



## The Panel's National Stakeholder Hubs - April 2024

The Panel's National Stakeholder Hub in April took the form of an All-UK Hub and participants joined from all four nations of the UK - England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Hub meeting focussed on our latest research into the awareness of and impacts on telecoms consumers, of migration to digital voice over-IP (migration to VoIP).

Migration to VoIP was due to be completed by 2025, but following our National Stakeholder Hub meeting this has been pushed back to 2027. The Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) are concerned about consumer awareness of migration to VoIP, as there could be significant implications for people affected by power cuts and people who rely on landlines, particularly users of telecare, medical devices and pacemakers.

We commissioned Yonder to look at current consumer awareness of the migration to VoIP and during the Hub meeting the research team presented their findings from a dataset of over 6,000 UK consumers. This third wave of research follows previous studies undertaken in 2022 and 2023 where the CCP undertook extensive surveys to understand the impacts and awareness of the digital switch over. Our previous research information can be found below:

- [Switching from analogue to digital: Listening to the needs of consumers \(2022\)](#)
- [Switching from analogue to digital: Listening to the needs of consumers \(2023\)](#)

The latest wave of research included a breakdown of awareness across regions, to better understand where awareness has improved.

The aim of the Hub session was to understand the issues facing consumers our valued stakeholders represent, especially those who may be more affected by the migration, such as people living in remote or rural areas, where power cuts can last longer, or who use additional services, telecare or medical devices.

### Hub participants' reflections on the Panel's Migration to VoIP research

Our research findings resonated with attendees which provided a valuable and engaging discussion to learn of potential similarities and differences between Nations.

### Hub participants discussed issues facing consumers they represent in relation to the Migration to VoIP. A summary of the discussion can be found below:

- The over-riding point taken from the discussion was the importance to raise consumer knowledge of the migration to VoIP using a national awareness campaign, so that people who help someone in another part of the country will be aware of when and how to support them.
- Participants in Northern Ireland reflected on whether the elevated level of awareness within their Nation, just above the National average, was connected to

the recent awareness campaign by BT.

- Many contributors confirmed they were aware of consumers who had been inadvertently migrated to VoIP without prior warning, with many who had connected devices.
- One stakeholder confirmed they themselves had been migrated to VoIP without any prior knowledge. A resident in the household concerned used a connected device and the telecoms provider was required to make a home visit to ensure the device would function in an emergency situation.
- Comments were raised on the need for Ofcom to ensure telecommunications providers fully explain the switchover to their customers including what action they need to take and provide further support.
- Comparisons were made between the switchover to digital television and the migration to VoIP. A large national campaign, including the delivery of leaflets to households and the offer of support was provided ahead of the digital TV switchover.
- Questions were raised on whether consumers living in urban communities preferred to use mobile telephones ahead of consumers living in rural settings.
- Concerns were raised over the inconsistencies of the level of telecommunications providers battery backup pack capacities. The minimum expectation for battery backup provision of one hour was set by Ofcom and the CCP had previously advised Ofcom that this was not a long enough time to provide safety for some consumers. Participants discussed a product that had been developed by one telecoms provider, offering a longer back-up time, which would be more beneficial to consumers in a power cut. There was some confusion around telecoms providers being allowed to use battery back-up as means for competition.
- According to our recent research only 8% of the sample were asked if they knew about battery back-up, which alarmed Hub participants.
- Stakeholders were aware that BT had provided some awareness of the migration to consumers, citizens and microbusinesses by regional radio campaigns, discussions in village halls and market squares. Stakeholders felt this was still not enough to raise awareness within the UK population.
- Stakeholders raised questions as to what other providers are doing to raise awareness of the migration to VoIP.
- Participants confirmed they'd seen a push for older people and individuals with lower digital skills to use mobile technology, but without enough support to improve skills and confidence to safe levels. Stakeholders felt a large number of individuals within this cohort would fail to realise they needed to keep their devices charged and would therefore be unaware that their mobile phone would not have sufficient battery life to call for emergency assistance during a power cut.
- Concerns were raised on whether telecommunications providers would increase their costs following the migration to VoIP.
- Stakeholders were very interested in receiving updates on the Panel's latest research and would share our findings.



## The Panel's reflections and thoughts concerning migration to VoIP.

The Panel are concerned about the potential implications to public safety and the potential risk to life on the migration of consumers' landlines to VoIP. In early 2024, Storm Isha was felt across Northern Ireland, Scotland and north-west England. BBC reported that power outages at the height of the storm affected around 53,000 homes in Northern Ireland, almost 89,000 customers in Scotland, and 8,500 customers in north-west England. Of these, around 30,000 customers were still without power the next day according to the Energy Networks Association (ENA). During the storm's 10-hour timeframe, PSNI officers dealt with over 1300 calls, around 600 of which related to the storm.

Our most recent research on the migration to VoIP, commissioned by Yonder, suggested that 16% of people needed to call someone during a power cut, this, with the added risk of consumers without reliable mobile coverage, without a functioning telecare device or the power outage lasting longer than the battery back-up, many individuals will be at serious risk of not obtaining assistance in the event of an emergency.

The Panel continues to strongly recommend a national campaign to highlight the migration to VoIP, to boost consumer awareness and understands other methods to inform consumers should also be adopted. The Chair continues to engage across sectors to encourage a multi-agency approach and write to MPs and governmental representatives across the UK and will continue to meet with officials. Once published our research will be shared with all Stakeholders.

### Stakeholders who took part in our National Hub are listed below:

- Age Cymru
- Age UK
- Cedar Foundation
- Citizens Advice Scotland
- Communications Consumer Panel
- Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
- Consumer Scotland
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)
- Country Land and Business Association (CLA) Cymru
- Countryside Alliance
- Department of Finance
- Digital Communities Wales

- Digital Poverty Alliance
- Disability Action
- Essential Services Access Network (ESAN)
- European Federation of Hard of Hearing
- Farmers Union Wales (FUW)
- Federation of Small Businesses Northern Ireland
- Federation of Small Businesses Wales
- Forum of Private Business
- Good Things Foundation
- Inclusion Scotland
- Leonard Cheshire
- Mind



**Continued:**

- National Association of Deafened People
- National Farmers Union
- National Federation of the Blind for the UK
- National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI)
- Northern Ireland Council on Voluntary Action
- Ofcom
- Ofcom Advisory Committee for England
- Ofcom Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland
- Ofcom Advisory Committee for Scotland
- Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales
- Older People's Commissioner for Northern Ireland

- Older People's Commissioner for Wales
- People Know How
- Promising Trouble
- RNIB
- RNID
- Rural Services Network
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)
- Scottish Government
- Supporting Communities
- University of Liverpool
- Wavelength
- Welsh Government
- Which?
- Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland
- Youth Scotland

For more information on previous discussions across the Panel's National Hubs and who took part - please visit the Panel's website [here](#).

### Future National Stakeholder Hubs Dates

#### England

- 25 June 2024 commencing at 11am - cancelled due to General Election
- 22 October 2024 commencing at 11am

#### Northern Ireland

- 24 June 2024 commencing at 3.30pm - cancelled due to General Election
- 24 October 2024 commencing at 2pm

#### Scotland

- 14 June 2024 commencing at 10.30am - cancelled due to General Election
- 25 October 2024 commencing at 10.30am

#### Wales

- 24 June 2024 commencing at 10am - cancelled due to General Election
- 24 October 2024 commencing at 11am



Communications  
Consumer Panel

and Advisory Committee for Older  
and Disabled people



Panel Defnyddwyr  
Cyfathrebiadau

a Phwyllgor Cyngori pobl Hŷn  
ac Anabl

Topics to be confirmed.

Please note - dates/times may change dependent on topic if necessary and we may hold an All-UK Hub if we need input from across the UK at the same time on a topic of importance to consumers and citizens (and potentially micro-businesses) in all Nations.