

FEBRUARY 2017 BULLETIN

Our 2017/18 Work Plan consultation

Each year, the Communications Consumer Panel and the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People (ACOD) publish a draft work plan for consultation. The draft work plan outlines the Panel and ACOD's role, describes the variety of ways in which the Panel and ACOD engage with issues, explains how we have chosen our proposed priorities for the coming year and sets out the areas that we propose to address.

We have published our [draft 2017/18 workplan](#) and we are currently seeking stakeholders' views on the issues we've provisionally identified. Please send any comments to contact@communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk by 20th March 2017.

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

Panel Chair Jo Connell, accompanied by Panel member Chris Holland and Executive Director Fiona Lennox and Jenny Borritt held the latest in their regular meetings with communication providers this month, discussing the promotion of good consumer outcomes with Virgin Media and Three. Jo and Chris also met with the NAO to discuss its work on more vulnerable consumers in regulated industries.

Chris Holland attended the Ofcom Advisory Committee for England meeting, where topics included the Digital Economy Bill and the Broadband USO.

Craig Tillotson attended Ofcom's spectrum event 'Enabling the Wireless World of the Future', which discussed spectrum challenges and opportunities, and future demands such as IoT, 5G, WiFi, mesh and satellite. Craig cited the Panel view that the industry should not focus too much resource on 5G until all of the UK has adequate voice and data coverage. In addition, he made the point that the idea of exploiting other customer's mobile devices in rural areas, to bridge the gap between another customer and their network, ought also to include a fuller consideration of exploiting existing but currently unusable networks via national roaming.

Panel member Jaya Chakrabarti has been meeting with the Open Rights Group, Wikimedia, Creative Commons and libraries' representatives to discuss the impact of Article 13 of the copyright directive in the Digital Single Market, in particular the proviso for an upload filter.

Panel member for Scotland Mairi Macleod took part in the Rural Futures conference, which was run by the [Consumer Futures unit of Citizens Advice Scotland](#). The conference was addressed by Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity. Mairi took part in the workshop focusing on postal services which explored some solutions to parcel delivery costs including community-based solutions; using the economy of scale of supermarket deliveries; engaging retailers in discussions as well as industry and the possibility of a rural-friendly badge system for retailers. Although consumers in rural areas across the UK face similar problems, Scotland has a greater level of rurality.

Ofcom responds to Panel's concerns regarding landline only residential customers

Prices have been increasing for consumers who only use a fixed residential line although the cost of providing that service has been decreasing for their providers. Many people who only use a fixed residential line are older. We think this is unfair and we had raised this issue with Ofcom. So we are delighted by two moves by Ofcom to address this.

Ofcom launches Narrowband Market Consultation

Ofcom have launched a [Narrowband Market Review 2017](#), covering five wholesale markets that underpin the delivery of retail fixed voice telephone services in the UK. The outcomes from this review are designed to promote competition and further the interests of residential and business customers.

The Panel are particularly pleased, following our concerns regarding the level of competition in the landline only residential market - which we raised with to Ofcom last year - to see the consultation includes wholesale fixed analogue exchange lines (the standard fixed lines used by residential and business customers).

[Read more about the Narrowband Market Review 2017](#) and how to respond. The deadline for this consultation has been extended to 29 March.

Ofcom cuts BT landline bills

Ofcom has announced plans to cut the bills of more than two million customers who buy only a landline telephone service from BT, by at least £5 per month, and to review the whole retail market.

Ofcom has reviewed how the market is working for customers who buy only a landline service from a provider - either because they do not want broadband or pay TV, or because they take these services under separate contracts, usually from different companies.

They have found that these customers - often elderly or vulnerable people who have remained with the same landline provider for decades - are getting poor value for money in a market that is not serving them well enough.

A [news release](#) is available on Ofcom's website. [Read more about the review and find out how to respond to the consultation](#) - responses are due by 9 May.

Digital Economy Bill Video-On-Demand subtitling amendment passed

National charity [Action on Hearing Loss](#), whose Subtitle it! campaign we have been supporting, scored a campaign win this month with the Government's decision to make video-on-demand subtitling a legal requirement. On 8th February the House of Lords approved a Government proposal to amend the Digital Economy Bill to give new powers to the regulator, Ofcom so that on-demand broadcasters will be legally required to provide minimum levels of subtitles.

The charity's Subtitle It! campaign, launched in June 2015, has been calling on the Government to introduce measures to improve the accessibility of subtitles on video-on-demand content so that people with a hearing loss can 'catch-up' on TV and films how and when they want. There has previously been no legal requirement to provide subtitles on catch up or video-on-demand services, leaving 76% of on-demand programming inaccessible to the UK's 7.5 million subtitle users, even if the programmes were subtitled when they were originally broadcast.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS)'s call for evidence on Extending Full Fibre Networks

As the Panel have consistently maintained - consumers should be at the heart of any desired policy outcomes and therefore universal availability of 10 Mbps should be a more urgent goal than very high speeds for a few. In our response to DCMS's call for evidence on Extending Full Fibre Networks, we outlined our support for full fibre as a long term solution, but agree that other technologies that offer equivalent reliability and speeds should not be ruled out if they are capable of extending broadband reach.

We look forward to seeing the detail of how local areas will be able to access new funding - hopefully this can be as straightforward and time-efficient as possible. Consumers need good speeds and reliable services, quickly and the needs of micro

businesses should be considered alongside other consumer groups, as micro businesses face similar barriers as domestic consumers and may also be facing the challenges of operating from business parks. In our response we reiterated our previously stated standpoint that support for digital participation and basic digital skills needs to go hand-in-hand with technology developments.

The Panel voiced its view that as well as public funding, to cover market failures, companies should continue to be encouraged to invest in and support broadband deployment. Furthermore, we support the reforms to the Electronic Communication Code, aimed at extending the legislation removing planning barriers, believing that as much as possible should be done to enable the use of currently unemployed duct networks - including BT's.

[Our response is here.](#)

Other news

Ofcom launch consultation on the general conditions relating to consumer protection

Ofcom are proposing to make changes to the General Conditions of Entitlement - the regulatory rules that all communications providers must follow in order to operate in the UK. This is because they have identified a number of areas where they consider new or strengthened regulation is needed to protect consumers from harm; in light of developments in technology and changes in consumer behaviour. Key areas of focus include the handling of complaints by communications providers and the needs of vulnerable consumers and end-users with disabilities.

[More about the consultation here](#) which closes on 14 March 2017.

FCC establishes accessibility requirements for US televisions and set-top boxes

The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has established accessibility requirements for televisions, set-top boxes, and similar devices that receive or play back video programming. On-screen text menus and guides and built-in functions included in all video programming must be accessible to individuals who are blind or visually impaired, if achievable; and on-screen text menus or other built-in visual indicators must be accompanied by audio output.

[Read more here.](#)

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