

**Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD**

**on 26 January 2023 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  
Helen Froud  
Clifford Harkness  
Richard Spencer  
Sian Phipps  
Michael Wardlow (items 5 to 11)

Apologies

Kay Allen  
Michael Wardlow (items 1 to 4)  
Richard Williams

In attendance

Jenny Borritt  
Fiona Lennox  
Chloe Newbold  
David Watkins (items 5 to 11)  
DRCF representatives (item 8)  
Ofcom colleagues

| <b>Item</b>  |
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| <b>1. Welcome and introduction</b>   |
| 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting.                                 |
| <b>2. Declarations of Members' interests</b>   |
| 2.1 Amanda Britain declared that she had been appointed to the Board of Capability Scotland. |
| 2.2 There were no other new declarations of interest.  |
| <b>3. Minutes of the meeting on 15 December 2022 and matters arising</b>                     |



3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 15 December 2022 were **APPROVED**.

#### 4. Chair's update

4.1 The Panel noted the Chair's update, which provided an overview of the Panel's recent activities. The Panel's Nations' Members also provided updates on recent activity and stakeholder engagement across each of the UK Nations.

4.2 The Panel had recently responded to Ofcom's consultation on reviewing the UK's net neutrality framework and Members had also attended an associated event. The Panel would continue to monitor how the review progressed, having flagged its concerns that changes to the framework could result in a 'digital underclass'.

4.3 The Chair provided an update on recent engagement relating to migration to Voice-over IP (VoIP), having recently chaired a roundtable with key stakeholders to share the Panel's research findings on consumer telephony requirements and stress the importance of implementing of a coordinated consumer awareness campaign in the interests of public safety. The Chair had also attended a ministerial roundtable hosted by DCMS to discuss the Panel's research and continuing concerns.

#### 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 continued to be concerned that the reintroduction of EU roaming charges could result in consumer 'bill-shock', particularly where sufficient consumer protections were not in place. In addition, inadvertent roaming charges continued to be a significant issue for people living near the UK/EU border in Northern Ireland. Members noted that Ofcom had gathered consumer insights on mobile roaming and asked if these could be shared with the Panel at a future meeting.

5.3 The Panel discussed the affordability of communications services and importance of protecting consumers who were in debt from disconnection and potentially becoming digitally excluded. Members asked if the API scheme introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions to make it easier for communications providers to verify if customers were eligible for social tariffs applied to Northern Ireland. Members were also concerned that consumers were facing significant in contract price rises at a time when financial pressures were high as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

5.4 Members raised concerns that some CPs were not automatically refunding credit on customers' accounts when they switched to another provider, instead customers were required to call up and claim the credit. Ofcom advised that such an approach would not be considered best practice and would explore whether it had received any complaints on



the issue.

5.5 The Panel discussed its concerns regarding the resilience of the postal services including how consumers would be compensated for ongoing postal delays and what steps were being taken by Royal Mail, Ofcom and government to improve resilience. Members also flagged that a recent news article had reported that postal deliveries between the UK and Ireland had dropped by 52 per cent and were being returned to the UK as a consequence of incorrect customs declarations. Members were concerned about the subsequent impacts on postal users across the UK and would share the article with Ofcom colleagues.

5.6 The Panel raised its continuing concerns that the Shared Rural Network would not provide mobile coverage for all people living across the UK and asked how any gaps in mobile coverage would be addressed.

5.7 Amongst other topics, Members also discussed its ongoing concerns surrounding migration to VoIP and provided an update on recent developments and stakeholder engagement.

## **6. Broadband consumer information**

6.1 The Panel received an update on Ofcom's latest work to improve broadband information for consumers.

6.2 The Panel supported development of common terminology to describe broadband services to help combat consumer confusion and ensure that CPs communicated openly and transparently with consumers and citizens.

6.3 Members flagged that some CPs had to adhere to the regulatory standards set by the Financial Conduct Authority and suggested that a cross-sector approach could help to secure progress.

6.4 Members suggested that any future research should focus on people who were less digitally confident and considered harder to reach.

## **7. Making Sense of Media programme**

7.1 The Panel received an overview of Ofcom's Making Sense of Media programme and its ongoing work to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children.

7.2 Members supported the programme and highlighted the importance of platforms adopting an inclusive by design approach to ensure that people with a range of access requirements could participate fully and safely online.



## **8. Digital Regulation Corporation Forum (DRCF)**

- 8.1 The Panel received an update on and fed into the DRCF's workplan for 2023-24.
- 8.2 The Panel supported the DRCF's focus on supporting improvements in algorithmic transparency and believed that more should be done to ensure that algorithms were inclusive by design. It was suggested that auditing processes involve consumer representatives to help foster good practice and in turn, enhance transparency.
- 8.3 Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that consumers who wished to engage digitally were able to do so to achieve equality of access and opportunity. Members were also keen to understand how the DRCF would deliver and measure better outcomes for consumers.

## **9. Review of the Panel's strategic plan 2022/2**

- 9.1 The Panel considered whether its current strategic priorities and areas of focus remained relevant and if there were any emerging issues that needed to be prioritised in the year ahead. Members also fed in the views of stakeholders and intelligence across the UK Nations.

## **10. Connected Nations**

- 10.1 The Panel received an overview of Ofcom's recently published Connected Nations report. Members discussed the key findings with interest and highlighted the importance of promoting inclusion and connecting consumers and citizens living in rural areas.
- 10.2 The Panel emphasised that digital connectivity should be regarded as an essential service and remained concerned that some consumers living in rural and remote areas were not digitally connected and were likely to find potential connectivity solutions too costly.

## **11. AOB**

- 11.1 There was no other business.