

**Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD**

**on 21 September 2023 at 10.30 am**

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

**Present**

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Rick Hill (Chair)

Amanda Britain

Judith Clifton

Lenna Cumberbatch

Helen Froud

Michelle Goddard

Robert Hammond

Richard Spencer

Michael Wardlow

Richard Williams

Apologies

Kay Allen

In attendance

The Panel's Executive Team

Ofcom colleagues

<b>Item</b>
<b>1. Welcome and introduction</b>  1.1 The Chair welcomed new and existing Members and attendees to the meeting.
<b>2. Declarations of Members' interests</b>  2.1 Due to agenda item 10 (Introduction to the Openreach Monitoring Unit), the following declarations of interest were raised by Members. Richard Spencer has a BT pension and he and his partner have shares in BT. Helen Froud's partner has a BT pension. Judith Clifton has shares in BT.



### **3. Minutes of the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and matters arising**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 20 July 2023 were **APPROVED**.

### **4. Chair's update**

4.1 The Chair and National Members provided updates on recent Panel activity and stakeholder engagement across each of the UK Nations.

4.2 Following recent correspondence with Government Ministers and Parliamentarians highlighting the Panel's concerns about migration to VoIP and its recent research into VoIP and rural connectivity, the Chair had undertaken further meetings and received correspondence from Sir John Whittingdale. The Executive Team would explore if there were additional relevant contacts.

4.3 Rick Williams had recently met with Ofcom colleagues to discuss the application of the social model of disability in Ofcom both in terms of its application to staff and its policy work. He has offered to facilitate several workshops for Ofcom on this subject and is awaiting further discussions.

4.4 The Panel was about to commission a review of best practice in research relating to neurodiversity and long-term health conditions, in a joint project with Ofcom.

4.5 Amanda Britain had met with Audit Scotland to discuss how public bodies understand and are tackling digital exclusion.

4.6 Richard Spencer attended a briefing organised by Citizens Advice on the cost-of-living crisis.

4.7 An All-UK Hub meeting is planned for October on the topic of social tariffs.

### **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 Panel asked for more detail about the role of the fairness commitments within the Consumer Protection Monitoring and Compliance Programme and would be pleased to see more measures put in place.

5.3 The missed deadline for implementing a new switching process for residential landline and broadband customers and improving information for mobile



customers remains a significant concern for the Panel. The Panel hopes to receive a positive update in the near future.

- 5.4 The Panel was keen to learn how the ADR review process was progressing and would like to view or provide input as part of that review.
- 5.5 The Panel was pleased to note the work being undertaken within the shared mobile rural network however questioned the cost of obtaining power to some sites.
- 5.6 The Panel remained deeply concerned with the lack of action to increase consumer awareness about migration to VoIP, in particular for those with telecare alarms.
- 5.7 The resilience of mobile networks are a concern for the Panel, in particular the issue of consumer protections when service drops or fails for a period of time. The Panel advised that networks should be more resilient to protect the needs of consumers who rely on a service and, depending on the severity of outage, MNOs should consider offering a compensation scheme to those experiencing difficulties.
- 5.8 The Panel expressed its disquiet with the current state of the postal service, in relation to the number of deliveries households are receiving each week, which appeared to be considerably less than the current USO of 6 days for letters. The Panel remains convinced by the need for a 6-day USO letter service to protect those who rely on this service, as for many communities and individuals it remains their only constant/reliable means of communication. Many communities within rural and remote locations around the UK rely on a ferry service for mail, and by reducing the USO this will further delay deliveries to once or twice per week.
- 5.9 The Panel reiterated its frustration with the classification of people into wide categories/silos which then risked not addressing the issues faced by these consumers. The Panel requested its points be taken on board as part of Ofcom's future discussion points.

## **6. Update on Ofcom's Annual Plan of Work**

- 6.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on its annual plan of work including the topics of priority across the UK for the forthcoming year.
- 6.2 The Panel raised particular concerns about digital exclusion - both in terms of access and skills/confidence which disproportionately impact those seen as 'vulnerable'.



6.3 The Panel urged protection and clarity for consumers in relation to increased use of AI.

#### **7. Update on 2G/3G Switch-off**

7.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on the mobile network operators' (MNOs) 2G and 3G switch-off plans.

7.2 Since Ofcom's previous update it was noted that the number of people using a 3G service had fallen and more consumers were using 4G.

7.3 The Panel was concerned by the potential creation of new 'not-spots' in some areas before the SRN provided 4G service. The Panel reiterated its belief in national roaming as a way of addressing such problems.

7.4 It also highlighted the financial impact for consumers of needing to upgrade older 3G handsets and expressed concern that consumers can still purchase 3G devices despite the imminent cessation of the service.

7.5 It would use the opportunity of writing to Local Government Associations to increase awareness of the 2G/3G switch off.

#### **8. Net Neutrality**

8.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on its work on net neutrality, including provision in public places.

#### **9. Social Tariffs and Younger Consumers Research Discussion**

9.1 The Panel reviewed the cover reports of two pieces of qualitative research. The social tariffs research would also be discussed with stakeholders at the Panel's All-UK Hub in October.

#### **10. Introduction to the Openreach Monitoring Unit (OMU)**

10.1 The Panel received an introduction and overview of the work undertaken by the Openreach Monitoring Unit (OMU).

10.2 The Panel were interested to understand how the OMU ensure that Openreach meet their expectations and how they act in the interests of both its customers and competitors.



**11. AOB**

11.1 The Panel raised the topic of broadband ‘throttling’ and would like to hear more information on the subject at a future meeting.

11.2 The Chair’s term will come to an end in May 2024. Existing Members of the Panel/ACOD would be invited to apply for the role in due course.

11.3 The Panel received an update on the Next Gen NEDS programme, and congratulated Fiona Lennox on her achievement with the scheme.