Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 16 January 2025 at 10.30 am

Meeting held in hybrid format at Riverside House and via Microsoft Teams

Present
Consumer Panel/ACOD
Helen Froud (Chair)
Rachel Burr
Judith Clifton
Lenna Cumberbatch
Michelle Goddard
Robert Hammond
Michael Wardlow

Apologies
None

In attendance
The Panel's Executive Team
Representative from the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI) (item 9)

Item
1. Welcome and introduction 1.1 The Chair welcomed Panel Members and attendees to the meeting.
2. Declarations of Members' interests 2.1 Helen Froud declared her spouse was to continue working in a retail role on a part-time basis, within Tesco Group (not Tesco Mobile).
3. Minutes of the meeting on 12 December 2024 and matters arising 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 12 December 2024 were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate reflection following a slight amendment.

4. Chair's update

4.1 The Chair and Members provided an overview of the Panel's recent activity and stakeholder engagement across the UK since the last meeting held on 12 December.

4.2 The Chair provided an update on recruitment, which was ongoing.

5. Consumer Policy update

5.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom's consumer policy team on its key consumer priority areas.

5.2 Members were pleased to hear that progress had been made with the difficulties in matching consumers' address records within the One Touch Switch (OTS) programme but highlighted the impact on consumers affected and urged Ofcom to monitor the situation and to ensure communications providers were sharing lessons learned.

5.3 The Panel questioned whether any data or evidence can be derived or shared from the results of the OTS programme and enquired whether any highlighted trends had had any adverse impact or unintended consequences for people with long term conditions or disabilities.

5.4 Members were pleased to see a recent increase in the uptake of social tariffs by consumers and asked Ofcom for analysis on this.

5.5 The Panel voiced concerns about the consistency of lower priced tariffs and reliability of services offered to consumers across the sector and urged Ofcom to continue working with small Communications Providers (CPs) to raise awareness of the General Conditions.

5.6 Panel Members look forward to receiving an update on the Migration to VoIP programme of work.

5.7 Members keenly await further information on mobile coverage and performance from Ofcom, having highlighted the link between poor connectivity and 2G/3G switch-off.

6. 2G/3G Switch-off Project update

6.1 The Panel received a progress update from Ofcom on the 2G/3G switch-off which included how the programme is being monitored, communications to consumers, and information on other services that rely on mobile networks.

6.2 Members advised that while there had been a very low volume of complaints to Ofcom about 2G/3G switch-off, which was, on the surface, positive news Ofcom should be proactive, to better understand difficulties consumers may be facing that they had not reported to Ofcom or their provider.

6.3 The Panel highlighted concerns of consumers who may be experiencing difficulties with the 2G/3G switch off which may be compounded by poor customer service when they try to seek support - and that these consumers' concerns were not being tracked by Ofcom.

6.4 Members recognised that it can be challenging for CPs to communicate with their customers about policy changes, such as the switch-off of services and the actions consumers must take, especially as consumers may fear following advice and being subject to scams .

6.5 Members were interested to understand if CPs (mobile network operators and mobile virtual network operators) were learning, listening and making changes to improve the switch off process and their customer service processes.

6.6 The Panel were keen to learn about the affects of the 2G/3G switch off globally to better understand what worked well and the similarities experienced.

7. Digitally Underserved Communities

7.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on their research into the experiences of Digitally Underserved Communities.

7.2 Members appreciated Ofcom's understanding of intersectionality, and were pleased to read a report which focussed on the complex lives of consumers and look forward to reading the full report once published.

7.3 Members provided Ofcom with additional insights around underserved communities, including people fleeing domestic abuse, LGBT+ communities, people who are not first-language English speakers, the ageing population, and people who chose not go online, are unable to go online, or fear online scams or misinformation.

7.4 The Panel advised Ofcom to consider making a list of policies that would need amending to break the complex cycles consumers find themselves in.

8. Implementation of the Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Act ('DMCC Act') update

8.1 The Panel received an update on the recent developments relating to the implementation of the consumer elements of the Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Act ('DMCC Act').

8.2 Members were keen to understand Ofcom's route map through the DMCC Act, how it would be monitored and the timescale for the statutory instruments' implementation.

8.3 The Panel look forward to receiving an update from Ofcom once further substantive progress has been made.

9. Consumer Council for Northern Ireland's (CCNI's) Postal USO Qualitative Study

9.1 A representative from the CCNI visited the Panel to provide Members with an overview of the statutory consumer representative body of Northern Ireland.

9.2 The Panel received an understanding of the differences in outcomes between Northern Ireland consumers and other parts of the UK, asked questions to further

their knowledge and the Panel's postal service user advocates offered to collaborate with the CCNI to build shared learning.

10. CCP/ACOD Online Safety Plan of Action

10.1 The Panel agreed to consider specific areas of focus to support and challenge Ofcom's Online Safety remit, to strengthen the consumer voice, and relay that vocalisation to Ofcom, Industry and Government.

10.2 Members and Exec team were tasked to seek and share evidence and insights that would support the Panel's work in this area.

11. Enforcement update

11.1 Ofcom's Enforcement team provided Members with an update on Ofcom's investigation and enforcement programme.

11.2 The Panel asked questions around the current enforcement work aimed at protecting consumers, citizens and microbusinesses.

12. Any Other Business

12.1 There was no other business.