

# Note of the 316th Meeting of the Ofcom Board, held on 17 July 2024

Members were welcomed to the 315th meeting of the Ofcom Board. In addition to Board members, Martin Ballantyne (General Counsel), Veronica Branton (Corporation Secretary), Francesca Carter (Head of Governance) and Sharon Malley (Governance Manager) attended throughout.

## Declaration of members' interests

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1. No new interests were declared.

## Minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2024 and matters arising

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2. The minutes of the Ofcom Board meeting held on 19 June 2024 were approved for signature as an accurate record.
3. A summary of progress against action points was noted.

## Chair's report

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4. The Chair updated the Board on his activities, including a meeting with fellow peers in the House of Lords on online safety.

## Chief Executive's report

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5. Melanie Dawes presented a paper on her activities, including meetings with stakeholders and politicians. She said finalisation of Ofcom's Annual Report and Accounts was continuing, and it was hoped that it would be laid before Parliament before the summer recess, although this was dependent on the capacity of the National Audit Office. The topline results of the colleague survey had been received and she had been very encouraged by the strong engagement scores and the recognition of a cultural shift on agility.
6. Gill Whitehead would be leaving her role as Group Director Online Safety at Ofcom. She would be stepping down from mid-September to take up a role as Visiting Policy Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute. She would also chair the Global Online Safety Regulators Network until the end of the year, and so would continue to work closely with Ofcom in both capacities. Lindsey Fussell would become interim Online Safety Group Director for a period of six months, while a competition to appoint a permanent successor would be conducted.
7. Ofcom was close to finalising the recruitment for the position of Group Director Network and Communications, to take over from Lindsey Fussell in the Autumn. It was hoped that an announcement would be made shortly.

8. Clive Jones updated the Board on broadcast standards during the election campaign.
9. The Board noted the paper.

## Post-election update

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10. The Board discussed an update on the new Government. She said one of the primary themes of the new Government was growth, with its plans across the piece dependent on improvements in the economy. There was strong focus on regions and nations, with MPs from Wales and Scotland being well represented in the Government and the Cabinet and some Ministers proposing to work part of the time in Manchester.
11. Kate Davies briefed the Board on the new Ministers at DSIT and DCMS and their initial approach to Ofcom's areas of responsibility and also on likely outcomes of the King's speech.
12. The Board noted that Ofcom would need to identify for the new Government how it contributed to the growth agenda, recognising Ofcom's facilitation role. Ofcom could also contribute to the debate on the creative economy, including through its past work on Small Screen Big Debate and the forthcoming Public Service Media Review. Projects such as supporting the move from legacy infrastructure to new tech backed up Ofcom's growth story.
13. The Board noted the update.

## Three-Year Business Plan update

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14. The Board discussed a paper on the Three-Year Business Plan. It was noted that the current Three-Year Plan had been helpful to clarify Ofcom's key objectives and priorities and that this new plan would include an integrated financial plan. The proposals were being subject to financial stress-testing at varying levels of budgetary constraint.
15. The Board discussed the proposed priorities and noted that it would be helpful to show where Ofcom had chosen to 'lean out' alongside the new priorities so that it was clearer how the new priorities would be resourced within the budgetary envelope.
16. The Board would be updated on the Three-Year Plan proposals, including year-by-year costs, at its meeting in September, and would be asked to approve the plan at its meeting in November.
17. The Board noted the report.

## Update on Ofcom's post work

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18. The Board discussed a paper on Ofcom's post work. It was noted that Royal Mail had a quality of service recovery plan, which Ofcom would monitor frequently throughout the year. It had highlighted this plan to its customers and made a commitment of continuous improvement.
19. The Board noted the proposed changes to the Universal Service Obligation that Royal Mail had put forward in response to Ofcom's call for evidence. It was noted that if it decided to do so Ofcom could make these changes without a need for primary legislation. The Board discussed the risks around the proposals.

20. The Board noted the paper.

## Update on the data transformation delivery plan

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21. The Board discussed a paper on the data transformation delivery plan and progress with the five data priorities. The ongoing review of the work and operation of the data team would focus on delivery for Ofcom and would be discussed by the Senior Management Team in September.
22. The Board discussed the move towards buying external data products, where possible, rather than developing systems internally. This has been driven by the increased quality and availability of off-the-shelf products and also by a new focus of the data team on producing data products to complement their ongoing work on data analysis.
23. It was noted that the investments required in data had been budgeted in the normal way and would be subject to usual financial governance approvals process.
24. The Board noted the paper.

## Estates strategy

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25. The Board discussed a paper on Ofcom's estates strategy. The Board approved the proposals set out in the paper.

## Communications strategy

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26. The Board discussed a paper on the 2024/25 communications strategy and noted that the strategy was a continuation of the approach adopted in previous years. The Board discussed the strategy and noted the proposals to improve awareness of Ofcom among harder to reach audiences and stakeholders. It was noted that although it was not possible to respond to every inaccurate comment about Ofcom and its work, it could be helpful to issue a rebuttal where the reach of the inaccurate comment was extensive and the rebuttal was clear and straightforward.
27. The Board noted that it would be helpful to see figures on awareness of Ofcom segmented by nation. The likely forthcoming challenges for the communications team and the need for continued stakeholder engagement were noted.
28. The Board noted the paper.

## Corporate Governance Framework – Schedule of Delegations amendments for online safety

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29. The Board approved amendments to Annex 4 of the Corporate Governance Framework to be effective from 1 August 2024.

## Appointments to the CCP-ACOD

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30. The Board approved a recommendation to be made to DSIT for the appointments of candidates to the Communications Consumer Panel-Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People for a three-year term. The Board noted that the vacancy for a CCP-ACOD Member for Northern Ireland was to be re-advertised under a revised role specification.

## Advisory Committee for Wales

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31. The Board approved an appointment to the Chair of the Advisory Committee for Wales.

## Planning for the Board Strategy Day

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32. The Board noted the key objectives, design principles and high-level agenda for the October Board Strategy Day.

## Regulator growth duty

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33. The Board noted the description and implications of the new 'growth duty', which the previous Government placed on Ofcom, and which came into effect in May 2024.

## Highlights from Ofcom's editorial standards work January to July 2024

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34. The Board noted the update.

## Information items

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35. The Board noted the following information items:

- Non-executive member updates
- Monthly performance report
- Board work programme and publications schedule
- Minutes of the Communications Consumer Panel of 15 May 2024 and Risk and Audit Committee of 10 June 2024.

## Any other business

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36. There was no other business.

## Date of the next meeting

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37. The next Board meeting would be held on 25 September 2024.