

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Thursday 15 January 2026
2nd Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

STV News consultation / Scottish broadcasting

1. The Committee took evidence on STV's proposed news changes at its [meeting on 9 October 2025](#) before [writing to Ofcom on 9 October](#) and receiving a [response on 27 October](#). Ofcom [wrote again on 16 December](#) to inform us of the publication of its consultation on the proposed changes, the deadline for which is 9 February 2026.
2. This evidence session with Ofcom will address both the STV News consultation and the [inquiry on Scottish Broadcasting](#).
3. A SPICe briefing can be found at **Annexe A** and the 16 December letter from Ofcom at **Annexe B**.

Clerks, January 2026

Annexe A

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Thursday 15 January 2026

Ofcom: consideration of STV proposals on news output; and Broadcasting inquiry and informing the BBC Charter & Framework renewal

Introduction

The Committee will take evidence from Ofcom. The Committee may wish to explore both Ofcom's role in deciding whether to agree to STV's proposals to change its news programming and issues relating to the Committee's inquiry into broadcasting and the BBC.

In relation to the broadcasting inquiry, Ofcom, of course, has a key role in sector as the regulator. One part of this is setting quotas for productions made out of London and in the English regions and other nations of the UK, as well as the criteria for determining what counts as, for example, Scottish. Ofcom also undertakes and publishes research on the sector, and provides advice to DCMS. The current Charter states that the UK Government will consult with Ofcom on the Charter renewal process.

This paper briefly covers the proposed changes to STV's licence. It also highlights some of the research, observations and conclusions that Ofcom has undertaken in relation to public service media. Discussion on the rules and criteria for determining what counts as a Scottish production are addressed elsewhere in Members' papers and is not replicated here; nevertheless this may be an issue Members wish to explore with the witnesses.

STV

Current licences

Channel 3 is currently made up of 15 regional broadcasting licenses issued by Ofcom. Three relate to areas in Scotland, including STV North, STV Central and Border ITV. Both the STV North and STV Central licences were renewed recently and came into operation on 1 January 2025.

The licences for the areas covering Scotland all include a requirement to broadcast a total of at least 365 hours per calendar year of news programmes that are of a "high quality" and "are able to compete effectively with other television news programmes broadcast nationwide in the United Kingdom." At least 125 of these hours must be shown in Peak Viewing Times.

The licenses for STV North and STV Central include quotas on regional news programming. The quota requires that there is an average of 4 hours a week of regional news programming.

The licence for STV Central also requires that on average 5 minutes of the 6pm news programme includes “separate sub-regional news of particular interest to persons living in the Central Scotland East sub-region and the Central Scotland West sub-region”. Similarly, the news broadcast in STV North is required to include 5 minutes of “news of particular interest to persons living in the North of Scotland North sub-region and the North of Scotland South sub region”.

The licenses also allow for news programmes at the weekend to be the same across both STV regions, “provided that it contains material which is of particular interest to persons living [in both areas]”.

The licences require STV to produce a percentage of the regional programmes it broadcasts from within the licence areas (measured by a percentage of broadcast time). For STV Central, this is 90% and for STV North it is 70%.

Proposed changes

On 25 September 2025 STV published [interim financial results for the 6-months ended 30 June 2025](#). STV's half year results in the first half of 2025 showed the operating profit was down 49% compared to the first half of 2024. STV set out a cost savings plan with the aim of delivering additional cost savings of £3m per annum. STV stated—

“Management is implementing a comprehensive cost savings programme to protect profitability and provide balance sheet flexibility in response to the deterioration in the advertising and content commissioning markets, and ensure the business is well set for growth as market conditions improve.”

It was reported that this cost savings programme may result in the loss of around 60 jobs across the organisation. Part of the initial cost saving plan was to replace the current news programmes for STV North and STV Central with one news programme covering both areas. The new programme would be broadcast from Glasgow.

The Committee took [evidence from stakeholders and executives from STV on 9 October 2025](#). Rufus Radcliffe, the Chief Executive of STV, told the Committee—

“We are clear about the long-term strategic direction of our business. However, as a commercial public service broadcaster that receives no public funding, we face significant challenges, which are driven by changing viewer behaviour and a very tough macroeconomic backdrop. We are facing declining linear viewing, reduced advertising revenues as companies hold back on spending, and a slowdown in commissioning for STV Studios. ...

“Part of our proposal involves changes to news services, reflecting both changing viewer behaviour and economic realities. We have approached Ofcom to amend licences unchanged since 2009. Sharing material from both regions will allow us to deliver high-quality journalism across Scotland from Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Holyrood and Westminster. We will tell these stories both on air and through our growing digital news offering. Our plan is designed to protect regional journalism,

because it is not financially sustainable in its current form. We are confident that our plan will deliver more stories to more people, wherever and however they want to receive them.”

Changes to operating licences requires approval from the regulator, Ofcom. Ofcom opened a consultation on changes to [STV's licences on 16 December 2025](#). The proposal would include a new STV News at 6 programme with shared or co-produced output across the STV Central and STV North licences. The proposal includes:

“[STV] to share up to 70% of material in its 6pm weekday programmes, STV News at Six, where it is of particular relevance to audiences in both licence areas, with the rest of the material to remain bespoke for each region.”

The initial proposal did not include the 30% of bespoke output for each region. In a letter to the Committee, Ofcom explained that STV made a revised request following “a period of engagement between Ofcom and STV, as well as STV's own internal consultation process”.

The revision would also remove the requirement to provide five minutes of sub-regional “opts” in the 6pm news programmes in each licence. The NUJ submission to the Committee last week explained that in practice these “opts” mean that “STV North viewers closer to Dundee see 5 minutes of dedicated Dundee news” and similarly those in the East of the central licence area see news specific to that area (ie the Lothians). The consultation document stated—

“[Ofcom is] of the view that removing the opts is appropriate now that audiences are more likely to seek out ‘hyperlocal’ news online rather than on TV. Alongside these proposals, we recognise the need for STV to rebalance its newsroom to ensure it is connecting with audiences on digital platforms as well as through traditional linear news bulletins.”

NUJ members undertook a strike over the proposals on Wednesday 7 January 2026. [The NUJ said](#)—

“Our members are angry at these cuts, angry at how management have handled them, and are angry at the plans to axe one of Scotland's most successful prime time news programmes in the north of Scotland. All this has happened in the same week that STV has launched a new commercial radio station, which is not expected to make a profit until 2027, and the cost of which is being paid for by the jobs of hard-working journalists.”

NUJ's submission to the Committee in advance of the meeting last week said that 30% of a broadcast may equate to “local weather, local sport, and one news item per programme”. NUJ argued that companies with Channel 3 licences “will always seek to maximise profits and where possible to reduce [costs associated with PSB obligations]”. It argued that in lean years, these companies seek to reduce PSB obligations but that in more profitable times, those companies increase returns to shareholders.

STV's revised request for the changes to their licences included responses to queries from Ofcom. This included a range of queries on STV's digital operations and how, particularly local, news will be provided through these means. STV stated, "long-term investment in digital gives us confidence that we can successfully transition our newsrooms to a content led, multiplatform future."

The revised request also responded to a number of questions in relation to the financial position that has led STV to make the request. Some of these responses were redacted in the published version. In answer to a question on what the impact might be if the request was rejected, STV said—

"We believe that rejection of STV's proposals would be very damaging to our own regional news provision and wider PSM delivery alike. For STV News, we would be locked into a legacy linear television configuration that has been overtaken by digital. We would still require to make savings to balance the books and would need to look at larger cuts in editorial and newsgathering resource if we had to continue with local opts, and/or could not access benefits associated with a natural sharing of stories pertinent to audiences across Scotland."

Last week, Professor Beveridge suggested that Ofcom does not take sufficient account of the interests of citizens. Section 3(1) of the Communications Act 2003 states:

It shall be the principal duty of OFCOM, in carrying out their functions—

- (a) to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters; and
- (b) to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition.

Professor Happer said that STV should consider the role that local news provision plays an important social role that goes beyond commercial considerations or audience-levels.

The consultation will close on 9 February 2026. Ofcom is proposing to accept the revised request. The NUJ's submission last week said that this has caused dismay and said:

"It creates the impression that Ofcom has already made a decision before the public consultation has begun, and that the decision has been made in closed meetings to which STV has access, but to which viewers, politicians, business leaders and the trade unions were not invited to participate."

Ofcom's view on the future of public service media

Ofcom has produced several reports on the future of public service broadcasters and, more broadly, public service media. The most recent, Transmission Critical: The future of Public Service Media was published in July 2025. This said—

“The UK media landscape is undergoing rapid transformation. Traditional broadcasters are in a fierce battle for audience attention, while global tech giants flood the market with an ever-growing range of content. These pressures are not unique to the UK. Services like Netflix and YouTube offer hyper-personalised experiences that are hugely popular with viewers and advertisers. Algorithms, tailored recommendations and instant accessibility are reshaping how a growing number of audiences discover and consume media. Emerging technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence (“GenAI”), are revolutionising how content is created, distributed and consumed. These seismic shifts are well underway and the next few years will be critical in determining the future of UK broadcasting.”

The report described UK PSM as being “under threat” and made six recommendations:

- Prominence and discoverability for PSM content on the third-party platforms that audiences increasingly turn to. This can be achieved by a range of measures, such as action by the PSBs themselves working with those platforms and/or regulatory action.
- Stable and adequate funding to sustain a broad range of PSM content.
- Urgent clarity on how TV will be distributed in the future.
- More ambitious partnerships amongst the PSBs.
- Investment in media literacy is vital for everyone’s ability to use digital services and to understand and critically engage with news and content.
- Streamlined regulation which strips away any outdated unnecessary restrictions.

Last week, Professor Happer warned that news consumption risks becoming bifurcated with older people and perhaps higher education or social and economic status more likely to use mainstream news providers and younger people and those with lower education and social and economic status tending to get their news from social media or other means. Ofcom produced research in February 2025 on the [relationship between the use of PSBs for news and societal outcomes](#). This found:

“Compared to survey participants who do not use PSBs for news, survey participants who use PSBs for news are more knowledgeable about news facts, have higher levels of trust in institutions and are more likely to have voted in the 2019 general election. They also tend to be less polarised than survey participants who do not use PSBs. Importantly, our analysis controls for the possible use by survey participants of a comprehensive set of alternative news sources, including: commercial TV and radio stations; offline news sources (i.e. newspapers and magazines); social media (such as X, formerly Twitter, and Facebook); and any other online source (such as search engines and news aggregators).”

Professor Happer also said that PSM providers role in news has become more important as people have become unsure of where to turn to for trustworthy information.

Ofcom report on the BBC 2024/25

Ofcom is responsible for holding the BBC to account on behalf of audiences for delivering its remit. It publishes an annual report on the BBC detailing its performance against the regulatory conditions. The most recent report was published in [November 2025](#) and referred to 2024/25 financial year.

The BBC's [most recent operating licence](#) was published on 23 March 2023 and came into effect on 1 April 2023. It was last updated on 31 July 2025 to incorporate changes to BBC Radio Foyle and the BBC Asian Network. It sets out the regulatory conditions that the BBC must comply with, as well as how Ofcom intends to hold the BBC to account for delivering this remit.

Quotas are a key feature of the operating licence, and there are over 70 of them in total. These are used by Ofcom to ensure that the BBC delivers a minimum volume of certain content. There are also several requirements detailed in the licence including: criteria for the BBC's online services; the need for services to cover a broad range of content; and an expectation that niche areas are covered even if they attract smaller audiences.

Some of the quotas and requirements specific to programming in Scotland include:

- In relation to each of BBC iPlayer, BBC Sounds, the BBC Website, BBC One Scotland, BBC Scotland, BBC Alba, BBC Radio Scotland and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, the BBC must provide content of interest and relevance to audiences in Scotland, including a broad range of content which reflects Scotland's culture.
- BBC Scotland must show original productions for a minimum of 75% of programming hours.
- In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, programming should include indigenous language content and a broad range of genres.
- The BBC must ensure that in each calendar year at least 8% of the hours of network programmes made in the United Kingdom are made in Scotland and at least 8% of the expenditure of the BBC on network programmes made in the United Kingdom is linked to programme production at different production centres in Scotland.

Overall findings

The Ofcom report on the BBC for 2024/25 found that –

“Overall, amid funding pressures, and against the backdrop of a rapidly changing media landscape, the BBC has performed strongly in delivering for audiences over the current Charter.”

The main findings of the report were that –

- The BBC has been successful in maintaining strong overall satisfaction while continuing to find ways to serve audiences, despite the increased availability and choice of content and services from other providers. This year there have been signs of improving engagement with younger audiences although some people, particularly those in D or E socio-economic groups, remain less satisfied
- The BBC has reinforced its commitment to serving and representing the UK's diverse nations and regions by expanding its regional presence, investing in high quality local content, supporting the creative economy, and implementing its' Across the UK plan.
- In the face of a fragmented and increasingly polarised media landscape, our research shows the BBC has remained a trusted source of news and the UK's most used news source.

Findings relating to Scotland

The report takes a specific look at how the BBC performed across the nations, including in Scotland, under public purpose 4 (p.36).

Ofcom's 2024-25 report found that:

- At the beginning of the Charter, audiences in Scotland were less favourable towards the BBC compared with those in other nations. Perceptions in Scotland are now in line with the UK average (with 61% now rating it highly, compared to the UK average of 60%).
- Improving perceptions of how well the BBC represents the life and culture of the UK remains a challenge. Its own recent public survey found that only 51% of respondents said it was currently effective in reflecting the people and parts of the UK. The BBC has said it is now considering the findings of this research, including areas such as how it can be more accountable and responsive to audience needs. This is an area Ofcom will also continue to monitor.
- The volume of TV content on the BBC's national and regional variations of BBC One and BBC Two ("opts") and BBC Scotland has declined, from 8,105 hours in 2021 to 7,798 hours in 2024 (a decline of 4%).
- Across all four nations, spend on first-run originated regional TV news and current affairs grew by 8% compared to 2023, above the 4% increase in volume to 5,115 hours. Within this, news hours increased by 4% year on year to 4,736, while current affairs hours grew by 9% to 379.
- It delivered 2,602 hours of Gaelic content on BBC ALBA, including 608 first-run hours.

Devolved broadcasting regulation

Broadcasting is reserved. The Committee took evidence from a panel of academics last week, and one of the themes of that discussion was that the BBC remains a London-centric organisation and that BBC Scotland is not sufficiently autonomous to reflect the culture and politics in Scotland.

The objectives of the Charter Review are set out in the [Terms of Reference](#) and one of these is:

A BBC that commands the public's trust, is independent and accountable to the public it serves, and represents all communities across the UK

Last week the first panel discussed whether Ofcom, is structured in a way that reflects the distinctive interests of the nations. [Ofcom is required](#) to have offices in all of the nations of the UK. Ofcom also produces research and commentary on the performance of the BBC in Scotland and the media landscape in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as the UK as a whole.

Ofcom has duties to promote media literacy. [Last year it consulted](#) on how online platforms, broadcasters and services should promote media literacy; these proposals include how design services to better facilitate users' choice and to "empower people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to understand, interpret and critically assess the credibility of the content they encounter". Education is a devolved policy area for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and it is not clear how Ofcom has engaged with devolved nations in relation to these duties.

Ned Sharratt, Researcher (Education and Culture), SPICe

Date: 09/01/2026

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The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

Annexe B



Clare Adamson
 Convener, Constitution, Europe,
 External Affairs and Culture Committee
 The Scottish Parliament

BY EMAIL

Glenn Preston
 Director, Scotland

16 December 2025

Dear Clare,

STV News consultation

Further to my letter of 27 October, I am writing to share that Ofcom has today published its consultation on STV's proposed changes to its regional programming commitments.

STV has requested to make the following changes to both its STV Central and STV North licences:

- To share up to 70% of material in its 6pm weekday programmes, STV News at Six, where it is of particular relevance to audiences in both licence areas, with the rest of the material to remain bespoke for each region;
- To extend the current permission to share news programming at the weekend to all news programming outside of peak viewing times, where it is of particular interest to audiences in both regions; and
- To remove the requirement to provide five minutes of sub-regional opts ("the opts") in the 6pm news programmes in each licence

This is a revised request that followed a period of engagement between Ofcom and STV, as well as STV's own internal consultation process. Its original request would have enabled the full sharing of STV's regional news between the North of Scotland and Central Scotland at any time (both peak and off peak).

We are proposing to approve STV's request. In our view, STV's proposals will ensure that audiences continue to be served with high-quality, regional news provision on a sustainable basis for STV. We are also mindful of the need for STV to rebalance its newsroom to ensure it is connecting with audiences on digital platforms as well as through traditional linear news bulletins.

Full details can be found on [Ofcom's website](#), alongside the two submissions we received from STV during this process. Our consultation is open until **9 February 2026** and I look forward to appearing in front of your Committee on 15 January 2026 to discuss the proposals further.

Yours sincerely,

Glenn Preston