

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 17 October 2023 at 10.30am

Meeting held in hybrid format at Riverside House and via Microsoft Teams

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Rick Hill (Chair)

Kay Allen

Amanda Britain

Judith Clifton

Lenna Cumberbatch

Helen Froud

Robert Hammond

Richard Spencer

Michael Wardlow (until 12.30pm approx.)

Richard Williams

Apologies

Michelle Goddard

In attendance

The Panel's Executive Team

Ofcom colleagues

Item
1. Welcome and introduction
1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting.
2. Declarations of Members' interests
2.1 Rick Hill declared that he had been appointed as acting Chair of the Strategic Panel for Non-Domestic Water (6 months tenure approx.).
3. Minutes of the meeting on 21 September 2023 and matters arising
3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 21 September 2023 were APPROVED following minor amendments.



3.2 The Panel expressed a wish to have an update on 'Ofcom's Fairness Commitments' added as a future agenda item.

4. Chair's update

4.1 The Chair and National Members provided an overview of the Panel's recent activity and stakeholder engagement across the UK Nations.

4.2 The Chair recently attended a meeting with Royal Mail to discuss the needs of consumers who rely on the postal service for their communication needs. The Panel's [rural research](#) which highlights the requirement for a reliable, affordable and dependable service was shared.

4.3 A recent Parliamentary reception on the migration to VoIP was attended by the Chair who shared with the Panel, the first cross-industry piece of communication which had been issued to parliamentarians on the topic. The Panel discussed areas for improvement in any future communications.

5. Consumer policy update

5.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom's consumer policy team on its key consumer priority areas.

5.2 The Chair confirmed that the Panel had responded to Ofcom's consultation on proposals to amend guidance on roaming, strengthening consumer protections, and was delighted to learn a number of responses had been made.

5.3 The Panel expressed their eagerness to learn of any progress being made by Ofcom with industry in terms of consumer communications around migration to VOIP and asked specifically for an update on how Ofcom are monitoring regional migrations.

5.4 With the help of Ofcom's planning, the Panel were pleased with how mobile providers understand consumers expectations around the 2G/3G switch off but remain concerned with how the switch off will transpire within rural and remote communities.

5.5 The Panel raised a point of concern regarding whether a service delay would occur when a 3G mast is switched off ahead of a 4G service becoming available in the area and raised further concerns about whether CPs would provide relevant reassurances.



5.6 The Panel voiced deep concerns from UK consumers regarding inconsistent delivery days within the postal sector. The number of delivery days varies around the UK and the Panel highlighted the risk of serious inconvenience and potential risks to consumers, for example, hospital appointments missed due to letters not arriving on time.

6. Improving Broadband Consumer Information for Customers

6.1 Ofcom provided an update to Members following their consultation in March 2023 on improving broadband information for customers.

6.2 The Panel were pleased that work was being undertaken to promote fair, transparent services, which would hopefully lead consumers to make well-informed choices - the Panel welcomed Ofcom's engagement with CPs on this.

7. Public Policy Update

7.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on its key public policy developments including migration to VoIP.

7.2 The Chair invited any future updates from the Ofcom team on telecoms consumer advocacy.

7.3 The Panel remain concerned with the awareness of migration to VoIP, among consumers, within the pilot areas which are soon to commence the switch. The Panel reiterated the need for a wide-reaching national campaign, aimed at all consumers in order to provide effective communication and emphasised their continuing concerns about an uncoordinated and inadequate approach which will potentially create further consumer harm.

7.4 The Panel expressed interest in the latest news from the Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum (DRCF) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) pilot due to commence - the Ofcom team would provide a future update.

7.5 The Panel requested an update from Ofcom on its work on AI and its potential impact on consumers and citizens.

7.6 The Panel requested an update from Ofcom, on mobile connectivity concerning the UK Government's changed plans for the HS2 transport project.



8. Annual Monitoring Update for Postal Services, Future Development of the Postal USO and Safeguard Caps Review

- 8.1 The Panel received an update on Ofcom's programme of work within the postal sector.
- 8.2 The Panel queried plans to reduce the postal USO from 6 days to 5 days, highlighting the risk to consumers whose reliance on post remains strong, due to geographical location or additional needs.
- 8.3 The Panel and Ofcom discussed current issues around reliability and reputation of Royal Mail, in circumstances where consumers were receiving post at intervals far less frequent than required under the current USO.
- 8.4 In addition to the postal service consumers are receiving, the Panel are also concerned of the costs, which for some households can be considerably high, and the provider must ensure higher transparency on service levels and focus on consumers' needs to ensure the service works.

9. Future of TV Distribution: Call for Evidence

- 9.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on the future of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT, the platform which distributes free terrestrial TV signals).
- 9.2 The Panel advised that many consumers, particularly those who are less able to leave home, use DTT as a means of company to make ensure they feel less alone. The Panel advised that DTT should remain easily accessible and affordable to all UK consumers and citizens, to prevent social exclusion and loneliness - including ensuring that devices consumers currently use do not become obsolete, incurring replacement costs to consumers.
- 9.3 Members urged the team to look into consumer-proofing the future of TV as citizens' habits and needs will change in the future, as many people move between digital inclusion and exclusion.
- 9.4 The Panel were keen to learn of how spectrum could be used in the future for other services, such as mobile broadband, however relayed concern that security factors must be taken into consideration.
- 9.5 The Panel raised concerns over consumers who are in short-term lets or close to homelessness and their ability to be connected and advised that market mechanisms should be reviewed as a large cohort of people do not live in a stable environment within a single residence.



9.6 The Panel queried how public service content would be managed and funded in the future.

10. Ofcom's Impact Assessment Guidance

10.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on their Impact Assessment Guidance with the emphasis on how a consultation decision or statement is clearly explained to the reader.

10.2 The Panel, as ACOD members, welcomed the guidance designed for Ofcom colleagues and provided their input.

11. Enforcement Update

11.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom's Enforcement team.

11.2 The Panel was alarmed to understand the April 2023 deadline for the One Touch Switch programme had been missed and remain concerned with the possibilities of providers missing further deadlines. The Panel highlighted that financial detriment is being felt by consumers unable to use a one touch switch programme and urged Ofcom to maintain pressure on industry to prevent further slippage. The Panel also expressed their concerns that as the initial deadline was not achieved this might give CPs a misperception about Ofcom's management of future deadlines.

11.3 The Panel are keen to receive an update on further enforcement issues at a future meeting.

12. AOB

12.1 Helen Froud noted apologies for the November meeting.