Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 14 November 2019 at 10.30

Riverside House, 2A Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA

Present
Consumer Panel/ACOD
Rick Hill (Chair)
Amanda Britain
David Holden
Karen Lewis
Richard Spencer
Craig Tillotson
Richard Williams

Apologies
Kay Allen

In attendance
Jenny Borritt
David Edwards
Fiona Lennox
Chloe Newbold
Colleagues from Broadband Stakeholder Group (item 6)
Ofcom colleagues

Item
1.   Welcome and introduction
1.1   The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting.
2.   Declarations of Members' interests
2.1   Richard Williams declared that he has provided consultancy services to the communications industry, relating to website accessibility (item 6).
3.   Minutes of the meeting on 17 October 2019 and matters arising
3.1   The minutes of the meeting of 17 October were **APPROVED**, subject to minor amendments.
3.2   In November, the Chair had met with Ofcom's Director for Scotland. Discussions had focussed on the future of Scotland's consumer landscape, particularly in relation to the powers of its proposed new consumer body, Consumer Scotland.
3.3   The Panel received an update on its soon to be commissioned research on scams, which included both a quantitative and qualitative piece – the brief would be circulated to Members, for comment. The Panel had also commissioned an online survey to capture consumers' unreported concerns – the results would also be circulated.
3.4   The Chair advised that, at the end of the year, Karen Lewis would be stepping down as Member for Wales. Her last meeting would be in December.

4. Consumer update

4.1 The Panel discussed priority areas outlined within the consumer update. Topics included:

4.2 Nuisance calls:
- The Panel asked Ofcom to further consider the basis on which it measured the performance of its work on nuisance calls.
- Members asked if Ofcom's data could identify an automated/non-automated nuisance call – if so, it would be possible to track any increase in these types of nuisance calls.

4.3 Fairness for consumers:
- Members were keen to find out how, in practice, CPs had begun to implement the fairness commitments. Ofcom advised that a report would be published next year. In addition, the Panel would receive a progress update in January.
- Ofcom accepted the Panel's offer to present the findings of its recently commissioned research, elements of the research relating to fairness.
- The Panel welcomed the opportunity to take part in a workshop on Fairness – to be arranged by the Ofcom team and the Panel's Executive team.

4.4 Mobile handsets
- The Panel asked to receive further narrative on the mobile handsets update.

4.5 Standalone voice engagement trials:
- A Member raised concerns about a CP basing pricing strategies on information about other services taken by a consumer.

4.6 ADR:
- The Panel noted that Ofcom would shortly be conducting a review of ADR providers and a further update would be provided in the New Year.

4.7 Vulnerability
- A Member emphasised the importance of CPs recording vulnerability and disability consistently across providers.
- Members suggested incorporating a requirement for a consistent approach into the fairness agenda/providing CPs with guidance on best practice in this area.
- The Chair confirmed that vulnerability had recently been discussed at the Panel's Industry Forum and a meeting had been arranged with Ofcom to discuss this further.

4.8 The Chair stressed the importance of postal user needs and looked forward to receiving the findings of research undertaken by Ofcom in this area. The team would attend a future Panel meeting.

4.9 The Panel also discussed fixed broadband and pricing differentials and sought clarity on how consumer outcomes would be used to monitor performance.

5. Migration to VOIP ('Voice-Over IP')

5.1 The Panel received an update on 'Migration to VOIP' and discussed the implications of the project.

5.2 Members suggested utilising consumer stakeholder channels to disseminate information to consumers. Both CPs and BSG would be holding roundtable discussions with stakeholders and producing material to inform customers of what 'migration to VOIP' meant.

5.3 The importance of consumer input was discussed. The Panel sought to clarify at what stage consumers could input and help shape the project. Members were advised that CPs would seek to engage with consumers who partook in the Salisbury and Mildenhall trials, to understand their experiences. Ofcom held quarterly meetings with CPs to discuss migration to VOIP and would keep the Panel updated.

5.4 Members commended the work done in this area and reiterated the need for consumer input at an early stage to ensure that the product, as well as the migration process, was effective. An option for Ofcom to carry out research to capture the consumer voice was also discussed.

5.5 Members considered that vulnerable groups should be included in the trials to assess the effectiveness of implementation, subject to implementation of necessary safeguards.

5.6 Members asked for an update on the effects of 'Migration to VOIP' on payment terminals and telecare services. It was confirmed that IP alternatives were in use and awareness of the potential effects of migration on telecare services was high. Further, Ofcom had engaged with external organisations, to help reach end users, particularly small businesses using payment terminals.

6 Broadband Stakeholder Group

6.1 The Broadband Stakeholder Group provided a verbal update to the Panel on the launch of a new website dedicated to providing information on the 'Migration to VOIP' project, also known as 'Migration to all-IP networks'. The website would seek to inform consumers and businesses of the implications and details surrounding migration. This information would also be disseminated by CPs to customers. A working group had been set up by the BSG and included members from CPs, Openreach, Ofcom and other interested parties. The Panel Executive Team had been invited to the next meeting and would attend on behalf of the Panel.

6.2 Members made a number of suggestions including:
- Avoid using industry jargon and help consumers locate relevant information by the product they use;
- Ensure the website is user-tested early-on, seek advice from people who understand disability user or access needs;
- Ensure accessibility across all available platforms;
- In addition to the website, provide hardcopy information to limit digital exclusion;
- Engage with stakeholder groups, particularly consumer focussed groups, who could provide feedback on the material; and
- Reflect the literacy levels of government websites.

6.3 The BSG thanked Members for their input and agreed to update the Panel, following the website launch next year.

7 Public policy update

7.1 The Panel discussed matters raised in the public policy update. Members were pleased that a recent study by the National Infrastructure Commission into regulations of the UK's energy, telecoms and water industries focussed on consumer needs.

7.2 In the context of Brexit, the Chair was concerned how postage from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland could be affected, including any associated paperwork requirements. The pricing of the USO was a regulatory matter and further information on this would be welcomed.

7.3 The Panel's comments were noted and a further update would follow in early 2020.

9. Universality

9.1 The Panel received an update on the key workstreams of Universality, including Broadband USO and the Shared Rural Network (SRN). KCOM and BT would deliver the Broadband USO and Ofcom had published a consultation on the funding arrangements. The SRN had been agreed in principle and would provide 4G to 90% of UK landmass.

9.2 The Panel was advised of the delivery timelines for the SRN and asked if coverage targets applied overall or to individual MNOs.

9.3 Members were concerned about the risks to consumers and citizens if coverage targets were not met. Members emphasised the importance of a coverage schedule to track performance and ensure delivery of the promised level of coverage. Ofcom confirmed that it would be reporting on implementation of the SRN.

9.4 Members voiced a preference for a national roaming solution and recommended that this be considered as a fall-back to the voluntary SRN deal. Ofcom offered to return with its technical team at a future meeting.

9.5 Members noted that those with no mobile coverage were also likely to have poor broadband and poor postal services. In addition, a small percentage of these individuals were likely to be vulnerable.

9.6 Members also expressed the importance of listening to the consumer voice, building a resilient network and having a contingency plan.

9.7 The Panel considered Ofcom's work on universality as a major step in addressing the needs of UK consumers.

10.   Automatic compensation scheme

10.1 The Panel received an overview of the automatic compensation scheme. The scheme continued to be monitored and, so far, no significant issues had arisen. The data received spanned a short period of time and continued to be scrutinised. Further data would be available in January.

10.2 To track performance, the number of incidents and faults would be compared to previous data, alongside the amount of compensation paid by providers. The aim of the scheme was to act as a deterrent and minimise service disruption long-term.

10.3 Under the scheme, compensation only applied if there was a loss of service over two working days – if service ceased over the weekend, this could span over four days. The Panel asked if there was scope to shorten this; or change the working days to calendar days, as suggested in the Panel's consultation response in 2017.

10.4 The Panel asked how the MNOs were performing in this area.

10.5 Members commended the scheme and asked why CPs, who had previously committed to signing-up, had not done so yet.

11.   Any other business

11.1 There was no other business.

…………………………………….Chair   …………………………………….Date