

Science, Innovation and Technology Committee

Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of Ofcom

Second Report of Session 2026–27

HC 55

Science, Innovation and Technology Committee

The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and its associated public bodies. It also exists to ensure that Government policies and decision-making across departments are based on solid scientific evidence and advice.

Current membership

[Dame Chi Onwurah](#) (Labour; Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Chair)

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[Kit Malthouse](#) (Conservative; North West Hampshire)

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[Freddie van Mierlo](#) (Liberal Democrat; Henley and Thame)

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[Daniel Zeichner](#) (Labour; Cambridge)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet [via www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the Report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 20 May 2026, to be printed. It was published on 22 May 2026 by authority of the House of Commons.
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1 Pre-appointment hearing for the chair of Ofcom

1. In April 2026, the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) informed us that, following an open recruitment campaign, the government's preferred candidate for appointment as chair of Ofcom was Sir Ian Cheshire.
2. We invited Sir Ian to a pre-appointment hearing, which took place on Wednesday 20 May. A transcript of the session is available on our website.¹
3. We have also published, as appendices to this report:
 - i) Campaign information provided to us by DSIT, including information on the number of candidates and diversity data;
 - ii) Sir Ian's CV, as submitted by him; and
 - iii) Sir Ian's responses to a set of written questions we sent him in advance of the hearing.
4. The hearing and the written questions addressed Sir Ian's motivation for applying for the role, his background and experience, and his understanding of the work of Ofcom. We also questioned Sir Ian on his priorities for Ofcom and the challenges that the regulator was likely to face.

5. **RECOMMENDATION**

Sir Ian possesses extensive experience of both the private and public sectors. His track record as a business leader is clear and his spells as a departmental non-executive director means that he is familiar with decision-making processes in Whitehall, and the relationship between regulators and government departments. We believe he possesses the skills and experience required to chair an independent regulator such as Ofcom.

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/135/science-innovation-and-technology-committee/work/5/?committeebusinessslug=preappointment-hearing>

6.

RECOMMENDATION

However, we encourage ministers to direct Sir Ian to prioritise quickly improving his knowledge of the UK's online safety legislation. In our digital society, online safety is a complex and urgent issue of critical importance to our constituents, and as chair we expect Sir Ian to provide not only strategic leadership and drive, but to represent Ofcom in difficult discussions with companies covered by the Online Safety Act, including the global technology companies that hold so much influence over our online lives.

7.

RECOMMENDATION

We also recommend that ministers underline the scope and scale of the challenges facing Ofcom to Sir Ian, reminding him of what makes a difference to our constituents on a day-to-day basis, and that Ofcom's primary duty is to the British public. We would expect to see this demonstrated in Ofcom's decisions and public engagement.

8.

RECOMMENDATION

In our hearing, Sir Ian committed to determining "what good looks like" and providing metrics to assess his performance at the end of his first year in post. Ministers should request that these be provided to Parliament within his first six months.

9.

RECOMMENDATION

We are endorsing his appointment, and will closely monitor his and Ofcom's performance, particularly its approach to enforcement of the Act. Sir Ian should expect to be robustly held to account by this committee on a regular basis, and we look forward to seeing a proactive approach from Sir Ian, and much-needed change at Ofcom.

Appendix 1: Campaign information

DSIT provided the following information on the recruitment process and the candidates who applied for the role of Ofcom chair:

Information on the preferred candidate

Name	Sir Ian Cheshire
Their current CV	As attached (Appendix 3)
Declaration of relevant interests made by the candidate	Sir Ian declared his role as Chair of the Institute for Government
Proposed terms of appointment and remuneration (if any)	Appointment: Four years Remuneration: £120,000 per annum Time commitment: Up to 3 days per week to include attendance at Board and Committee meetings, preparation time and other ad hoc engagements.

Campaign information

Campaign launch date	17 November 2025
Campaign closing date	5 January 2026
Reason for any changes in timetable to that originally planned	The closing date was extended from 18 December as there was time to allow an additional application time without impacting the timeline of the process.
Advertising strategy	Gov.uk Public Appointments website

Advisory Assessment Panel	Emran Mian, DSIT Permanent Secretary (Panel Chair) Susannah Storey, DCMS Permanent Secretary Alison Walker-Fraser, business and management expert (Senior Independent Panel Member) Fiona Cannon, Chief Strategy and Sustainability Officer at Yorkshire Building Society (Independent Panel Member)
Number of applicants	30
Number of candidates invited to interview	6 (one candidate withdrew their application after being notified of their interview – 5 candidates were interviewed).
Number of candidates found appointable	3

Diversity data

A: Gender

	% male	% female	% Identify another way	% not declared
Applicants	61%	39%	0%	0%
Shortlist (applicants invited to interview)	67%	33%	0%	0%

B: Ethnicity

	% white	% ethnic minority	% not declared
Applicants	71%	29%	0%
Shortlist (applicants invited to interview)	83%	17%	0%

C: Disability

	% disabled	% non-disabled	% not declared
Applicants	8%	92%	0%
Shortlist (applicants invited to interview)	0%	100%	0%

Appendix 2: CV

Career summary

Experienced FTSE100 chair and former FTSE 100 chief executive, with a career spanning retail, real estate, healthcare, financial services, media and the charitable sector. Extensive board-level leadership experience in large, customer-facing organisations, with a strong record in governance and sustainability.

Appointments

Chair, Land Securities Group PLC (May 2023–Present)

UK-listed commercial property company and one of the UK's largest real estate developers and investors.

Chair, Spire Healthcare Group PLC (March 2021–Present)

Leading UK private healthcare provider, operating hospitals and clinics across the UK.

Chair, Channel 4 (April 2022–March 2025)

UK public-service broadcaster.

Chair, King Charles III Charitable Fund (2018–Present)

Charitable foundation supporting community, environmental and heritage causes.

Chair, We Mean Business Coalition (February 2022–Present)

Global coalition of business facing NGO's focused on climate action.

Chair, Institute for Government (July 2025–Present)

Independent think tank working to improve the effectiveness of government.

Senior Advisor, Ardea Partners (July 2024–June 2026)

Advisory firm focused on sustainability, strategy and long-term value creation.

Previous appointments

Chairman, Barclays UK (February 2017–December 2020)

Ring-fenced UK retail and commercial banking subsidiary of Barclays plc.

Chairman, Debenhams (April 2016–January 2019)

Major UK department store chain at the time of appointment.

Group Chief Executive Officer, Kingfisher plc (January 2008–February 2015)

International home improvement retailer, including brands such as B&Q and Castorama.

Chief Executive Officer, B&Q plc (June 2005–January 2008)

Largest UK home improvement retail business.

E-commerce CEO, International CEO Kingfisher plc (1999–2005)

Created new e-commerce operations for group brands, then ran non UK/France operations.

Public service

Government Lead Non-Executive Director (April 2015–March 2021)

Providing non-executive leadership and challenge at the centre of government.

Economy Honours Committee Chairman (2013–2021)

Business honours and main honours committee member.

Chair of Global Resource Initiative Taskforce (2019–2020)

Govt sponsored multi party review of deforestation, sustainable materials.

Chairman Heads Together (2016–2018)

Mental health campaign of The Royal Foundation.

Honours

Knighted (2014) for services to business, sustainability and the environment.

Appendix 3: Pre-appointment questionnaire

Motivation

What motivated you to apply for this role, and what specific experiences would you bring to it?

I feel that Ofcom has a vital national role to play, with its extended remit in Online Safety, as well as its traditional role in telecoms and broadcasting. It also enables the growth agenda through encouraging infrastructure investment in broadband, telecoms as well enhancing the creative industries in their economic contribution. I would bring extensive PLC chairing experience, knowledge of Whitehall and specific working knowledge of broadcast (C4), telecoms (BT) as well as 25+ years of e-commerce background.

If appointed, are there specific areas within your new responsibilities where you will need to acquire new skills or knowledge?

If appointed I would need to deepen my skills /understanding of the online safety issue set and keep close to the evolution of AI as it impacts all aspects of the remit

How were you recruited? Were you encouraged to apply, and if so, by whom?

I was recruited through an open panel process and was sounded out by adviser at no 10 before applying.

Personal background

Do you currently or potentially have any business, financial or other non-pecuniary interests or commitments, that might give rise to the perception of a conflict of interest if you are appointed? How do you intend to resolve any potential conflicts of interests if you are appointed?

There is some potential of apparent conflict in my chairing the Institute for Government, as it often reports on regulatory performance. As IfG chair I am not involved in the content of these reports and have made the IfG aware of the issue of conflicts, which we would deal with on a case by case basis. Other possible conflicts should be identified upfront, and I have declared anything remotely sensitive to Ofcom (including my son being a Sky News journalist).

If appointed, what professional or voluntary work commitments will you continue to undertake, or do you intend to take on, alongside your new role? How will you reconcile these with your new role?

If appointed, I would continue to Chair Land Securities plc and Spire Healthcare plc, as well as some small charities. I was doing these roles when I was chairing Channel 4 so believe I can manage the time, and they do not present conflicts of interest.

Have you ever held any post or undertaken any activity that might cast doubt on your political impartiality? If so, how will you demonstrate your political impartiality in the role if appointed?

The only political involvement I have ever had was standing in a local council election in 1998, as a conservative candidate. I am not a member of any party, have worked for three politically different governments and am fully committed to Ofcom's independence and impartiality.

Do you intend to serve your full term of office? Do you intend to seek re-appointment?

I intend to serve the full term and would normally hope to be re-appointed

Ofcom

If appointed, what will be your main priorities on taking up the role?

My main priorities will be to assess whether Ofcom has the resources and plans to deliver its remit, including the metrics to measure its performance objectively. Clearly the online safety agenda is the biggest area of activity and I would prioritise that in the first few months, but the breadth of the remit requires disciplined plans to be tracked carefully.

What criteria should the Committee use to judge your performance, and that of Ofcom, over your term of office?

I believe I will need to develop and share the metrics on Ofcom's delivery in order to be able to assess its effectiveness – these metrics should start with the consumers, and their experiences, especially around children's safety online. The emphasis should be on outcomes rather than just how many codes have been issued.

How will you protect and enhance your personal independence and the institutional independence of Ofcom?

I have had extensive Whitehall experience as the Lead Non Executive Director for Government, and on government task forces as well as serving on the current independent Pensions Commission. I fully understand the importance of good honest relationships with departments and have also been an independent ALB chair before at C4.

How do you assess the public profile and reputation of Ofcom?

The public profile of Ofcom has never been higher, led by expectations of enforcement on online safety. It is clear from press coverage that some parties want Ofcom to go faster and further, which I will seek to understand and assess as a priority.

What risks do you think Ofcom will face over your term of office? How do you intend to manage them?

The two main risks seem to me to be 1) losing the trust of the public in the effectiveness of Ofcom as a regulator and 2) the pace of technology change, especially AI, outstripping the ability of Ofcom to regulate in practice. I will monitor both of these risks closely with objective measurement and mitigate as needed.

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 20 May 2026

Members present

Dame Chi Onwurah, in the Chair

Emily Darlington

Kit Malthouse

Samantha Niblett

Lauren Sullivan

Martin Wrigley

Daniel Zeichner

Declaration of interests

The following declarations of interest relating to the inquiry were made:
The Chair declared that she had previously worked for Ofcom.

Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of Ofcom

Draft Report (*Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of Ofcom*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 9 read and agreed to.

Papers were appended to the Report as Appendixes 1-3.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Wednesday 3 June at 9.00 a.m.

Witness

The following witness gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 20 May 2026

Sir Ian Cheshire, government's preferred candidate for the role of chair, Ofcom

[Q1-86](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
4th	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of UK Research and Innovation	HC 1844
3rd	Flying Blind: Innovation, Growth and the Regions	HC 538
2nd	Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms	HC 441
1st	Pre-appointment hearing for the Executive Chair of Innovate UK	HC 834
3rd Special	Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms: Government and Ofcom responses	HC 1397
2nd Special	Insect decline and UK food security: Government Response	HC 717
1st Special	Governance of artificial intelligence (AI): Government Response	HC 591