



Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD response to BIS' consultation on options to refine the UK competition regime

The Communications Consumer Panel (the Panel) and the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People (ACOD) welcome the opportunity to respond to BIS' consultation on options to refine the UK competition regime.

The Panel works to protect and promote people's interests in the communications sector, including the postal sector. We are an independent statutory body set up under the Communications Act 2003. The Panel carries out research, provides advice and encourages Ofcom, governments, the EU, industry and others to look at issues through the eyes of consumers, citizens and microbusinesses.

The Panel pays particular attention to the needs of older people and people with disabilities, the needs of people in rural areas and people on low incomes, and the needs of micro businesses, which have many of the same problems as individual consumers.

Four members of the Panel also represent the interests of consumers in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales respectively. They liaise with the key stakeholders in the Nations to understand the perspectives of consumers in all parts of the UK and input these perspectives to the Panel's consideration of issues. Following the alignment of ACOD with the Panel, the Panel is more alert than ever to the interests of older and disabled consumers and citizens.

Response

The Panel believes that the recent merger applications in telecommunications make this an opportune time to review the UK competition regime. We will restrict our comments to the overall policy, rather than specific processes or the mechanics of the CMA panel.

We support "a strong flow of enforcement cases"; and a proportionate process - as the consultation document says, these moves should achieve faster protection for consumers and more clarity for businesses.

We broadly support the aim to reduce burdens on businesses, as long as this is not at the expense of consumer interests, choice and protection.

We would like to see more focus on consumers and consumer representation, in the form of expert input.

We believe there should be provision for dealing with market failure swiftly and effectively so that consumer detriment is minimised/remedied.

We support the option to reduce phase 2 timetables for the CMA. Option 1 in the consultation document, where the timetable is reduced from 18 to 12 months with a six month extension requiring CMA Board approval seems to be an improvement.

We consider that communications providers - be they existing, or new entities formed as a result of a merger of acquisition - should be strongly encouraged to provide coverage to all of their customers via all of their existing and newly acquired networks (fixed broadband and mobile).