

Ofcom Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland

For Discussion: Spectrum Auction: [✂ Names redacted].

The Spectrum Auction team gave a presentation regarding the planned 700 MHz and 3.6-3.8 GHz spectrum auction, and the consultation on the auction process which is closing on 12 March. The team highlighted Ofcom's statutory duties regarding spectrum and how the auctioned spectrum will be used for 5G services. The main aim of this spectrum auction is to improve mobile coverage across the UK, keeping strong competition between the 4 mobile network operators. The spectrum is expected to be available by mid 2020.

The committee:

- Welcomed this further opportunity to comment on the auction process and hear about the proposed coverage obligations.
- Expressed concern that the UK-wide obligation target to build 500 new mobile masts (i.e. not nation-specific) might allow the possibility of Northern Ireland to gain little or no benefit. In addition, the 90% target for coverage could have little impact in Northern Ireland given that many of the operators are at, or close to, this level.
- Noted that it would be beneficial to engage with the Department for Infrastructure and Local Councils in Northern Ireland to ensure that planning rules and processes would not hamper decisions by MNOs to plan for new masts in Northern Ireland.
- Whilst recognising the careful balancing of incentives with coverage obligations, were nevertheless concerned at the possibility that neither coverage obligation would be taken up.
- Noted that although this is an opportunity to significantly improve mobile coverage over the next few years, it falls short of universal coverage. The Committee encouraged Ofcom to work with Government to explore further opportunities to reach the last remaining percentage of geographical not-spots.

Action: *Minutes noted as response to Spectrum Auction consultation*

Spectrum team to provide a follow up note on auction developments