

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 25 July 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 the University of Liverpool and Good Things Foundation (Item 6)

Ofcom colleagues and an intern from the 10,000 able interns scheme (from item 8 to 12)

Item
<p>1. Welcome and introduction</p> <p>1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting.</p>
<p>2. Declarations of Members' interests</p> <p>2.1 There were no declarations of interest.</p>
<p>3. Minutes of the meeting on 25 June 2024 and matters arising</p> <p>3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 25 June 2024 were APPROVED following a minor amendment for clarity.</p> <p>3.2 The Panel questioned the response received to an action concerning the</p>



anecdotal evidence of a change to postal collection times advertised on post boxes within residential areas. Many confirmed a last collection time of 9:00am except in town centres. Members questioned Ofcom if they were aware of a policy change and look ahead to a further update.

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 General Election on 4 July.
- 4.2 The Chair provided an update on recruitment. The process of appointing new Members for Scotland, England and general Member vacancies was ongoing and recruitment of a new Member for Northern Ireland would recommence in the Autumn, with a revised job specification, taking into account the technical competency matches that would hope to be achieved through the recruitment of other members. The revised job would be open to all including previous applicants and this role would be focused on the specifics of consumer, citizen and micro-business needs in the context of the Northern Ireland consumer market.
- 4.3 A leaflet entitled 'Spoilt for Choice' was shown to Members which highlighted an extension to parcel collection and delivery via Collect+ Parcelshops and Parcel Lockers accessed online or via a QR code. The Panel shared concerns that while the scheme appeared to engage the wealthy working population it appeared to exclude the underserved community of consumers and citizens who are not digitally confident, which may include people who rely on parcels services and might benefit from these services. The Exec Team would ask Royal Mail about accessibility.

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 remain concerned with the risk of CPs failing again to meet the implementation date of the One Touch Switch programme and urged Ofcom to keep them updated ahead of the September Panel meeting.
- 5.3 The Panel asked for any updated information in connection with the migration to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) implementation along with data surrounding the telecare reporting system and look forward to receiving an update.
- 5.4 Panel Members praised Ofcom on the [banning of mid-contract price rises linked to inflation](#) to protect consumers and were pleased the Panel had been able to provide advice to Ofcom on this at an early stage and throughout policy development.



5.5 The Panel commended Ofcom on the targets so far achieved on the Shared Rural Network in Scotland and Wales, and questioned whether the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) provided any further information on how they reached their targets. Members are keen to view any findings ahead of Ofcom's published statement due in September.

5.6 The Panel were keen to establish how old the data received from the MNOs was in relation to the 2G/3G switch off thus affecting Telecare systems. The Panel requested an update from the team.

6. Minimum Digital Living Standard (MDLS) update

6.1 Members received an overview on how the [Minimum Digital Living Standard \(MDLS\)](#) work is progressing following a previous visit.

6.2 The Panel were delighted with the research and depth of findings so far achieved on the programme and emphasized the immense value to society it would bring, especially with the involvement of the Welsh government.

6.3 Panel Members highlighted the increase in digital living standards in recent years, speculating that if the MDLS research had taken place ahead of the Covid pandemic the results would have shown a much lower level of digital detriment.

6.4 Members look forward to future engagement with the MDLS team and reviewing further statistics following the programmes future planned research.

6.5 The Panel would meet with Good Things Foundation to discuss consumer policy interjections.

7. Public Policy update - General Election Q&A

7.1 The Panel received a verbal update from Ofcom's Public Policy team on the political landscape following the General Election on 4 July.

8. Communications Consumer Panel Research update

8.1 Members narrowed down ideas on future areas to research, looking at issues within their current window of influence.

8.2 The Exec team would lead the process to commission research, with input into the research design from selected Panel Members and Ofcom's Market Research and Policy teams.

9. 2G/3G - Emergency eCall brief teach in

9.1 The Panel received detailed technological information from Ofcom on eCall, the emergency call service within motor vehicles that notifies the



emergency services in case of a road accident, to assist in understanding how the system works and the implications of when 2G/3G is switched off.

9.2 Members were deeply concerned to learn of the potential safety risk when 2G/3G is switched off and owners of vehicles, whether new, second or third hand vehicles, would be unaware of their eCall service not working in an emergency.

9.3 While recognising that Ofcom's remit was narrow in this area, Members urged Ofcom to use its influence and experience from migration to VOIP, to engage with government, industry and manufacturers to raise awareness of the risks.

9.4 Members were interested to ascertain the number of vehicles on the road with 2G/3G sims and asked Ofcom to find a way to collaborate with those who could ensure that vehicles with outdated sims are not being sold and that consumers would receive information to alert them to their eCall facility ceasing to work once switch off occurs.

10. Voice Assistants within the Media Bill

10.1 The Panel received information from Ofcom on the Media Bill and how the role of voice assistants as gateways to access online radio has become more significant in listening to internet radio on smart speakers and the use of voice control, for instance, in vehicles, has increased.

10.2 Members raised concerns with Ofcom for consumers who could struggle with accessing voice assistants, such as individuals with strong accents, speech differences, English as a second language or who speak UK native languages other than English, people with specific physical limitations who are unable to project their voice and people with mobility issues.

10.3 Further concerns raised by the Panel highlighted people with speech impediments or stroke survivors plus individuals with dementia or older people who struggle with a natural decrease of memory skills being able to remember the 'key' words to access voice assistants.

10.4 The level of accessibility and inclusion raises apprehension for the Panel as people with lower digital skills have to rely on either family, friends or other community members to set the service up for them.

10.5 Members recommend Ofcom to look at encouraging providers to look at the workings of voice assistants overall, as if enhancements can be made for radio stations, further widespread improvements could be adapted across the entire service.

10.6 The Panel Member for Wales recommended the Ofcom team look into an open-source Welsh Language voice assistant and mentioned a study relating to voice assistants and accessibility she had recently read. Details would be shared.



11. Enforcement update

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

11.2 Members applauded the Ofcom Enforcement team's strong action on recent breaches that could have caused serious harm to consumers.

11.3 The Panel were also pleased with Ofcom's consumer-focused approach to the publication of announcements of the outcomes of these investigations, which included use of a British Sign Language (BSL) video.

12. AOB

12.1 The Chair announced plans that the Panel would hold a meeting once per year in each of the UK Nations, while maintaining the facility to attend a meeting virtually for participants who required it.