[GB] GB News' "People’s Forum: The Prime Minister" breached Ofcom’s due impartiality rules

IRIS 2024-6:1/17

Julian Wilkins
Wordley Partnership

An Ofcom investigation today concluded that "People’s Forum: The Prime Minister" (the People’s Forum) broadcast on 12 February 2024 by GB News breached broadcasting due impartiality rules. The determination was considered in the context of serious and repeated breaches of Ofcom's impartiality rules, and as a consequence the regulator is considering a statutory sanction against GB News.

Ofcom received 547 complaints about the People’s Forum which is a live, hour-long current affairs programme. The episode featured the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, in a question-and-answer session with a studio audience about the government’s policies and performance, presented in the context of the anticipated UK general election. The type of programme met the definition of a major matter under Ofcom’s impartiality rules meaning that more demanding impartiality requirements applied.

Ofcom did not in principle object to the programme’s editorial format. Broadcasters are free to innovate and use different editorial techniques in their programming such as providing the audience with innovative methods of debate. However, the broadcasting codes on impartiality had to be observed. Whilst the focus of the People’s Forum would be mainly on the prime minister’s Conservative Party policies and track record this still meant the programme had to comply with due impartiality rules under the code. GB News had an obligation to ensure that an appropriately wide range of significant views was given due weight in the programme or in other clearly linked and timely programmes.

Ofcom considered a number of factors to determine whether the People’s Forum was duly impartial such as the audience’s questions to the prime minister, the prime minister’s responses, the presenter’s contribution, and whether due impartiality was preserved through clearly linked and timely programmes. The regulator concluded that whilst some questions to the prime minister were challenging, on the whole the audience was not able to challenge the answers, and the presenter did not present alternative views or counterarguments to Mr Sunak’s responses.

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

The prime minister presented future policies his government wished to implement if successful at the general election, but neither the audience nor the presenter challenged or otherwise referred to significant alternative views about those proposals. Mr Sunak was critical of some of his opponent's (the Labour Party) polices but neither the Labour Party's views or positions on those issues, nor any other significant views on those issues were in fact included in the programme or given due weight. GB News did not identify an agreed future programme in which an appropriately wide range of significant opinions on the matters discussed would be presented and given due weight.

Whilst Ofcom recognised GB News representations that they had purposefully not known the questions audience members would ask the prime minister, an editorial decision meant that the presenter would not intervene or challenge the views expressed, and that there were no other editorial means for alternative views to be included in the programme.

Ofcom determined that GB News's approach to compliance was wholly insufficient, and that the broadcaster should have done more to ensure due impartiality, for instance, ensuring an appropriately wide range of significant viewpoints were presented and given due weight in the People's Forum; likewise, the broadcaster should have ensured due impartiality was preserved through clearly linked and timely programmes. Overall, Ofcom considered that the programme gave the prime minister an uncontested platform to promote his political party's policies in expectation of a UK general election.

Ofcom determined that GB News had breached Rules 5.11 and 5.12 of the Broadcasting Code.

The regulator considered GB News's failure to preserve due impartiality in this case to be serious and given its two previous breaches of these rules, Ofcom was therefore starting the process for consideration of a statutory sanction. Ofcom intends to conclude their consideration within 60 working days. If Ofcom decides a sanction is appropriate GB News will be notified with a Preliminary View and given the opportunity to submit oral and written submissions after which a final decision will be made. Sanctions can include fines or revocation of the broadcaster's broadcasting licence.

In an earlier announcement on 24 April 2024, Ofcom issued a guidance statement on politicians presenting during elections. In the statement, Ofcom reminded broadcasters that its code "prohibits candidates in UK elections from acting as news presenters, interviewers or presenters of any type of programme during the election period". Further, Ofcom said: "Politicians who are not standing as candidates in a UK election can present non-news programmes – including current affairs – during election periods, provided that programme complies with all relevant code rules."

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

Ofcom decision, "People's Forum: The Prime Minister" GB News, 12 February 2024, 20:00, 20 May 2024

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0037/285589/Peoples-Forum,-GB-News,-12-February-2024.pdf

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026