic climate.

We recognise the continued impact of C4C's expanded *4Skills* programme across the UK and its strong integration within the *4 All the UK* strategy, as well as improved transparency on commissioning activity in the Nations and Regions and broader supplier engagement outside London. These are important indicators of C4C's contribution to the wider production sector. However, our engagement with independent producers continues to highlight the wider pressures across the creative economy, emphasising the importance of clear, timely and consistent communication with the sector.

Looking ahead, greater clarity on how commissioning and skills activity will support the long-term sustainability of the production sector, alongside further evaluation of the impact of *4Skills* initiatives, will be valuable.

As C4C enters its next stage under your leadership, I trust this assessment provides a useful foundation for your strategic review, particularly in considering how the organisation can continue to balance commercial resilience with strong delivery of its remit. Channel 4 remains a highly important institution within the UK's public service broadcasting system and the decisions taken in this next phase will be central to its continued strength and distinctiveness.

I look forward to continuing to engage with you on these issues over the coming year.

I am copying this letter and the link to our detailed response to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Chairs of the House of Commons Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport, and the House of Lords Select Committee for Communications and Digital. We will publish both documents on Ofcom's website.

Yours sincerely,

Dame Melanie Dawes
Chief Executive