

**Minutes of the 93rd meeting of
the Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland
held hybrid (at Landmark House, Belfast and via Microsoft Teams)
on Thursday 10th October 2024**

Present

Carrie Matchett	ACNI Chair
Colm Murphy	ACNI Member
Jackie Neill	ACNI Member
Aodhan O'Donnell	ACNI Member
Paul Wickens	ACNI Member
Michael Wilson	ACNI Member
Karen Baxter	Ofcom Board Member for Northern Ireland (by Teams)
Maria McCann	Content Board Member for Northern Ireland (by Teams)

In attendance

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

NextGen NED observer

Representative from the Communications Consumer Panel (via Teams)

Other Ofcom colleagues (via Teams)

Item 1: Welcome, apologies and declaration of Members' Interests

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies were received.
2. Members did not have any new interests to declare.

Item 2: Minutes of the 92nd meeting held on 20th June 2024 and Actions

3. The Minutes of the 92nd meeting were approved.
4. Members noted the Actions Table from the previous meeting and agreed all actions were complete after a verbal update was given on two actions.
5. The Committee asked to be kept updated on those two items: a 'middleman solution' for PSTN switch-off for vulnerable/specialist needs consumers; and the rules around telecoms providers' End of Contract Notifications and new contract offers.

Item 3: Interim Committee Business & Issues since last meeting

6. The interim Chair invited updates from the Connectivity & Consumer and Broadcasting subgroups:
Broadcasting
7. The subgroup lead noted ACNI's submission to the second consultation on Channel 4's new licence, and its emphasis on the need for a higher quota for Out of England commissioning, with targets for each of the devolved Nations. He noted that, with the Channel 4 relicensing process nearing completion and the Channel 3&5 licences re-awarded, the coming months looked quieter for the sub-group, although they will continue to engage with Ofcom's Review of Local Media.
8. A Committee member highlighted the continuation of the Global Ireland Media Challenge Fund in the Republic of Ireland which provided support for the wider news market. The Committee asked for this to be shared with the Local Media Review team.
9. The Committee discussed BBC NI's recent announcement of staff cuts, and noted that Ofcom had recently met with BBC NI's Director and Head of Corporate Affairs.
10. The Committee discussed a response from Ofcom's BBC regulation team on the strategy for NI local and network commissioning, and agreed to continue to monitor this important issue.
Connectivity & Consumer
11. The subgroup lead noted the Committee's response to Ofcom's consultation on mobile text scams.
12. Future work areas for the sub-group will be the Postal USO, ADR and Inflation-linked Price Rises, with a watching brief on the new mobile roaming rules.
13. Committee members agreed that while the Inflation-linked Price Rises rules come into force in January 2025, this needs to be monitored as it is not retrospective, so consumers on older contracts could still be negatively affected.
14. Committee members welcomed an offer from Royal Mail to meet the Committee and agreed to organise this through the sub-group with the invitation extended to all Committee members.
Online Harms
15. The Chair confirmed plans for an ad hoc meeting on 7 November with Ofcom's Online Safety team to discuss the Committee's response to the Illegal Harms consultation.
Chair & other business
16. The Chair thanked the sub-group leads for their work on their respective forward plans.

17. The Chair informed the Committee that Channel 4 and Ofcom's Media Act team would be attending the December meeting. Ofcom's BBC Regulation team would attend the March 2025 meeting and the Chair noted that any issues could be raised with the team in the interim.
18. The Chair had met the other National Advisory Committee Chairs at the beginning of October when they discussed priorities and common areas of focus. The Chair welcomed plans to hold the annual meeting with Ofcom's Chair and CEO early next year, before the terms of some Advisory Committee Chairs come to an end.
19. The Chair confirmed which Committee member will be the 2025 Next Generation NED mentor and thanked them for volunteering.
20. The Chair congratulated Ofcom's Northern Ireland team on a successful Media Nations event last month and noted the Ofcom Board's forthcoming visit to Belfast in November, as well as Ofcom sessions at the Belfast Media Festival that same week.

Item 4: Committee Discussion on Agenda items:

21. Members discussed the key issues to raise with the Ofcom project teams in items 9 and 11.

Item 5: Board update from Northern Ireland Member

22. The Board member reported on the Board's recent meeting and highlighted several items which had been discussed. These included the PSM review, Royal Mail and progress in Online Safety regulation. The Board member also noted a paper on satellite connectivity and asked for it to be shared with the Committee.
23. The Board member said a statement was imminent on the relicensing of Channel 4. She reassured the Committee that all the relevant issues raised by local industry stakeholders had been discussed at great length by the Board and she looked forward to Channel 4 significantly improving its performance in Northern Ireland in the next licence period.

Item 6: Content Board update from Northern Ireland Member

24. The Content Board member reported on the Board's recent meeting and highlighted several items which had been discussed, especially in relation to broadcasting standards cases, the Media Act, and diversity in broadcasting.
25. The Content Board member echoed the NI Board member's comments regarding Channel 4 relicensing and noted the collegiate approach taken by the production industry representatives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Item 7: Public Policy Update

26. The Chair welcomed the Public Policy Director to the meeting and thanked them for an insightful paper.
27. The Director highlighted the ongoing engagement with the new UK Government and Parliament across all of Ofcom's sectors.
28. Members asked about the impact of the new Regulatory Innovation Office and noted Ofcom's work on the DRCF Innovation Hub.
29. The Committee discussed the effect 2G/3G switch-off could have on the connectivity of planned smart meters and asked if the NI Executive had taken this into account.
30. The Content Board member noted Coimisiún na Meán's legislative function to promote programmes relating to climate change and environmental sustainability and promote environmental sustainability in the practices of broadcast and online services. The

Committee agreed to share this information with the Public Policy Team and sought information on any comparable work by Ofcom.
[Maria McCann left the meeting]

Item 8: Online Safety Report

31. Bimpe Archer introduced her paper and highlighted a forthcoming tender to map out the existing provision of Media Literacy services across Northern Ireland.
32. A Committee member recommended previous work by the NI Consumer Council on Media Literacy and financial capabilities which could prove helpful.
33. The Committee discussed the August riots and the part which misinformation & disinformation played. Members discussed what learnings Ofcom could take from these events and noted planned follow-up activity with industry and Government.
34. The Committee also discussed the challenge facing young people to discern factual information and welcomed any effort to include Media Literacy in the educational curriculum.
35. The Committee agreed that, while it would not formally respond to Ofcom's draft transparency reporting guidance consultation, it was important to raise with the Ofcom team the need for sufficient Northern Ireland-specific data.

[Maria McCann rejoined the meeting]

Item 9: Plan of Work & Three Year Plan

36. The Chair welcomed members of the Ofcom Plan of Work & Three Year Plan team.
37. The Committee welcomed plans to engage the NI Executive and Assembly in the Plan of Work – in keeping with Ofcom's Memo of Understanding – which will include hosting the stakeholder consultation event at Stormont in January.
38. Committee members suggested that Ofcom's themed priorities appeared too vague, while noting that the full Plan of Work document would provide additional details on specific activities.
39. The Committee asked that the Northern Ireland priorities focused as much as possible on outcomes rather than being process-led – an example being the objective on the Public Service Media Review which should focus on the outcomes for audiences.
40. The Committee welcomed the continuing recognition of the importance of co-ordinating work with the Irish communications regulators, for the benefit of consumers.
41. Committee members queried whether the make-up of Northern Ireland's telecoms infrastructure warranted special consideration from a resilience and security perspective.
42. The Committee agreed to respond to the Plan of Work consultation due to be published in December.

[Karen Baxter left the meeting]

Item 10: Revised Equality Scheme for Northern Ireland

43. Jonathan Rose introduced his paper to the Committee and sought the Committee's advice on the content of the revised equality scheme. The Committee made the following suggestions:
 - Add Mencap to the list of equality consultees
 - Make the potential for religious, age and gender inequality in online safety more explicit
 - Add postal services to the Action Plan, noting the needs of NI users and their over-reliance on Royal Mail

44. The Committee noted the plans to consult publicly on the revised scheme in the coming months.

Item 11: Future of Wireless Connectivity

45. The Chair welcomed members of the Future of Wireless Connectivity project team. The team gave a brief introduction to their paper and highlighted the key points.

46. Committee members offered the following observations:

- Consumers will care less about the technology providing the connectivity and will care more about its quality and seamlessness.
- There is still a need to strive for a consistent service for all consumers in the future, meanwhile some people in rural areas are still struggling to get a basic service.
- Is enough consideration being given to having different levels of network security?
- How resilient are the various platforms and how quickly can they take over from each other?
- Can networks be built to be resistant to viruses and scams?

47. The Committee encouraged Ofcom to engage with the following organisations to ensure the relevant issues for Northern Ireland were part of the discussion:

- Department for the Economy's telecoms team
- QUB's Centre for Wireless Innovation
- ComReg

48. The Committee also noted the potential for Northern Ireland to be a testbed for future connectivity systems, given the extensive availability of full-fibre.

49. The Chair thanked the team and advised them the Committee would like to meet them again as the project developed.

[Maria McCann left the meeting]

Item 12: Northern Ireland Director's Report

50. Jonathan Rose introduced his paper to the Committee and highlighted the Radio Foyle licence breach, three community radio stations going off-air and progress on the Shared Rural Network.

51. The Committee discussed the possibility of the three community radio licences being transferred to a new owner.

52. The Committee also discussed the Radio Foyle breach, noting it was still under consideration by Ofcom.

53. The Committee noted the recent NI Assembly debate on mobile coverage and discussed the ongoing barriers to mobile rollout. A member asked whether the Strategic Investment Board was part of the Mobile Action Plan's approach to remove the barriers.

Item 13: Communications Consumer Panel Update

54. The Chair welcomed the Panel's member for Wales to present the update paper, in the continued absence of a member for Northern Ireland.

55. The Committee noted that recruitment was underway to appoint a new NI member of the Panel.

56. Members welcomed CCP's detailed report and underlined the importance of a number of emerging issues, including the implications of 2G/3G switch off on vehicle eCall; the need for additional postal services to be promoted through non-digital as well as digital means to reach all relevant consumer groups; and the difficulties for certain consumer groups in accessing voice assistants.

57. A member noted the Connectivity & Consumer subgroup's interest in the Panel's work on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and the sub-group wished to follow any progress.
58. The Committee discussed Minimum Digital Living Standards and noted research funded by the Welsh and Scottish governments on the matter. Members agreed it is important Northern Ireland does not fall behind in this area and should learn from the research findings in Wales and Scotland.
59. The Committee was reminded of the NI Consumer Hub meeting on 7 November where research on Inclusivity would be shared.

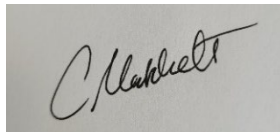
Item 14: Any other Business

60. The paper on the 2024 NI Connected Nations Report was noted.
61. Committee members asked if any Ofcom reports on the August riots could be shared in due course.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

62. The next scheduled Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 5th December 2024.

Approved:



Date: 5th December 2024