Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 14 November 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
Lenna Cumberbatch
Michelle Goddard
Robert Hammond
Michael Wardlow

Apologies
Judith Clifton
Richard Spencer

In attendance
Will Harding (Ofcom Board Member) Observing
The Panel's Executive Team
Representatives from Improbable (Item 11)

Item
1. Welcome and introduction 1.1 The Chair welcomed Ofcom's Board Member, Panel Members and attendees to the meeting.
2. Declarations of Members' interests 2.1 Lenna Cumberbatch declared her Co-Chair position with Galop the LGBTQ+ anti-abuse charity and police monitoring group in the UK who have an association with the Vodafone Foundation and Stonewall. 2.2 Helen Froud declared her spouse was due to commence a seasonal retail role within Tesco Group (not Tesco Mobile).

3. Minutes of the meeting on 17 October 2024 and matters arising

3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 17 October 2024 were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate reflection.

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 last meeting held on 17 October.

4.2 The Chair provided an update on recruitment, which was ongoing.

4.3 Members were reminded of the importance of sharing open vacancies widely to encourage a broad base of applicants.

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 discussed the needs of consumers who may find themselves susceptible to harm. While recognising that the term 'vulnerable' was used in the communications sector to describe consumers in vulnerable circumstances, Members advised Ofcom to take care not to abbreviate 'consumers in vulnerable circumstances' to 'vulnerable consumers', which could lead to misinterpretations around the needs and abilities of the consumer.

5.3 Members also advised Ofcom to avoid artificially grouping consumers under protected characteristics and making assumptions, without considering other characteristics. Members also advised Ofcom to be mindful that the Equality Act 2010 does not apply in Northern Ireland, which would make the protected characteristic groupings less relevant when attempting to monitor equality of outcome across the UK.

5.4 The Panel questioned Ofcom on how the success of the One Touch Switch (OTS) programme is being monitored.

5.5 The Panel voiced concern over the possibility of consumers failing to complete the OTS journey and relayed to Ofcom the importance of identifying those consumers – any risk factors to their failure to complete switching - and ensuring robust measures are put in place to protect those consumers.

5.6 Members reiterated concerns that companies promoting costed versions of One Touch Switch to communications providers could lead to consumer confusion and the normalisation of One Touch Switching being a paid-for service. They suggested that websites referring to One Touch Switching for consumers add the word 'free' to information about One Touch Switch, to ensure that consumers are not prevented from switching or taken advantage of by bad players.

5.7 The Panel look forward to receiving an update on the One Touch Switching trend data during the next meeting.

5.8 Following the last Panel meeting, Members questioned Ofcom on how the postal quality of service is monitored taking into consideration the physical aspect and sample sizes.

6. Ofcom's Plan of Work

6.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on their Plan of Work for the coming financial year which included priorities and key areas of focus.

6.2 The Panel reminded Ofcom of the importance of its teams undertaking Equality Impact Assessments for each project, to prevent unintended consequences.

6.3 In relation to Online Safety, Members recommended Ofcom learn from other countries and suggested Ofcom view [work being undertaken in Australia](#).

6.4 While the Panel was pleased that Ofcom's Online Safety is focused on tackling online harm to children and 'women and girls', members advised Ofcom to consider early on, other demographic groups including [LGBTQ+ citizens.](#) (See item 10 'Online Safety Roadmap'.)

7. AOB

7.1 Due to a change in timing on the agenda to allow for the availability of external presenters, the Chair called for any other business to be raised after item 6.

7.2 There was no other business.

8. Update on Migration to VoIP and Telecare Incident Reporting

8.1 The Panel received an update from Ofcom on the monitoring of telecare incidents and power resilience in relation to the migration to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

8.2 Panel Members were keen to understand how many communications providers had reported telecare incidents.

8.3 Although Members are pleased government continue to monitor telecare incidents, the Panel relayed ongoing, deep concerns to Ofcom, on the continued lack of awareness-raising with consumers.

8.4 The Panel highlighted to Ofcom the need for communications providers to understand what additional services and devices are being held on a property they supply telecoms to, and who makes the decisions on behalf of residents of that property - for example, a landlord, caregiver, or care home, where residents may have varying different services.

8.5 The Panel believes that the need for a coordinated national campaign remains evident, to educate and protect citizens and to make the likes of landlords, caregivers or care home staff aware of the need to declare which residents have additional services and devices that need supporting through migration.

8.6 Members highlighted the risk of second-hand telecare devices not being declared to communications providers. Members again highlighted the lack of awareness of the migration to VoIP to citizens and the potential consequences.

8.7 The Panel reiterated the need to ensure consumers' telecommunications services are protected for a relevant amount of time to enable them to seek help, or check on someone, in a power cut. Members highlighted that for those living in rural and remote areas of the UK when extreme weather can cause power failures for long periods of time, one hour battery back-up would not suffice. Members supported innovation in this field and advised Ofcom to support this.

8.8 Members queried the criteria consumers must currently meet to receive a free battery backup (or equivalent contingency) and how aware consumers are of this, referencing feedback from a consumer who had been quoted an unaffordable amount for this.

9. Public Policy update

9.1 Members received an update from Ofcom on the key public policy developments since the previous update in July 2024.

10. Online Safety Roadmap

10.1 Members received an update from Ofcom on their Online Safety progress to date and the future Online Safety programme.

10.2 The Panel relayed to Ofcom that other demographic groups, aside from children, are likely to experience harm and abuse online such as the LGBTQ+ and transgender communities. They urged Ofcom to gather further insights on communities at higher risk, as the Online Safety programme continues.

10.3 Members highlighted that transgender communities are at high risk of online hate crime and are also disproportionately less likely to be listened to when they report these crimes and disproportionately less likely to report these crimes. They urged Ofcom to gather further insights on communities at higher risk, as the Online Safety programme continues.

10.4 Members highlighted the importance of children being able to access information for their needs, while not receiving incorrect or inappropriate material which an algorithm has pushed to their internet/social media feed. Panel Members believes that further strategy is required in this area.

10.5 The Panel were pleased of Ofcom's awareness of other organisations that work alongside children and their understanding of the provision and where provisions are not currently met within the Online Safety programme.

10.6 Members also recommended that Ofcom learns from other countries and suggested Ofcom view work being undertaken in Australia. (Ofcom's Online Safety colleagues were invited to observe item 11 on this agenda.)

10.7 Members questioned Ofcom on their proactiveness in ensuring service providers provide risk assessments.

10.8 The Panel will retain a keen interest with the implementation of Online Safety.

11. How to design in digital safety for the future of pro-social metaverse

11.1 The Panel received a presentation from a games development company on the convergence of gaming and social media, which leads to users spending time in a metaverse community.

11.2 Representatives explained their learning journey and how companies like theirs, designing games, can learn how to create a safe environment for users.

12. Round up

12.1 The Chair, Members and Executive team expressed their gratitude to Panel Members Kay Allen OBE and Richard Spencer, who had both served two terms with the Panel (six years). They thanked Kay and Richard for their additional dedication, passion and insight in their roles as facilitator of the Panel's Industry Forum and Member for England, respectively.