

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 18 May 2023 at 10.30 am

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

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Rick Hill (Chair)

Kay Allen

Amanda Britain

Clifford Harkness

Sian Phipps

Richard Spencer

Richard Williams

Apologies

Helen Froud

Michael Wardlow

In attendance

The Panel's Executive Team

Ofcom colleagues

Representative of Futuresight (item 11)

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 new declarations of interest.
3. Minutes of the meeting on 20 April 2023 and matters arising
3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 20 April 2023 were APPROVED .
4. Chair's update
4.1 The Chair provided an overview of the Panel's recent activities. The Panel's National Members also provided updates on recent activity and stakeholder engagement across each



of the UK Nations.

4.2 The Panel had recently published its [latest research on migration to VoIP](#) and shared the findings with Ofcom, UK government and industry, and continued to push for a coordinated communications campaign to help raise consumer awareness.

4.3 The Panel discussed the significant impacts of network outages on rural and remote communities, following a recent outage in Colonsay. Members emphasised the importance of network resilience and highlighted that Ofcom's current reporting thresholds did not capture network outages that impacted smaller communities. The Panel would soon publish its latest research on the experiences of people living in rural and remote areas using communications services, which would include a number of recommendations to help improve the experiences of these consumers.

4.4 The Panel continued to input into discussions that fed into the Communications Crime Strategy Group - the main signatories to the Telecoms Fraud Charter - on improving the experiences of consumers contacting their CPs when reporting scams.

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 Ofcom provided members with an update on the recent developments relating to 2G/3G switch-off. A short, written update on the points covered would be circulated to Members. Members noted that c.5.5m households still used 3G connectivity and asked if a breakdown by UK Nation was available. They also encouraged Ofcom to engage with other industry telecare organisations in the devolved Nations and offered to share relevant contacts. The 2G/3G switch-off team would provide Members with a further update at a future meeting.

5.3 The Panel was deeply concerned about the impending 2G/3G switch-off, as mobile connectivity was likely to be the contingent in emergencies once consumers had migrated to VoIP. The Chair had previously engaged with Vodafone on its 3G switch-off pilot in Basingstoke and Plymouth and would have a follow-up discussion now that the pilot was complete. The Chair would also engage with other CPs to discuss future plans for 2G/3G switch-off.

5.4 The Panel was disappointed that CPs had missed Ofcom's deadline to implement a 'one-touch' switching process and noted that Ofcom had opened an enforcement investigation. Members asked for further information on next steps and when any progress was likely to be made.

5.5 The Panel noted that Ofcom's survey of international regulators on migration to VoIP was complete and asked if the team could share any insights. Ofcom colleagues advised that a



summary of the findings would follow.

- 5.6 The Panel asked for any insights from Ofcom's recent engagement with consumer representative organisations on migration to VoIP.
- 5.7 The Panel queried when Ofcom's crowdsourcing data outputs would be available to share, as the insights would help identify areas that could be affected post 2G/3G switch-off.
- 5.8 Members noted that DSIT's Wireless Infrastructure Strategy referred to the role of Ofcom in improving the accuracy of reporting network performance levels in rural areas and expressed a keen interest in contributing to any related work at the relevant time.
- 5.9 Panel members noted recent updates on the Shared Rural Network and asked for further information on the EAS trial site.
- 5.10 Members raised that the BBC's recent announcement that it planned to switch-off terrestrial TV by 2030 was likely to affect consumers, particularly those with additional access requirements, and asked for an update from the relevant team.

6. Affordability of communications services

- 6.1 The Panel received an update on Ofcom's latest research into the affordability of communications services, which included an update on social tariff availability. The findings suggested that awareness and take-up of social tariffs had increased but remained low in comparison to eligibility.
- 6.2 The Panel raised concerns that some CPs were yet to offer social tariffs and believed that more pressure and 'asks' should be placed on CPs to deliver and promote support services for consumers who were struggling financially.

7. Mobile Roaming Update

- 7.1 Ofcom provided an update on the outcome of its mobile roaming review, which looked at customers' experiences and the potential harms they face.
- 7.2 Members flagged that mobile roaming alerts could cause confusion where the wording was ambiguous and lacked transparency, and believed that all messages should meet plain language requirements.
- 7.3 Whilst recognising that pricing was outside of the scope of the review, Members questioned the fairness of mobile roaming costs, highlighting the risk of consumers experiencing bill-shock where updates on data usage were not timely and/or reliable.

8. Adults' Media Literacy update

- 8.1 The Panel received an update on Ofcom's Adults' Media Literacy reports. It was noted that the research had found that a number of participants had reported a deterioration of eyesight and an impact on mental health.



8.2 The Panel raised concerns over the number of households who remained offline despite a slight improvement on the previous years' figures.

8.3 Members noted that nearly one in five internet users only go online via a smartphone; and it was questioned whether there was any data to understand the proportion of users who connected using WiFi or mobile data.

9. Children's Media Literacy update

9.1 The Panel received an update on Ofcom's recently published annual reports on 'Children and parents: media use and attitudes' and 'Children's Media Lives'. Details were provided on the ages of children accessing online communications and the approaches of parents/guardians towards online safety.

9.2 The Panel was concerned that media literacy levels were low among children and how online content was pushed towards them.

10. Review of postal safeguard cap

10.1 The Panel received an update on Ofcom's review into postal safeguard caps and discussed the findings with interest. The Panel was concerned that the costs of postal services could escalate if the safeguard cap was removed, particularly for consumers living in rural and/or remote areas where competition was limited, surcharging was commonplace and reliance on the postal USO was high. Members asked if Ofcom's research had captured any insights on consumers experiencing surcharging. In addition, Members flagged the importance of safeguarding consumers who were struggling financially so they could continue to use postal services.

10.2 Members also raised concerns regarding the reliability of postal services, having noted that Royal Mail had once again failed to meet its annual performance targets.

11. Panel research update: Experiences of people living in rural and remote areas using communications services (Futuresight)

11.1 The Panel watched a video on the findings of its latest research detailing the experiences of people living in rural and remote areas across all four nations using communications services. Members commended the research and believed that it brought to life the struggles individuals, families and small businesses faced on a daily basis.

12. AOB

12.1 The Chair noted it was Clifford Harkness' last meeting and thanked him for his valuable contributions throughout his time as a Member of the Communications Consumer Panel/ACOD.