

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 19 September 2024 at 10.30 am

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

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Helen Froud (Chair)

Kay Allen

Rachel Burr

Judith Clifton

Lenna Cumberbatch

Michelle Goddard

Robert Hammond

Richard Spencer

Michael Wardlow

Apologies

none

In attendance

The Panel's Executive Team

Representatives from Audit Scotland (item 6)

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 25 July 2024 and matters arising 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 25 July 2024 were a true and accurate reflection, and thus APPROVED .



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 25 July.
- 4.2 The Chair provided an update on recruitment. The process of appointing new Members for Scotland, England and general Member vacancies was still ongoing. Following a revision of job specification, and taking into account the technical competency matches that would hope to be achieved through the recruitment of other members, the recruitment campaign to find a Member for Northern Ireland had recommenced. The revised vacancy was open to everyone meeting the criteria, including any previous applicants, and was focused on the specifics of consumer, citizen and micro-business needs in the context of the Northern Ireland consumer market.
- 4.3 The Chair provided confirmation on the Panel's preferred research topics for 2024/2025 and progress towards commissioning these.

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 learn the implementation of the One Touch Switch (OTS) programme had taken place, however, were concerned to learn of the 'matching' difficulties between communications providers (CPs) on switching consumers.
- 5.3 In addition, the Panel highlighted concerns with the potential impact to consumers once the 6-week OTS handover period expires, especially for consumers living in unstable housing situations, and encouraged Ofcom to monitor consumer impact closely and flag to the CCP any cohort of consumers who may be in detriment.
- 5.4 Members had viewed online advertisements for external companies offering a switching service and questioned how effective the communication of the OTS programme was in signposting consumers to the service. The Panel raised further concerns around the risk of companies that could monetise the One Touch Switch scheme and urged Ofcom to look into these concerns.
- 5.5 The Panel reiterated that the delay to the implementation of the OTS programme had affected potential switchers and recommended Ofcom to continue to monitor how the delay had impacted consumers' ability to benefit from a competitive market.
- 5.6 The Panel were pleased Ofcom was continuing engagement with CPs around the migration to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and asked for any



updated information on the volume of serious incidents provided on the telecare reporting system and look forward to receiving an update.

5.7 Members also requested an update on the distribution and use of battery back-up packs by consumers in relation to the migration to VoIP.

5.8 The Panel questioned Ofcom on how first and second class postal deliveries are recorded and analysed, along with how post is monitored. An update from Ofcom's postal monitoring team had been scheduled for the next meeting and would be appreciated by the Panel.

5.9 Panel Members questioned Ofcom on whether they had witnessed an increase in consumers cancelling communications services due to affordability and look forward to an update.

6. Audit Scotland - Tackling Digital Exclusion

6.1 A representative from Audit Scotland provided a presentation on their recently published findings entitled '[Tacking Digital Exclusion](#)'.

6.2 The Panel were enlightened with the level of research and depth of findings so far identified which echoed the Panel's concerns on the level of detriment experienced by consumers.

6.3 Panel Members felt the report helped to confirm the complexities and challenges society and organisations face in supporting individuals and households.

6.4 The Panel questioned whether a multi-agency approach, or a look outside of the UK may provide a better outcome of providing support and the necessary digital skills to consumers.

7. Shared Rural Network update

7.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on the Shared Rural Network programme including the monitoring and delivery of coverage obligations established between the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and the UK Government.

7.2 Members were pleased to learn mobile coverage was now being checked thoroughly 'in the field' by Ofcom, and questioned what next steps could be taken if an MNO failed to deliver on their target.

7.3 The Panel agreed the outcome of coverage was good and acknowledged the final stage of implementation would be difficult for MNOs to achieve, due to the complications associated with the more rural and remote areas of the UK, and the difficulties in ensuring the public funding sites become operational.

7.4 Members encouraged Ofcom to look again at regional domestic roaming possibilities to help solve connectivity in the more isolated and inaccessible



areas of the UK (beyond emergency service roaming, which already takes place).

8. Portrayal of Older and Disabled People in Broadcasting

- 8.1 The Panel, under their remit as the Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People, received information from Ofcom on their policy and standards related work regarding the portrayal of older and disabled people working off-screen in broadcasting and appearing on-screen.
- 8.2 Members highlighted the importance of diverse role models in the broadcasting sector.
- 8.3 The Panel advised Ofcom that inclusivity begins with the overall employee population knowing both that decision-making responsibilities are given to people who represent them and that decision-makers are transparently held to account on the approach they take to inclusivity (in representation and portrayal on air and behind the scenes).
- 8.4 Additionally, Members stated that to attract and retain a more inclusive workforce, employer/employee behaviours need to adapt, and additional care should be taken to make workplaces more accessible.

9. Panel Priorities

- 9.1 Members discussed areas of work to prioritise over the coming year and looked at topics within their window of influence.

10. Future of Wireless Connectivity

- 10.1 The Panel received information from Ofcom on the work they are undertaking to ensure UK consumers and businesses continue to access high quality broadband wireless connectivity in the future, whether enabled through 6G, satellite, Wi-Fi, or all three.
- 10.2 Members raised concerns over cyber security and what society, including consumer demand, will require connectivity to cope with, as yet unknown.
- 10.3 The Panel questioned whether the right level of funding will be available to ensure consumers who need extra assistance, encapsulating physical, psychological, financial and geographical support, are not left behind. Additionally, Communications Providers must be mindful to not increase costs to an unaffordable level which may exclude communities already suffering exclusion and detriment.
- 10.4 Further concerns raised by the Panel highlighted the importance of eliminating network outages, or at least ensuring they are kept to a bare minimum to not impact or bring harm to consumers.
- 10.5 The Panel agreed the best possible outcome for the future of wireless connectivity would be to connect all consumers who wish to be connected,



especially those who are currently impacted or excluded and to ensure everyone who wishes to be connected, has the correct digital skills to navigate society. The Panel highlighted the work of Good Things Foundation and the University of Liverpool on understand what should be included in a Minimum Digital Living Standard.

10.6 Members recommend Ofcom liaise with the gaming community to better understand potential metaverse implications to future connectivity and consider ideas from science fiction which are currently fictional, which in time could become a reality.

11. AOB

11.1 There was no other business.