

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 17 April 2024 at 10.30 am

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

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Rick Hill (Chair)

Amanda Britain

Rachel Burr

Judith Clifton

Lenna Cumberbatch

Helen Froud

Michelle Goddard

Robert Hammond

Richard Spencer

Michael Wardlow

Apologies

Kay Allen

In attendance

The Panel's Executive Team

Ofcom colleagues

Representatives from Dissonance Consulting (item 7)

Item
1. Welcome and introduction 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting.
2. Declarations of Members' interests 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.
3. Minutes of the meeting on 21 March 2024 and matters arising 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 21 March 2024 were APPROVED .



4. Chair's update

- 4.1 The Chair and National Members provided an overview of the Panel's recent activity and stakeholder engagement across the UK.
- 4.2 The Panel discussed ideas on future research projects for the forthcoming year.

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 The Panel was pleased to learn of the preparation of a blog post on Ofcom's social tariff research and expressed interest in viewing the material once available.
- 5.3 The Panel was interested to view the findings from the recent Ofcom commissioned research on consumer experiences of ADR schemes and to learn if consumers receive different outcomes depending on which scheme their provider uses. The Ofcom team would provide information to the Panel in a future meeting.
- 5.4 Members were keen to view Ofcom's quantitative and qualitative market research findings on the experience of customers in debt and to view the materials including infographics and BSL videos designed to promote awareness of measures for consumers with disabilities across telecoms and post. The Ofcom team would provide information to the Panel in a future meeting.
- 5.5 The Panel asked for further information on CPs' uptake and use of the telecare incident reporting system.
- 5.6 Members had been alerted to consumers experiencing scams in relation to migration to VoIP and are keen to learn if Ofcom are aware and to understand what work has been completed. The Ofcom team would provide information to the Panel at the next meeting.
- 5.7 The lack of a national campaign to promote the awareness of the migration to VoIP remains of grave concern to the Panel, especially for consumers who have already migrated who remain unknown to providers due to the lack of comprehensive data.
- 5.8 The Panel raised concerns about the lack of recent evidence based research in connection with the future of the Universal Postal Service and questioned whether the service would become more reliable and affordable for consumers.



6. Broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) update

- 6.1 Members received an update from Ofcom on the broadband USO and publicly funded initiatives to improve broadband connectivity.
- 6.2 The Panel continue to raise concerns with the current broadband USO speed of 10mbps as not being adequate for households and suggested Ofcom view the [Minimum Digital Living Standard \(MDLS\)](#) research which has defined the 'basket' of digital goods, services and skills required by an average UK family to live in a digital world.

7. Trust and why nobody trusts institutions anymore - research findings from Dissonance Consulting

- 7.1 Representatives from Dissonance Consulting provided a presentation on trust and why nobody trusts institutions anymore which the Panel found interesting and thought provoking.

8. Phone-paid Services Authority (PSA) update

- 8.1 The Panel received an update from the Phone-paid Services Authority (PSA) on latest market data and trends in consumer complaints, plus work undertaken on Information Connection and Signposting Services (ICSS) in the context of the transfer of regulation to Ofcom.
- 8.2 Members were pleased to learn of the impact and success of the programme to date.

9. Digitally Underserved Communities

- 9.1 The Panel received information from Ofcom on their Digitally Underserved communities (DUC) project which focuses on learning from demographic groups that are more likely to face digital disadvantage due to location, capabilities, social characteristics or choice of technology.
- 9.2 Members were enlightened to learn the DUC project focused on renters, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups, rural communities and smartphone-only users, but additionally highlighted the project should also include citizens who are homeless, gypsy/traveller communities and people who live on retirement parks.
- 9.3 The Panel highlighted when carrying out research into citizens with disabilities care should be taken and further information should be gathered as the term 'disabled' covers a broad spectrum of conditions.
- 9.4 Members look forward to receiving another visit from the Ofcom team to present the research findings later in the year.



10. Future Development of the Postal USO and Nations Events update

- 10.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on their recent call for inputs on the future of the Universal Postal Service and Ofcom's hosted Nation's events which enabled representatives from Royal Mail, consumer, SME groups and access operators to debate the future of the service.
- 10.2 Members acknowledged a great deal of work would be needed to provide a reliable, affordable service to meet the needs of consumers, citizens and microbusinesses and urged Ofcom to fully analyse the data and not be pressurised to rush through a decision.
- 10.3 The Panel questioned the wide range in the cost estimates of the Universal Service Obligation and further analysis should be undertaken.
- 10.4 Concerns were raised by the Panel upon learning the research was not up to date enough, had not included people who are digitally excluded, and the focus groups questioned consisted of online and urban participants. The Panel advised Ofcom to commit to further research to look at the needs of current consumers before making any decisions about the future of the universal postal service.

11. Digital Lifelines - the digital inclusion initiative

- 11.1 The Panel received a presentation on Digital Lifelines Scotland which addresses digital exclusion and developing digital solutions for people with substance abuse in Scotland.
- 11.2 Members agreed the programme which offered support, confidence, motivation and skills alongside devices and connectivity, not only assisted people who use drugs to reduce the risk of harm and death, but also helped their families, organisations and industry.

12. AOB

- 12.1 The Chair noted it was Amanda Britain's last meeting and thanked her for her valuable expertise, contributions, polite and thoughtful cross-questioning abilities and her years of wisdom on consumer policy, advocacy and research throughout her time as the Member for Scotland and Member of the Communications Consumer Panel/ACOD. Members, and the Executive team have appreciated Amanda's kindness, guidance and friendship during her term.