

Consumer Panel highlights in third annual report progress on embedding consumer issues

25 June 2007

The Consumer Panel, the independent voice for the consumer interest in communications markets, has today published its third annual report highlighting work to embed consumer needs into government, Ofcom and industry policy. The Annual report 2006-07 looks at the progress made by the Panel in pressing for a consumer focus at the heart of policy-making and regulation. Colette Bowe, Consumer Panel Chairman, said: "During the past year the Panel has taken on major areas of work, and reacted quickly where commercial disputes have disadvantaged consumers. We have also continued to build a solid research evidence-base to support our advice."

Some of the key strategic areas are:

- Engaged with Ofcom to help shape its consumer priorities
- Continued to press government, Digital UK and Ofcom for the needs of vulnerable people to be recognised and addressed in digital switchover
- Secured interest in the adoption of the Consumer Interest Toolkit by the European Commission
- Engaged with Ofcom 's Digital Dividend Review
- Worked on consumer disadvantage issues
- Worked closely with Ofcom, government and the third sector to deliver policies that close the digital divide

The Panel has used research and workshops to identify consumers that might face difficulties in embracing new communications. "We continue to work on issues of disadvantage and social inclusion around older people and children, which we hope will illuminate actual and potential problems and help people think through solutions," Colette Bowe said.

The arrival at the end of last year of the new Ofcom chief executive, Ed Richards, provided the opportunity for the Panel to take a strategic stock-take on the progress made on consumer issues, which it did in an open letter to him.

Colette Bowe concluded: "I have been greatly encouraged by the progress that Ofcom has made in taking on board citizen and consumer issues. But, more still needs to be done to diminish public nervousness about the complexity of communications services, costs, service quality and the potential for disadvantage."

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

The Consumer Panel was established to advise Ofcom on the consumer interest in the markets it regulates. The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Visit www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk for more information.

The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

- Colette Bowe, Chairman
- Ruth Evans, Deputy Chairman
- Fiona Ballantyne
- Roger Darlington

- Simon Gibson
- Graham Mather
- Kevin McLaughlin
- Jeremy Mitchell
- Kate O'Rourke
- Bob Twitchin
- Allan Williams

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