**Communications Consumer Panel’s All-UK National Stakeholder Hub Summary – February 2025**

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| **About us:**  The Communications Consumer Panel’s role as a critical friend to Ofcom and other decision-makers in the communications sector requires Members to actively listen to the ‘voices’ of consumers, citizens and micro-businesses across the UK. One way that Members do this is by running a ‘Hub’ meeting in each Nation, roughly once a quarter. |

The Panel’s National Stakeholder Hub in February took the form of an All-UK Hub and participants joined from all four nations of the UK – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

**Aim of the All-UK National Stakeholder Hub**

The Hub was chaired by our Member for Wales, Rachel Burr, and concentrated on listening to our stakeholders plans for the coming year. In advance of the Hub, we posed prompts to participants to assist in maximising the information shared which were:

* Detail any updates for the coming year
* Provide suggestions or relay concerns to the Panel
* Specify any research plans – both current findings and future proposals

Rachel Burr invited the Panel’s Chair, Helen Froud, to provide a brief summary of some of our areas of interest and plans for the year ahead, which included:

* Future of the Postal Universal Service Obligation (USO)
* Plan of Work, which included Online Safety
* Migration to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) – including consumers who have migrated and those who are yet to migrate do not face detriment
* 2G/3G switch-off – ensuring people stay connected
* Affordability of communications services - to include contract fairness and ease of switching providers
* Recruitment of New Members to the Panel

A link to our 2023/2024 strategic plan can be found [here](https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/current-year-2/current-year-2).

**A summary of the key points raised by each organisation can be found below:** (listed in the order they were raised by participants during the session)

**Older People’s Commissioner for Wales**

* The Older People’s Commissioner for Wales provided details of a consultation entitled [‘Have Your Say’](https://olderpeople.wales/haveyoursay/) which will allow participants to highlight concerns or share positive examples on how to assist older people living in Wales.
* The shift to a more digital online world prompts older people being excluded from accessing online public services either through lack of skills or the cost of buying the necessary equipment required to access online services.
* Although older people feel comfortable to access some online facilities, other more complicated online services are more complicated to navigate.

**Mencap**

* Highlighted the importance of people with learning difficulties being seen, heard and valued in all aspects of life, and look to raise awareness.
* Mencap provided the link to their Learning Disability week commencing on 16 June 2025, entitled [‘Do you See Me?’](https://www.mencap.org.uk/learningdisabilityweek?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiA_NC9BhCkARIsABSnSTbBBzzamNOv5JjU6eiDeAOzGumwuMtd5WJbbJ7MX5L3hGfaCVqrSoQaAlLuEALw_wcB) and encouraged people to get involved.

**Good Things Foundation**

* Highlighted digital exclusion as a main topic of interest and urged participants to keep a close eye on emerging information from UK government, including devolved nations, regional and local authorities.
* Work on the [Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS)](https://mdls.org.uk/) continues and further research is underway, continuing their work understanding the needs of households with children and moving to the needs of other households, such as older people.
* Sharing the MDLS story will help raise awareness and portray crucial information about digital inclusion and exclusion.

**Consumer Scotland – Postal services**

* Communicated to Hub participants their investment on the Future of the Postal Universal Services Obligation (USO), the implications around second-class mail and what the postal system needs to look like in 2040.
* Consumer Scotland asked participants to share any relevant insights or knowledge they had gathered on the postal sector.

**Consumer Scotland – Telecoms**

* Relayed concerns on the Migration to VoIP, especially within resilience and power outages.
* Details were provided to participants of various correspondence issued from Consumer Scotland concerning the switch from traditional landlines to telephone calls over a broadband internet connection. [Consumers in Scotland and the transition to VoIP](https://consumer.scot/publications/consumers-in-scotland-and-the-transition-to-voip/).

**UK Safer Internet Centre**

* The South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) is a not for profit charity ensuring everyone can benefit from technology free from harm. The [UK Safer Internet Centre](https://saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/safer-internet-day-2025) provides expert advice to schools, public bodies and industry on appropriate actions to take in regards to safeguarding and advancing positive online safety policies.
* In addition to the SWGfL providing [education and technology resources](https://swgfl.org.uk/education-tech/) specifically designed to help schools, they also run three helplines:
  + Revenge Porn Helpline – The UK’s only service dedicated to supporting adults who have been victims of intimate image abuse.
  + Report Harmful Content – An online platform for guidance around reporting harmful online content.
  + Professionals Online Safety Helpline – an Online Safety helpline for professionals who work with children and young people in the UK.
* Details were shared about [Safer Internet Day](https://saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/safer-internet-day-2025) (11 February 2025) with celebrations and learnings based around the theme ‘Too good to be true? Protecting yourself and others from scams online’.
* Figures were shared concerning the number of people who had experienced scams online (2 in 3 people).
* Major concerns were highlighted about the [repeal of the Video Sharing Platform (VSP) regime](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/repeal-of-the-vsp-regime/) and UK consumers will no longer have anywhere to go to report harmful online content. Figures from the helpline suggest increased support for consumers is essential. The UK Safer Internet Centre confirmed that within Europe the Digital Services Act has a provision build in for an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service, however the UK, including Northern Ireland did not. More work is required in this area.

**Ofcom Wales**

* Provided an update on the work they are doing within the Youth Engagement space.
* Relayed the importance of their dedicated Welsh Language helpline to assist Welsh speakers have a voice within the communications sector.

**National Association of Deafened People (NADP)**

* Highlighted concerns on the text relay service, originally mandated by Ofcom as an equivalent telephony channel for users who are less able to hear or speak.
* Advised about advances in technology and suggested that improvements should be made to the existing offering or other services should be made available to help individuals who require access to services other than voice telephony.
* Advised that the format of automatic speech recognition can be difficult to view and urged that Ofcom review this.
* The NADP would like to see a more diverse workforce being employed or retained in organisations, especially those with a hearing loss.
* The NADP’s information suggested individuals with a hearing loss were not as confident in the work environment, and many employees felt they’ll get left behind, leave their role or retire early.
* More people with hearing loss should be included in research. (Note, the NADP took part in the Panel/Ofcom’s research project last year ‘Paving the Way to Inclusivity’).
* Highlighted the universal postal service as a lifeline and communication tool for individuals with a hearing loss, especially for making and confirming appointments. The postal service must be accessible for everyone.
* Advised that Migration to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), especially within emergency situations is a concern to the deafened community, as people should be able to compare services and those who have switched to a digital line appear to struggle. An increased awareness and assistance in this area is key.
* Accessibility to on demand services is a key topic for the NADP and suggest more programmes should have a captioning facility.
* The NADP feel deafened people should receive a reduction in their TV licence as they are unable to use the full service such as radio services. An alternative option would be to include a captions facility on radio programmes. (Note: while TV Licencing does not come under Ofcom’s remit, we have kept this in this note as it may be of wider interest to stakeholders in understanding challenges faced by people who have hearing loss or are deafened).

**European Federation of Hard of Hearing People**

* Provided information on the regulations for online captioning and advised of the need for improvements in this area to ensure people with hearing loss are not underserved.
* Recommended that the UK learns from and adopts the captioning model used in the USA. [[1]](#footnote-2)
* The Electronic Communications Code was discussed, including concerns around accessing emergency services and improvements to be made.

**Ofcom’s Advisory Committee for Scotland (ACS)**

* The representative from Ofcom’s ACS reached out to Hub participants to request the sharing of statistics on Scottish consumers digital lives to include online safety.
* The ACS are keenly interested in the inclusive culture of making services accessible to everyone.
* Additionally, improving media literacy is an important aspect of their work and provided the link to the [Glasgow Disability Alliance](https://gda.scot/2024/08/29/inclusive-media-literacy-with-gda-and-ofcom/) who aim to improve critical thinking skills.
* Within the Online Safety space, the representative from the ACS relayed concerns over seeing the de-prioritising of safety over online growth, and that being online can be dangerous. The Online Safety regime is currently child focused and should focus on every user.

**Advice Northern Ireland (NI)**

* Relayed concerns with the lack of awareness around the eVisa (online immigration status) system.
* Advice NI are working with people who have gained status as refugees and advised that each individual eVisa provides the refugee the right to live and work in the UK. Without access to online services, refugees are unable to apply for an eVisa and are at a disadvantage. Refugees may not be able to speak English fluently, or have the right specification of mobile device, and with the multi-factor authentication tools required to access the platform, they are unable to use the service. (Note: while the eVisa process does not come under Ofcom’s remit, we have kept this in this note as it may be of wider interest to stakeholders in understanding the challenges faced by consumers and citizens who do not speak English fluently, including some who may rely on their children as interpreters when using communications services and public services.)

**Citizens Advice – Telecoms and Postal Services**

* Confirmed their current work on the Future of the Postal USO and proposals for the Address and Collect service – a way for consumers to collect parcels from a specified location without having a fixed address.
* Rural consumers relying on a postal service is of importance, including the effects of the Windsor framework across England, Wales and particularly Northern Ireland.
* Citizens Advice also confirmed their ongoing work on how people get in contact with their communications providers and affordability of telecoms services including hidden deals, haggling and awareness of social tariffs.
* Other aspects of their work include, fraud and scams, Migration of VoIP and the importance of a national advertising campaign to boost consumer awareness.

**Ofcom’s Advisory Committee for Wales (ACW)**

* The Chair of the ACW relayed information on how the recent storms had impacted Welsh consumers and asked for information from other participants on the experiences of resilience and network outages in other areas of the UK.

**Ofcom Northern Ireland**

* Ofcom’s Northern Ireland team shared insights into the consumer experience in Northern Ireland during the time of impact of Storm Eowyn. (Note: The Panel has commissioned research into the impact of network outages on consumers and we have asked the agency to capture insights into not only consumers’ experiences of the outage, but also of the usefulness of communications providers’ communications during the recent storms).

**The Alliance (Scottish Sensory Hub)**

* In the context of the recent storms and any future emergencies, The Alliance highlighted difficulties for people who are unable to hear around the audible emergency alert issued to citizens, which included a text message that did not stay on screen long enough to be read.
* The Alliance aims to provide feedback to designers and developers to make the system more accessible for consumers.

**BSI's Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN)**

* The representative from CPIN was interested to hear if any participants had knowledge from consumers who are served by AI standards.

**For links to research and insights shared by participants during the All-UK Hub – please see below:**

* **Age UK** [Offline and Overlooked | Campaigns | Age UK](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/campaigning/offline-overlooked/) – an Age UK campaign to ensure everyone can access the services they need, so that offline doesn’t mean being overlooked.
* [Paul Farmer and Minister Seema Malhotra discuss eVisas | Age UK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yX73XuHfHFU)
* **Youthlink Scotland** [Landmark Bill Seeks to Secure Right to Youth Work in Scotland](https://www.youthlink.scot/news/youth-work-scotland-bill/) – Member’s Bill seeks to secure legal right to youth work in Scotland.

**For more information on previous discussions across the Panel’s National Hubs and who took part – please visit the Panel’s website** [**here**](https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/stakeholder-engagement/the-panels-national-hubs)**.**

**Stakeholders who took part in our National Hubs are listed below:**

* **Good Things Foundation**
* **Inclusion Scotland**
* **Mencap**
* **Money Advice and Pensions Service**
* **National Association of Deafened People**
* **Ofcom**
* **Ofcom’s Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland**
* **Ofcom’s Advisory Committee for Scotland**
* **Ofcom’s Advisory Committee for Wales**
* **Older People’s Commissioner for Wales**
* **Royal National Institute for Deaf People**
* **The Alliance Scotland**
* **UK Safer Internet Centre**
* **University of Liverpool**
* **Advice Northern Ireland**
* **Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People**
* **Age UK**
* **Cedar Foundation**
* **Citizens Advice**
* **Communications Consumer Panel**
* **Competition and Markets Authority**
* **Consumer Scotland**
* **Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)**
* **Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services**
* **Countryside Alliance**
* **Digital Health and Care Wales**
* **Disability Action (NI)**
* **European Federation of Hard of Hearing People**

**Future National Stakeholder Hubs Dates – Topics to be confirmed**

**England**

* 25 April 2025 commencing at 2pm
* 29 September 2025 commencing at 2pm
* 15 December 2025 commencing at 2pm

**Northern Ireland**

* 30 April 2025 commencing at 10am
* 30 September 2025 commencing at 10am
* 18 December 2025 commencing at 10am

**Scotland**

* 25 April 2025 commencing at 10am (subject to change)
* 30 September 2025 commencing at 2pm (subject to change)
* 19 December 2025 commencing at 10am (subject to change)

**Wales**

* 1 May 2025 commencing at 10am
* 24 September 2025 commencing at 10am
* 17 December 2025 commencing at 10am

1. The [Media Act 2024](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2024/15/pdfs/ukpga_20240015_en.pdf) includes subtitling quotas for certain on-demand programme services (see page 149). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)