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Press Release

## Channel 4 tightens Big Brother procedures in response to review findings

### **New Viewers' Editor and return of 'Right to Reply' to make channel more responsive to audience concerns**

Channel 4 has published the findings of its review of Celebrity Big Brother and unveiled a series of initiatives in response including a tough new interventions policy for the show, the return of a 'right to reply' style programme to Channel 4, the appointment of the channel's first Viewers' Editor and a major research programme into diverse Britain.

The publication of the review, jointly commissioned by Channel 4's Chairman, Luke Johnson, and Chief Executive, Andy Duncan, follows publication of Ofcom's adjudication of viewers' complaints about the series. The regulator has judged the programme breached its broadcasting code on four occasions and has ordered Channel 4 to broadcast a summary of its ruling prior to the launch of the next series of Big Brother on 30 May. **See separate release.**

The review panel, consisting of Channel 4 non-executive director, Tony Hall, Group Finance Director, Anne Bulford, and independent member Rabinder Singh QC, conducted 40 interviews and analysed public complaints and media coverage of the programme.

The review panel found no evidence that tensions in the Big Brother house were deliberately engineered, that Channel 4 saw them as a source of financial benefit or that anyone involved set out to give offence to viewers. The panel said it had observed throughout its review the effectiveness of Channel 4's legal and compliance team and its "deep involvement" in all aspects of Big Brother.

However, the review stated: "The significant lesson for Channel 4 and Endemol is that great offence was caused by the broadcast of several comments by housemates, irrespective of their motivation. Channel 4 appeared to be somehow condoning the behaviour of some of the housemates because interventions were felt to be too late or insufficiently forceful."

In response, the channel has agreed with Endemol, the producer of Big Brother, **a new written intervention policy**, which spells out how the show will tackle seriously offensive language or behaviour. The new policy will encourage the programme's producers to intervene earlier and more formally on the grounds of potential offence to viewers as well as duty of care to housemates.

**An updated version of the House rules** will clarify for housemates what the channel considers to be unacceptable behaviour, including "*behaving in a way*

*that could cause serious offence to either their fellow housemates or members of the viewing public (including serious offence based on the grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion, beliefs or sexual orientation)*". The rules now also identify "*serious harassment... including bullying*" as unacceptable behaviour that will prompt an intervention. Other measures include:

- **A stronger Channel 4 commissioning and legal presence** at the production studios in Elstree, including a **new senior Editor** based on site.
- **Improving the system of referral** to ensure inappropriate behaviour is brought swiftly to the attention of senior staff at Endemol and Channel 4. There will be an increased number of senior producers working night shifts.
- **The appointment of a new Senior Welfare Producer** whose sole task will be to observe housemates and to advise producers of any concerns arising.

Kevin Lygo, Director of Television, commented: "I believe these measures are a sensible tightening of our procedures. Channel 4 is doing everything possible to prevent a repeat of the public offence caused by the programme while staying true to the format of Big Brother."

The review concluded that the public reaction to Celebrity Big Brother showed the need for "significant lessons to be learnt about the nature of racial offence". The panel said it was "unacceptable in a modern pluralistic society... to be offensive about somebody because of their ethnic or cultural origins or other factors which they cannot change" and underlined the need for Channel 4 and Endemol to recognise that racial offence could be caused even if not intentional or motivated by hostility.

Recognising Channel 4's strong track record in reflecting cultural diversity, the panel believed that having unintentionally stimulated a debate about racism, the channel now had the opportunity to "lead a national debate on the role of media... in reflecting and contributing to a diverse and equal society". In response to the panel's recommendations Channel 4's management has agreed the following actions:

- **A major research programme** in conjunction with Trevor Phillips and involving panels, citizens' juries, interactive events and a dedicated website, which will seek to initiate a debate on the implications of the changing nature of cultural diversity in the UK. Outcomes could include a lecture or seminar, new Channel 4 programmes and insights to inform commissioning policy.
- **Enhanced training in equality and diversity** for all staff working on Big Brother at Channel 4 and Endemol.

The review concluded that with the internet and digital media increasingly empowering the audience to complain about and even campaign against what they see on mainstream media, the channel needed to learn lessons about tracking and responding to viewer reaction to its programmes and demonstrating public accountability through prompt and effective external communication. In response Channel 4 management has announced:

- The establishment of a **new executive role at Channel 4 of Viewers' Editor**. The Viewers' Editor will ensure the viewer's perspective is considered as part of the editorial decision making process and will have responsibility for monitoring viewers' reactions to Channel 4 programmes online as well as through the channel's Viewer Enquiries team and its extensive viewer research programmes.
- **A new monthly 'Right to Reply' style programme on Channel 4**, encouraging Commissioning Editors to explain decision making and giving audiences a platform to air their views alongside enhanced online forums.
- **A new formal early warning system for its Viewer Enquiries unit** to indicate to members of the senior management team whenever an unusual number of complaints have been triggered by an event or programme.
- The introduction of **more formal and improved Escalation Procedures** to ensure the channel can identify potential crisis points and a well understood procedure for handling any such situation. The channel has already appointed two external consultancies, Maitland and Euro RSCG Apex Communications, to advise it on public relations and corporate affairs.

Channel 4 has also accepted the review's recommendation that the Big Brother website and sister programmes be used flexibly to provide viewers with a forum for expressing their views about issues arising and to give more immediate context to potentially offensive material.

Luke Johnson said: "I'd like to thank the panel members for the time and thought they have put into this review. I believe it has been a rigorous process that has challenged the channel and provided valuable recommendations on how to strengthen our working practices."

Andy Duncan added: "Channel 4 is determined to learn the necessary lessons from Celebrity Big Brother. The wide-ranging initiatives we have announced will influence decision making at every level within the channel, helping us to take more account of the views of our audience for the benefit of all our programmes and services."

### **Notes to editors**

A detailed report of the review panel's findings, a transcript of the untransmitted material referred to in Ofcom's adjudication and a press statement giving Channel 4's response to Ofcom's ruling are available from [www.channel4.com/about4](http://www.channel4.com/about4).

**Contact: Matt Baker, Channel 4 – 020 7306 8666/ 07775 845 480**