



29 March 2023

Citizens Advice response to the Communications Consumer Panel's draft strategic plan 2023-24

Citizens Advice appreciates being part of the Consumer Advocacy Hubs, which provide an important opportunity for consumer bodies to discuss issues and share insights. It's great to see continued support in the Panel's strategic plan for affordable communications, reliable postal services, and a fair transition to Voice-Over IP (VOIP).

Affordability and changes to the communications sector

Citizens Advice supports the Panel's continuing work on the migration to VOIP. We share the Panel's concerns around the low awareness of the migration and the risk to consumers who rely on landlines or have limited mobile coverage. And we support the Panel's work to follow up on its 2022 research to take stock of the migration.

Citizens Advice also agrees that communications providers should be proactive in identifying and contacting customers who may be struggling. We support the Panel's focus on consumers experiencing data poverty, and the impact of mid-contract price rises. Citizens Advice research has found that more than 13 million people could be facing hikes to their mobile and broadband bills this year - and worryingly, 1 in 3 mobile and broadband customers facing these hikes have already cut back on essentials like food, energy or clothing to make ends meet.¹

¹ Citizens Advice, [Mid-contract price rises: tightening the squeeze on consumers](#), 22 September 2022

Citizens Advice also supports the Panel's planned work to look at the experiences of consumers who are on low incomes and are eligible for social tariffs. Around 4.2 million eligible households are currently missing out on broadband social tariffs, with take up at just 3.2% in the most recent figures.²

Postal services

Citizens Advice shares the Panel's concerns around the affordability of the postal service. We agree that the second class safeguard cap is a vital part of maintaining a universal postal service that is fit for purpose, and support the Panel's aim to respond to Ofcom's upcoming consultation.

This is particularly important when the price of stamps have risen above inflation at the same time as quality of service has been in decline - meaning consumers are already paying more for less. Citizens Advice supports the Panel's aims to ensure that the regulator takes action if operators fail to meet delivery targets. Royal Mail hasn't met its 1st class delivery targets for almost 3 years. Over that time, millions have experienced negative consequences as a result.³

Citizens Advice agrees that postal consumers should receive a good quality service wherever they are in the UK. We support the Panel's planned research into the individual experiences of consumers in remote and rural communities.

Citizens Advice looks forward to continuing our meetings and engagement in 2023/24.

² Ofcom, [Affordability of Communications Services - September 2022 update](#), p7.

³ Citizens Advice, [Ofcom needs to protect consumers from rising stamp prices](#), March 2023.