



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ian Katz  
Director of Programmes  
Channel Four Television  
124- 126 Horseferry Road SW1P 2TX

23 April 2020

Dear Ian Katz

We write as co-chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in relation to the Channel 4 documentary series 'Dispatches' on Thursday 16th April 2020, 'The Truth About Traveller Crime'.

We note the apparent disregard for aspects of both the Ofcom Broadcasting Code and Channel 4's own guidelines. We will be raising our concerns in more detail with Ofcom. The "Dispatches" strand lies within the News and Current Affairs output and as such is subject to specific guidelines relevant to this section of broadcasting which we consider in the case of 'The Truth About Traveller Crime' may have been breached.

Ofcom Broadcasting Code, section 3, refers to Crime, Disorder, Hatred and Abuse, the most relevant in this case being the incitement of hate speech. which includes intolerance on the grounds of ethnicity. It suggests that there are various editorial approaches a broadcaster can take to provide context for this. However, as you will probably have noticed, the title of the programme was enough to trigger a raft of vicious and hateful comments on social media and elsewhere. The programme itself compounded the impression that Travellers overall are inclined to commit more crime than other sections of society.

The Broadcasting Code indicates that there are various editorial approaches a broadcaster can take to provide context for such potentially damaging content. It states that here is less potential for a breach of Section 3.1 "if opposing viewpoints and sufficient challenge are provided [to viewers] where the programme seeks to provide examination or commentary on criminal activity in the public interest." In this programme, in their quest for "the truth" the producers gave the bulk of the content over to criminal activity, leaving little space for material which would challenge or balance such information in a wider context. For example, it included only one police officer who was anonymous and voiced by an actor, apparently giving his personal take on local crime. If the regional police force or local authority had been approached, they would likely have provided a more balanced, complex response, as they have already done following the transmission.

Section 5 of the Ofcom code outlines strict principles to “ensure that news in whatever form is reported with due accuracy and impartiality, not favouring one side over the other”. Channel 4 issued a statement declaring that the issue was addressed fairly and in accordance with these principles. We would be keen to know if Channel 4 regard the two short interviews towards the end of the programme as adequately balanced? In addition, if impartiality were paramount, why was there no attempt to include the views of the National Police Chiefs Council who have an overarching understanding of the topic?

Channel 4’s own guidelines emphasise “viewer trust”, requesting that producers ensure viewers are not “deceived or misled”. It states that ‘all allegations and facts upon which they are based should be thoroughly researched, corroborated, double checked and that care should be taken when relying on statistical data’. We request evidence of the research methodology on which the documentary’s content was based, particularly ethical considerations, objectivity and the selection process for Traveller sites that featured on the show. Very many Gypsies and Travellers have come forward to express their shock, anger and fear as a direct result of this documentary. Many feel as though they have been sentenced as criminals simply because of their ethnicity.

In light of this, we ask what the editorial purpose of the programme was and does Channel 4 believe that purpose was achieved whilst ensuring due accuracy and due impartiality?

Yours sincerely



Baroness Janet Whitaker and Kate Green MP  
Co-Chairs, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies Travellers and Roma