

Minutes of the 77th meeting of the Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland held virtually via Microsoft Teams on 9 September 2020

Present

Carrie Matchett	ACNI Chair
John Ellison	ACNI Member
Phil Flanagan	ACNI Member
Kathy Graham	ACNI Member
Alan Meban	ACNI Member
Paul Wilson	ACNI Member

In attendance

Bob Downes	Ofcom Board Member for Scotland and Northern Ireland (Acting)
Angelina Fusco	Content Board Member for Northern Ireland
Rick Hill	Consumer Panel Chair and Member for Northern Ireland
Jonathan Rose	Director, Northern Ireland
Rebecca Lennon	Regulatory Affairs Advisor, Northern Ireland
Sinéad Lee	Regulatory Affairs Manager, Northern Ireland
James Stinson	Regulatory Affairs Manager, Northern Ireland
Other Ofcom colleagues	
Colleagues from Bauer NI (items 37-42)	

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Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed members and attendees to the meeting. Both Paul Wilson and Bob Downes were in attendance for part of the meeting.

Declaration of Members' Interests – Oral

2. No interests were declared by Members or attendees.

Minutes of the meeting held on 1st June 2020 and matters arising – Minutes 76

3. The minutes of the 76th meeting, held on 1st June 2020, were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair as an accurate record. Actions from the previous meeting were completed.

4. The Chair discussed future meeting agendas to include: Migration to VoIP, Ofcom's Universality work and a meeting with the new Consumer Council Chief Executive. It was **NOTED** that the universality work was still ongoing and that an update had been subsequently delayed.

5. A Member mentioned their negative experience with migrating to VoIP and a follow up call was offered with Ofcom's VoIP team.

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Interim Committee Business since last formal meeting

6. PSB: A subgroup met with Ofcom's Small Screen: Big Debate team on 23rd June. The team updated that there will be a series of virtual stakeholder roundtable meetings and an online conference in the Autumn to help inform a consultation on proposals to government. Members **AGREED** that they will meet with the SSBD team following the conference and respond to the consultation.
7. Postal User Needs: A subgroup met with Ofcom's Post team on 29th July and were given an overview of Ofcom's recent research due to be published in the Autumn. There was a discussion around the sustainability of the postal USO, changes to delivery patterns during the Covid-19 period, and the protection of rural, older, vulnerable and isolated consumers.
8. Strategic Implications of Covid-19: On 7th July the Committee provided a summary of issues affecting Northern Ireland to Ofcom's Strategy Team.
9. Social Change Initiative meeting: The Chair and Ofcom NI colleagues met with a colleague from the SCI on 10th July. Ofcom's work in diversity in broadcasting and SS:BD were highlighted at the meeting. A paper was provided to ACNI on the recent SCI conference and Members discussed ethnic diversity in the media and the BBC's coverage of the Republic of Ireland.
10. Advisory Committee Chairs' meeting: In June the Chairs had an informal meeting and discussions included: different experiences of the community radio fund, the challenges facing local production centres and Small Screen Big Debate.
11. It was **NOTED** that the annual meeting for the Ofcom Chairman, Chief Executive and Advisory Committee Chairs was scheduled for mid-November. It was **AGREED** that the Committee would have a conference call beforehand to discuss issues to be raised.
12. The Chair thanked ACNI members for their contributions across the wide range of work progressed outside the Committee's formal meetings.

Access Market Review Consultation – Area 3

13. A subgroup met with Ofcom's Wholesale Fixed Telecoms Market Review team on 1st September and were updated that the *Pricing wholesale local access services in Geographic Area 3* consultation is a follow-up to the January consultation as BT has since made a commitment to deploy a fibre network in rural areas (defined as Geographic Area 3).
14. The current consultation provides detail on BT's proposal to build to 3.2m UK-wide premises in rural areas and Ofcom's proposals for adopting a forecast RAB approach in Area 3 by indexing copper-based services of bandwidths up to 40/10 and allowing pricing flexibility for higher speed services. The consultation will close on 16th September.
15. The Committee welcomed BT's commitment and Ofcom's proposal for WLA pricing in Area 3 and **NOTED** that although BT's commitment did not have nations-specific targets, ACNI would appreciate assurances from BT that there would be proportionate fibre build in Northern Ireland as part of its build.
16. The Committee **AGREED** that they would not formally respond to this consultation but use these minutes to feed back to Ofcom's WFT Review team.

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Committee discussion on Agenda items and papers

17. The Committee discussed the agenda items and papers, focusing particularly on the BBC Annual Review with emphasis on investment in Northern Ireland and retaining younger audiences.
18. The Committee also discussed the Bauer NI presentation, highlighting Bauer NI's innovative work during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

Ofcom's Annual Report on the BBC

19. Members were briefed on the upcoming Annual Report and Performance Report on the BBC.
20. The Committee discussed a range of themes and issues including:
- concern that the capital investment project for BBC NI had been put on hold, without a published date for review or next steps
 - a need for further progress on representing the diversity of NI voices on the BBC's networks
 - the importance of content aimed specifically at NI audiences; a need for more NI news at weekends on TV and online; disappointment that Radio Ulster/Foyle's traffic and travel service had been discontinued in its entirety due to cuts
 - the value of the BBC engaging directly with its audiences as well as with stakeholder groups
 - the need to appoint a BBC Board member for NI to ensure its audiences are fully represented in BBC decision-making
21. Members considered that, overall, the BBC had demonstrated its value as a public service broadcaster in the pandemic, from the provision of news and information to the excellent and timely response to home schooling needs as well as the important entertainment offer. However, network news had not always reflected the different situations and policies across the UK. Members would welcome more information and transparency in the annual report around the BBC in the Nations, including NI.
22. Members **AGREED** to send a note of issues and themes relevant to Northern Ireland to the BBC Annual Review team. The team also offered a follow up meeting with ACNI.

Ofcom Board update

23. The Committee was briefed on recent Board meetings and **NOTED** the recent reorganisation of groups and teams within Ofcom. The Committee heard about the upcoming Board Strategy day.
24. Members discussed the UK Government's decision on Huawei, forthcoming legislation on VSP and Online Harms and the impact that Black Lives Matter has had on Ofcom and industry.

Public Policy update

25. An Ofcom colleague updated the Committee on key public policy developments since the last meeting.

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26. There was a discussion around the Brexit and the resulting uncertainty regarding parcel deliveries from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. It was **NOTED** that the Consumer Communications Panel Chair has written to BEIS regarding post issues.

27. A Member asked why there was not a published list of successful NI applicants for the recent round of Community Radio Fund. Ofcom colleagues **AGREED** to find out further information.

Director's Report

28. An Ofcom Colleague highlighted several points from the Director's Report including the recent publication of the Media Nations Report and the NI Consumer Council's Postal Report. Members **NOTED** that Ofcom colleagues had presented written and oral evidence to the DfI Minister's Advisory Panel looking at the scope of a possible Infrastructure Commission for Northern Ireland.

29. Members **NOTED** that TG4 is interested in a higher available slot on the NI Electronic Programme Guide and Ofcom, DCMS and Digital UK all have a role in considering this request. Members **AGREED** that they would support TG4's ambition noting the value of both Irish and Ulster-Scots broadcasting for Northern Ireland audiences.

30. Members **AGREED** to request a briefing from Ofcom's Brexit team to discuss postal, telecoms and broadcasting implications from January 2021.

31. Members **AGREED** discussions on the appointment of an Ofcom Board Member for Northern Ireland should be a standing agenda item going forward.

Consumer Communications Panel update

32. The CCP Representative highlighted several points from the CCP Report including the recent Consumer Hub meeting in Northern Ireland and the CCP's strategic plan which is now on its website.

33. A member asked if there had been any information obtained by CCP or Ofcom on customer service response times. Ofcom colleagues **AGREED** to find out information from complaints data.

Content Board Update

34. Members **NOTED** that Content Board held an extraordinary meeting in August. They **NOTED** that recruitment was underway for new Members and that Content Board is preparing for any new Online Harms responsibilities for Ofcom may be decided by Government.

35. Content Board is looking into several standards cases and noted it was likely that there will be a review of Ofcom's code of acceptable language for broadcasters.

Presentation from Bauer NI

36. Bauer NI representatives gave a presentation highlighting the radio broadcaster's work and impact in Northern Ireland. Their 2020 overview included a new Business Hub - sponsored by Invest NI, a mental health awareness campaign during the Covid-19 lockdown period, Cash for Kids emergency

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grants and an ongoing Cash Call quiz. Bauer invested in all colleagues to equip them to work from home and recently defined their values as Inform, Entertain and Engage. Bauer NI colleagues had met with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, reflecting the important role Bauer’s stations play for local audiences.

37. It was **NOTED** that 48% of the Northern Ireland population had tuned into Bauer stations and watched their Facebook Live Covid-19 briefings. As reported by RAJAR, in Q1 2020 Bauer NI had surpassed BBC Radio Ulster’s listening figures for first time with 527,000 weekly reach.

A number of key themes were discussed:

- Digital: There was a discussion on digital radio use and the low take up in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK. It was **NOTED** that some rural areas are unable to receive DAB signals and there is a lack of local radio stations on the platform. Bauer NI is making use of the popularity of internet streaming, smart speakers and phone apps for radio listening.
- Small Scale DAB: It was **NOTED** that there are 12 stations earmarked for NI, starting off in Derry/Londonderry, and that Bauer NI welcomes competition. Bauer NI would need to discuss the business case for each of their stations to enable Small Scale DAB operations to be viable.
- Learnings from Covid-19: The Committee asked what Bauer NI had learned from broadcasting over the Covid period and what they think will endure beyond this period. Bauer NI emphasised its social responsibility and the innovative ways in which this had been delivered during lockdown, from presenting news and statistics in accessible ways to using social media to reach wider audiences.

38. The Committee thanked Bauer NI representatives for attending the meeting and congratulated them on their achievement of growth and engagement throughout 2020.


Any Other Business

39. There was no other business.

Date of the Next Meeting

40. The next scheduled Committee meeting would be held on 25 November 2020.

Approved:



Chair

Date: 17.10.22