



**Communications
Consumer Panel**

Advisory committee for older
and disabled people



**Panel Defnyddwyr
Cyfathrebiadau**

Pwyllgor Cynghori Pobl
Hŷn ac Anabl

Communications Consumer Panel and Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People



Annual Report 2023/24



Foreword

The context of this annual report is a year of fast-paced change and uncertainty, in UK and international political landscape, the merging and converging communications and digital sectors, the postal services landscape and even in the Communications Consumer Panel itself.

I am delighted to have been successfully appointed as the new Chair of the Communications Consumer Panel and, having been a member for three years, look forward to my next three years leading a highly skilled Panel. We have expertise across communications policy, cross-sector consumer advocacy, postal services, economics, equality, equity, diversity and inclusion, marketing, legal services, accessibility, and research. Many of those members joined in the past year, including our new Member for Wales, and we face more change to our membership ahead, with the forthcoming appointments for new Members for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England, as well as general Panel Members.

Alongside the Panel's longstanding remit of consumer advocacy across communications services, we must also align ourselves with the aims of the Online Safety Act and associated concerns, and with the remit of the Phone-paid Services Authority's consumer panel, with the PSA's regulatory and enforcement operations moving to Ofcom. In the context of a change of government, we will learn the priorities of the new government and while the Panel is independent of Ofcom, we will continue to act as a critical friend, providing insights to Ofcom, as well as to government, industry and others with influence. In this report, we reflect on the 2023/24 and thank Rick Hill, former Chair for his leadership the last year of his 10-year term with the Panel and ACOD. His tireless efforts to safeguard those consumers most susceptible to risk in this sector has paved the way for changes we will continue to see developing in years to come. His assiduous focus on building awareness of migration to VOIP, to protect public safety, has made decision-makers with the power to make a direct difference to consumers' everyday lifestyles and welfare, think again. We welcome the decision by BT to pause forced migration to VOIP for two further years and will stay focused on the needs of consumers using interim connectivity until they are migrated safely.

We have previously raised concerns about network resilience - reliable and usable connectivity in this sector, without which all other efforts to improve the consumer experience in this sector are moot. This year, we have promoted awareness of our research about the consumer experience of connectivity in rural and remote parts of the UK and commissioned further studies into the experiences of urban consumers, and micro-businesses across the UK, seeking to understand gaps in a successful marketplace, and recommendations for potential solutions.

We have also highlighted our concerns around supporting consumers who may have already been financially vulnerable before the Covid pandemic, or who have become financially vulnerable since then. Our 2022/23 research showed that social tariffs can work well to keep consumers connected to communications services, but we and our stakeholders are still concerned about those who cannot afford the services they need, even with a social tariff, or who must make drastic decisions affecting their wellbeing to connect to essential communications services.



We believe digital inclusion and skills are also paramount to a connected UK and have taken a keen interest in the development of a Minimum Digital Living Standard, by our stakeholders, Good Things Foundation, guided by robust research from the University of Liverpool.

Having previously raised concerns about the quality of service received by postal services consumers, we have been pleased to have been able to feed into the work of Ofcom on the future of the Universal Postal Service, replying to its consultation, attending events across the UK and meeting Ofcom independently, and we urged Ofcom to recognise that there is yet more work to be done to understand and cater for the needs of consumers, microbusinesses and NHS patients and carers who rely on post, having previously encouraged more focus on fairness and quality in the postal sector.

This year, we have continued to feed into Ofcom's work on improving consumer choice by simplifying switching processes and improving information on broadband terminology. We have also advised Ofcom on providing a more inclusive approach to research and worked with them on commissioning a piece of research that looks into making it easier for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions to be heard by policy-makers and industry.

We value our strong stakeholder relationships with Ofcom, government, charities, academics and industry players and will always look first to be a critical friend and encourage progress by providing robust insights. However, we have also encouraged and supported Ofcom to take strong enforcement action on providers where needed and to use its formal powers and diplomatic levers, as well as its evidence-based monitoring and analysis, to make the market fair to all consumers, citizens and micro-businesses.

Helen Froud
Chair
Communications Consumer Panel and Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People



The Panel's stakeholder network

We aim to capture a well-rounded view of consumer opinion, gathering first-hand information from a range of consumer and citizen-facing organisations. It is important to us that everyone's voice can be heard, and we endeavour to ensure that all discussions, presentations, and communications are inclusive.

Over the past year, our discussions with stakeholders have allowed us to highlight a number of key issues facing people across the UK. We have combined this intelligence with evidence from our insight programme to inform our advice to Ofcom, industry and government on communications policy and practice. Regular stakeholder engagement throughout the year helps us to anticipate consumer detriment or identify it occurring. We then work with those who can directly make a difference to policy, process and practice.

75 meetings with 102 organisations:

Communications Consumer Hubs for each Nation

- 12 National Hub meetings
- One all-UK Stakeholder Hub arranged (took place in April 2024)
- 53 organisations
- A range of sector-specific topics developed in consultation with our consumer-focused stakeholders across the UK, from trade bodies representing small businesses, to third sector organisations representing consumers susceptible to harm



Consumer Advocacy Hubs

- Quarterly meetings with consumer-focused organisations across the UK
- We look to expand the Hub to include other representatives



Industry Forum

- 3-4 meetings per year
- 11 major providers and looking to expand
- Speakers from other sectors to build understanding of best practice around 'consumer vulnerability'



Other stakeholder engagements

- 49 letters to parliamentarians
- Quarterly meetings with Ofcom's Advisory Committees for each Nation
- Regular meetings with Chairs of Consumer Panels in other sectors





How we work

The communications market is complex, highly technical, and fast-moving - and impacts across society and the economy. The Panel and ACOD's work is diverse and broad, covering not only telecommunications such as broadband, spectrum (mobile and TV airwaves) and mobile, but also post, broadcasting and cross-cutting issues such as digital inclusion.

The Panel's wide remit enables it to identify projects that are often apparently unrelated but raise similar consumer issues - we can then ensure that connections are made between them. Our sector specialism, experience and understanding allow us to robustly challenge telecoms policy development from a position of strength, supported by sound evidence and resulting in pragmatic actions based on real world solutions.

The Panel works to influence before, during and after policy development - through a variety of methods and channels. Our work results in significant policy changes - we contribute expert advice to ensure consumers' and citizens' interests are high on the agenda and we do not shrink from airing issues more widely if necessary.

We are working closely with our UK-wide consumer stakeholder base to hear their insights into the harm caused by the cost-of-living crisis, from debt and disconnection to difficulty finding a provider that will serve a remote community. We build these issues into our strategic plan, and ensure we highlight the information to those who could directly make a difference. We urge prompt action and monitoring of impact throughout.

The sector presents different challenges to those faced in utilities such as energy and water; in many ways it is closest to financial services in its complexity, vast range of providers and related competitiveness. Overall indicators of consumer satisfaction with the market risk masking individual service variations. An appreciation of the complexities of the market is vital if progress on consumer service is to be made - different services within the sector present different challenges. Panel Members' own insights from their work in other sectors, as well as the insights gained from our consumer research and our National Hubs and Consumer Stakeholder Hubs, help us to keep aware of the differences and similarities in consumer experiences across sectors.

We believe in learning from best practice in other sectors, so that communications consumers can receive an accessible, trusted, affordable and reliable service, with excellent standards of customer care.

When we anticipate consumer detriment, or identify it occurring, we work with those who can make a difference - Ofcom, communications providers and UK and national governments. Our sector specialism and expertise mean we can challenge in a constructive environment, offer robust advice, and influence the development of policy so that it delivers good outcomes for consumers and citizens.

We welcome continued discussions with Ofcom, governments and industry on actions that can be taken towards putting consumers at the heart of what they do.



This year, we have:

- commissioned further research into the migration to VOIP networks, the rural and remote and urban consumer and micro-business experience, the experiences of younger consumers entering the mobile and broadband market,
- commissioned research jointly with Ofcom on inclusivity in research to ensure the ‘voices’ of disabled people and people with long-term health conditions are heard,
- held National Hubs across the UK which have continued to inform and inspire us and those we engage with, enabling us to share with consumer organisations and charities news and consultations from the communications sector and to listen to and feed into policy the experiences of the consumers, citizens, and micro-businesses they represent,
- continued to strengthen the consumer voice in this sector by working closely with all of the major consumer advocacy bodies in the UK, in our Consumer Advocacy Hub meetings,
- continued to share best practice and facilitate healthy debate with communications providers who participate in our Industry Forum meetings, from topics ranging from debt advice to domestic abuse and beyond, and
- met with a wide range of stakeholders from alternative dispute resolution schemes, trade bodies, government officials, Ofcom teams, other sector regulators and consumer panels, individual communications providers, postal services providers, charities, academics, and others.
- We have effected change through discussion with those who can make a difference: we welcomed Royal Mail’s response to our suggestions resulting in updates to its Stamp Swap-out Scheme; we welcomed clarification of the processes and charges involved in sending parcels to and from Northern Ireland since the UK’s exit from the EU and we have welcomed the Phone-paid Service’s Authority’s proposals to strengthen its guidance to protect consumers from unfair practices around connected call services, raising consumer awareness of these premium rate services and providing the option to easily opt out.



Our Strategic Plan

We develop our strategic plans by examining issues and considering:

- What is the scale of the issue for consumers, citizens, and micro businesses?
- What difference can the Panel and ACOD make?

The Panel's remit is broad, and we also try to scan the horizon for emerging issues that could potentially cause harm to consumers, citizens, and microbusinesses. During the last year, we have advised policymakers and industry on a range of issues including:

- Affordability and debt, including social tariffs and mid-contract price rises.
- Migration to voice-over IP networks (VOIP), particularly the implications for consumers with additional access requirements and those more vulnerable in an emergency.
- Universal connectivity, including rural connectivity gaps and outages, data collection measures in rural areas, 2G and 3G connectivity awareness before switch-off and the need for protection from the failure of smaller communications providers in the current context.
- Mobile Roaming (including inadvertent roaming in Northern Ireland).
- Consumer information regarding broadband services and contracts.
- Customer service, complaints, and consumer dissatisfaction.
- Contracts, switching and consumer choice.
- Equality Impact Assessments.
- Media literacy.
- Public policy.
- Accessibility and inclusivity of television and on-demand services.
- Scams and fraudulent practices using communications networks.
- 'Vulnerability': to encourage sectoral use of the social model of disability and promote awareness of access requirements.
- Premium rate telephony, including directory enquiries and call connection services (including collaboration with the Phone-paid Services Authority and its consumer panel on strengthening its consumer protection in this area).
- Digital privacy and ethics.
- Postal services and parcels.

Engagement with our stakeholders

Through our initiatives to strengthen the consumer voice in this sector, we have endeavoured to fill knowledge gaps and dispel myths that prevent the sector from being able to act.

We aim to capture a well-rounded and representative consumer voice, gathering first-hand information from consumer-facing organisations and those whose voices would historically be less likely to be heard in policymaking. Over the past year, our discussions with our stakeholders have allowed us to highlight a number of key issues facing consumers across



the UK. We have combined this intelligence with evidence from our insight programme to inform our advice to Ofcom, industry and government on communications policy and practice.

We have collaborated with other consumer organisations - Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland, Consumer Scotland, the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and Which? individually and within our **Consumer Stakeholder Hubs**. The Hubs have enabled us to learn from those who have direct engagement with consumers on a daily basis, and for all participants to share insights and research plans. This ensures that we are working together in a way that makes the most of our differing roles and further aligns our activities to better benefit consumers, citizens, and microbusinesses in the communications sector.

We have continued to work collaboratively with industry, in our **Industry Forum**. We have brought in a range of speakers from other sectors to raise awareness of best practice that could benefit their customers, including debt agencies to help communications providers consider what actions they can take to support people in these situations. We also continue to hold meetings with individual communication providers to hold them to account and understand and influence their consumer strategies.

Additionally, we have continued to meet with a range of stakeholders including Ofcom Board Members and the Chief Executive and senior team representatives, the two Alternative Dispute Resolution Providers in the communications sector, other sectoral regulators and the Chairs of their Consumer Panels, the Phone-paid Services Authority, and the Digital Connectivity Forum.



Our networks

National Stakeholder Hubs

The Panel's National Hubs were introduced to help strengthen the UK consumer voice in the communications sector. Hub Members include a wide range of consumer, citizen and micro business representatives - NGOs, policymakers, consumer protection organisations; and charities working in a range of fields such as mental health and racial equality or representing the interests of people who are: older; younger; with disabilities; carers; in debt; living in farming and rural communities; digitally excluded and many intersections of the above.

We continuously review whether we are hearing from a wide enough range of consumer, citizen and micro business voices and regularly invite new organisations to attend a session that may be of interest to them. It is important to us that all participants who want to participate, can. We provide a range of support for meeting participants and endeavour to ensure that all discussions, presentations, and communications are inclusive.

We relay the insights provided by Hub Members to Ofcom policy teams and industry, resulting in positive action. We act as a facilitator of debate and encourage information sharing, for example encouraging Ofcom's engagement with the views of Hub Members through the presentation and discussion of policy proposals at meetings. We have been pleased that Hub participants have gone on to share news about consultations, research and ideas with their stakeholders and other participants following meetings. We value the knowledge and skills of participants who attend the Hubs, and we encourage participants to share updates on recent work that they have been involved in.

In 2023.24 we continued to:

- Put specific issue discussions on the agenda of industry and policy makers in response to Members' intelligence of the problems facing consumers across the UK.
- Facilitated evidence-based discussions to feed into emerging areas of policy focus in the communications sector.
- Further increased participation across the Hubs and ensured a diverse range of voices are contributing to these discussions; and
- Generated awareness of consultations at the Hubs and fed intelligence gained at them into our responses to live issues and consultations, encouraging participants to respond directly where relevant.

Details on specific Hub meetings are published on our website: [National Stakeholder Hubs - Communications Consumer Panel](#).

UK Consumer Advocacy Hub

The UK Consumer Advocacy Hub provides an opportunity for consumer advocacy bodies to come together and share knowledge and awareness of the types of issues facing consumers nationally.

Chaired by the Chair of the Communications Consumer Panel, regular attendees include: Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland, Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and Which?



The meetings provide an opportunity to share knowledge across the consumer landscape and drive awareness of any ongoing work/or research and to avoid duplication of work.

These discussions are valuable in ensuring that the limited resources of all consumer advocates are used to best effect and that we do not duplicate effort, but instead inform each other's work. Topics of discussion in the past year have included affordability and debt, and consumers' reliance on postal services. While there is no bespoke advocate for Wales, we ensure that the Welsh voice features in discussion and have also been pleased with the engagement our Member for Wales has had with stakeholders in Wales, to ensure we can hear the needs of all UK consumers.

In 2023/24 we:

- Continued to share intelligence across the UK, strengthen networks and identify areas that require further research.
- Identified mutual and separate areas of concern and made best use of the resources of all participants, by learning from each other's research and commissioning research where knowledge gaps existed, or further depth of understanding was needed.

Industry Forum

We established the Industry Forum to gather the main communications providers together under Chatham House Rules, presenting examples of cross-sectoral best practice to facilitate and inform discussion. The group is open to any communications provider who would like to attend and is facilitated by the Panel. The Forum enables discussion of how to overcome obstacles and barriers to service improvement - including making communications services accessible and easy to use by all consumers - conscious of the fact that they are competitors. Our aim is for CPs to provide a baseline level of fairness for consumers, above which they can freely compete for customers. In order to provide this baseline, we believe that CPs need to hear the voices of consumers who are most susceptible to harm.

In 2023/24 we:

- Valued being able to work collaboratively with industry and to bring insights to them from other sectors and our research.
- Invited guest presenters from other sectors to highlight what is possible in terms of adapting and designing processes to suit consumers' changing needs and requirements. This has included debt organisations and charities.

Panel meetings

Our monthly meetings offer an opportunity for Members to advise on the development of both policy and procedure, provide consumer insights into emerging policies and provoke thought and debate. Members also meet outside of these regular meetings on topics of interest and expertise.

We continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including Ofcom, the National Advisory Committees, other regulators and consumer panels, individual communications and postal service providers and other subject matter experts to look deeper into ongoing issues that would benefit from a more proactive and systematic approach.



We have identified synergies between ongoing pieces of work by our stakeholders and called out issues of consumer harm early on, to prevent, reduce or halt impact on consumers.

Our research and insight programme

Our qualitative and quantitative research programme has been focused on investing in specific areas where we have identified consumer harm, or risk of harm if action is not taken by industry and policy makers and we seek to provide recommendations that will enable action to be taken to support consumers (and citizens and micro-businesses).

[Switching from analogue to telephony: Listening to the needs of landline consumers \(2023\)](#)
(a follow-up to the above quantitative study, with a boosted sample)

[The Struggle for Fairness: the experiences of communications consumers in remote and rural parts of the UK](#)

Consultation responses

The Panel provides a voice for consumers, citizens, and micro-businesses not just in public consultations, but also in discussion with policymakers early on in policy development and throughout implementation and revision of policy. We also regularly share news of public consultations with our stakeholders to encourage policy insights from a range of consumer, citizen, and micro-business representatives.

We publish all of our consultation responses on our website¹. In 2023/24 we responded to consultations on a range of topics, to provide the UK communications consumer voice, including:

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's consultation on its review of postal services regulation

<https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-ofcoms-review-of-postal-regulation.pdf>

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's proposals to tackle scam calls and texts

<https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-ofcoms-proposals-to-tackle-scam-calls-and-texts.pdf>

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to DCMS's call for views on plans to improve the security and privacy of apps and app stores

<https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to->

¹ <https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/consultation-responses-and-advice-notes/consultation-responses-and-advice-notes>



[dcmss-call-for-views-on-plans-to-improve-the-security-and-privacy-of-apps-and-app-stores.pdf](#)

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to CAP and BCAP's consultation on guidance on the presentation of mid-contract price increases in telecoms advertising

[https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-capbcappricerises2022.pdf](#)

Communication Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's review of Net Neutrality

[https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-ofcom-net-neutrality-review.pdf](#)

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's Plan of Work 23-24

[https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-ofcom-plan-of-work-23-24.pdf](#)

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Citizens Advice draft plan 23-24

[https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-citizens-advice-draft-plan-2023-24.pdf](#)

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Consumer Scotland's draft work programme 23-24

[https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-consumer-scotlands-draft-work-programme2324.pdf](#)

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland's draft work programme 23-24

[https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-ccnis-postal-services-draft-work-programme-2023-24.pdf](#)

Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Phone-Paid Services Authority on ICSS Code amendments 2023

[https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccp-acod-response-to-psa-re-icss-code-amendments-2023.pdf](#)



Annex 1: Financial Report

Panel Member Fees	£132,074
Panel Member Expenses	£14,588
Support (including Advisory Team, research, consultancy, stakeholder engagements, communications access support, design, and website publications)	£492,883
Total:	£639,545



Annex 2: Panel Member biographies

Rick Hill MBE (Chair and Member for Northern Ireland)

Following degrees in Applied Maths and Church History, Rick worked as a parish minister for 17 years. He left church work in 2007 to develop a portfolio career.

Rick is an independent member of the Strategic Panel for Non-Domestic Water, and Civil Aviation Authority Consumer Panel. He has previously been Deputy Chair of the Independent Press Standards Organisation, Chair of Northern Ireland Screen Commission, Chair of The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Chair of Consumer Focus Post and member of the Consumer Focus UK Board, a member of the BBC Audience Council for Northern Ireland and BBC Broadcasting Council for Northern Ireland. In 2014, he was made MBE for services to Broadcast Media.

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Kay Allen OBE

Kay is Campaign Director for Age Irrelevance and has worked for B&Q, BSkyB, and Royal Mail. She has been a Commissioner on the Disability Rights Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. She also served as a NED on the Department for Work and Pensions PDCS Board.

In 2010 Downing St asked her to look at Responsible Business Practice of small business as part of the Big Society Team. As a result, she created the online digital platform 'Trading for Good' which is now owned by Business in the Community.

She has run her own successful bespoke consultancy for 10 years specialising in Responsible Business and Diversity and Inclusion. A qualified performance coach Kay helps others to succeed. Kay is a Fellow of St Georges House Windsor, A Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. In 2010, she was awarded an OBE for services to Equality.

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Amanda Britain (Member for Scotland)

Amanda has wide experience of housing, health, social care, and digital services. She has worked in frontline and national positions and been on housing association and charity boards. In all roles, she has championed the interests of people who are socially or economically excluded.

During the pandemic, she led Digital Lifelines (reducing drug-related harm), and Digital Approaches in Care Homes and supported Connecting Scotland - Scottish Government initiatives using digital technology to connect people with friends, family, and services.



Amanda has authored reports on excluded groups, such as homeless people and gypsies/travellers, and on complaint handling in NHS Scotland and the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman. As chair of the Peter Gibson Memorial Fund, she helped publish 'Championing Consumers, a history of consumer advocacy in Scotland 1974-2014.'

Amanda is a board member of Capability Scotland and a member of Leuchie House Technology Project Board: both charities support people with complex needs and have a particular focus on the contribution of digital technology. She is a member of the Chartered Institute of Housing and past chair of its Scotland Board. Until recently she was Chair of Iriss, a charity supporting innovation, change and solutions to complex problems.

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Helen Froud

Helen is a former Deputy Chief Executive of the Western Isles Council and was previously Director of Corporate Services at Worcestershire County Council. She also worked in consulting for KPMG. She was Managing Director of her own consultancy firm until 2013, when she retrained to be a Salvation Army Officer. Since then, she has run Salvation Army centres in Aberdeen and Inverness; and is now Assistant Director (Research) for The Salvation Army UK and Ireland.

Helen was previously a Non-Executive Director on the former Health Protection Agency Board, and on the Board of the National Records of Scotland. She is also a former Trustee of One Parent Families Scotland. She sat on the SSE Networks Stakeholder Advisory Panel until 2022.

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Dr Siân Phipps (Member for Wales) (2020 - June 2023)

Siân spent four years championing the interests of water consumers through her non-executive role with the Consumer Council for Water, regularly challenging the performance of water companies in Wales. As a Patient and Community Leader at Velindre Cancer Centre, Siân is also a voice for people who use health and care services and is currently a lay member with NICE, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

Previously in her career, Siân worked for cross-party committees in the Senedd/Welsh Parliament and in the House of Commons, where her role was to advise Members in scrutinising government policies, legislation, and finance.

Siân has worked in communications and public affairs for a range of public organisations including BBC Wales, the Arts Council of Wales, and the Environment Agency, and has a PhD in public attitudes to environmental risk from the University of Leeds.

Siân is a Welsh learner, originally from Cardiff, where she currently lives.



Richard Spencer (Member for England)

Richard has 30 years' experience in consumer and SME mobile and fixed telecoms markets in the UK and abroad, most of which was spent at BT. His career has encompassed pricing, strategy, policy, business ethics and regulation. His final role was as Director of Corporate Social Responsibility, playing a key role in architecting and monitoring the company's programmes designed to have a positive impact on society and the environment.

Richard is the Senior Independent Director of the East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust and was trustee for a charity in Colchester which provides support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. He also serves on the Leadership Board of Reference of a local church in Colchester.

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Dr Michael Wardlow

Michael was most recently the Chief Commissioner for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, a public appointment he held from March 2012 to February 2020. Before joining the Commission, he was the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education a post he held from 1995.

Michael is currently Chair of the NI Police Fund and Chair of Translink NI. Prior to this, following 7 years in commerce, the majority of his work experience, both paid and in a voluntary capacity, was in the area of peace building and reconciliation, interests which have presented opportunities for him to work in over 40 countries.

In addition to being a graduate of Queen's University Belfast, Michael is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and a Fellow of the Chartered Insurance Institute. Michael is also a Visiting Scholar in George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice.

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Rick Williams (until December 2023)

Rick is the Managing Director of Freeney Williams Ltd, a disability and diversity consultancy. He is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and an Associate of Business Disability International.

Rick is an experienced consultant and trainer with expertise in all areas of disability and their impact on individuals and organisations.

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