

## **Consumer Panel Toolkit succeeds in putting the consumer at the heart of regulation**

7 March 2008

A toolkit designed to help Ofcom build consumer concerns into the organisation's systems and policy-making is working, says the independent voice for the consumer and citizen interest in communications markets.

Capturing the consumer interest, a PricewaterhouseCoopers review of three diverse Ofcom projects, found that the Consumer Interest Toolkit had influenced Ofcom's decision-making. The regulator has been using the toolkit, developed by the Consumer Panel, in its policy-making across the organisation for two years.

New Consumer Panel Chair Anna Bradley said: "The toolkit has clearly brought real benefits to communications consumers. We believe it could be used to do the same in other sectors, which is why we are so pleased to find other policy makers and regulators interested in adopting the toolkit."

The success of the toolkit has prompted the European Commission's Health and Consumer Affairs Directorate (DG SANCO) to consider using it in a streamlined form in its policy-making process.

"Today we are asking our audience of regulators, policy-makers, Parliamentarians and consumer bodies to think about how their organisations might benefit from the toolkit. I hope that they will be encouraged to adopt it in their own work," Anna Bradley said.

The Consumer Interest Toolkit is a practical and objective way for regulators to identify and take into account consumer concerns in policy development.

### Key toolkit report findings

- A clear document trail showed that consumer interest issues had been considered
- Information had been gathered to identify consumer concerns
- Consumer issues were reported upwards to senior managers
- All project teams used a consumer interest checklist.

### Key report recommendations

Ofcom should consider:

- Finding some new ways of engaging with consumer organisations
- Doing more to explain technical issues to consumers by using more consumer-friendly language
- More work to embed the use of the toolkit within the organisation as an aid to regulation
- Publishing more of the analysis used to make its decisions
- Publishing complaints data so that consumers and consumer organisations can identify emerging consumer issues.

National Consumer Council Chairman Lord Whitty, making the keynote speech, said that the Consumer Interest Toolkit was an important step in putting the consumer at

the heart of regulation: “This is the first initiative to audit regulators from the consumer perspective – and we should never forget that the job of a regulator is to protect the public. I’m pleased to see how the toolkit is informing Ofcom’s working practices and has changed the way that they do things,” he said.

Ends

#### NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

1. 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](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk) for more information.

2. The Panel’s members appointed by Ofcom are:

- Anna Bradley, Chair
- Ruth Evans, Deputy Chair
- Fiona Ballantyne
- Roger Darlington
- Simon Gibson
- Graham Mather
- Kevin McLaughlin
- Jeremy Mitchell
- Kate O’Rourke
- Bob Twitchin
- Allan Williams

3. Capturing the consumer interest: the removal of BT’s retail price controls, broadband migrations and licence exemption framework reviews is available from the Ofcom Consumer Panel website [www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk). For a hard copy please ring 020 7783 4021

4. The review of the Consumer Interest Toolkit was carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP.

5. The Consumer Interest Toolkit was developed by the Ofcom Consumer Panel and PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP to help regulatory and policy-making bodies identify the consumer interest. It provides an objective assessment of the way the consumer interest is handled in decision-making and policy work.

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