

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 25 June 2014 at 11.00

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

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Jo Connell (Chair)

Kim Brook

Jaya Chakrabarti

Mairi Macleod

Craig Tillotson (items 1 to 7)

Bob Twitchin

In attendance

Eleanor Berg

David Edwards

Fiona Lennox

External visitor from Arqiva (item 8)

Other Ofcom colleagues

Apologies

Chris Holland

1. Declarations of interest

1.1 In relation to item 4, on payment surcharges, Craig Tillotson reminded members of his relationship with the Payments Council Executive Committee.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 21 May 2014 and matters arising

2.1 The minutes were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chairman.

2.2. Following its request, the Panel had received supplementary data from PhonepayPlus' *Understanding Consumer Journeys* research related to consumers with disabilities - Bob Twitchin would follow up some queries in this regard.

3. Emergency SMS

3.1 Members had received a paper in relation to a proposal by a private sector company to provide a service that was not aimed specifically at disabled consumers but which relied on the emergency SMS (eSMS) service. An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to brief members further. It was of concern to the Panel that the efficient function of eSMS, a service intended for the use of people who were hearing or speech impaired, was not threatened in any way. Members **NOTED** that Ofcom was in dialogue with the Home Office about the issue.

4. Affordability

4.1 Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting. A paper had been provided to brief the Panel on the provisional findings of a project that aimed to understand which telecoms services people now considered essential for participation in society and if there were situations where affordability was a barrier to using them.

4.2 Members **NOTED** that although competition had delivered affordability for most consumers it appeared to have been less effective at providing quality of service and coverage for all. The Panel expressed concern about awareness levels of BT Basic and, whilst acknowledging that universal service provisions did not extend to mobile services, a desire to see a product similar to BT Basic made available to mobile users.

5. Payment surcharges

5.1. Members had been provided with a paper and an Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to brief the Panel on Ofcom's work, including research undertaken, to understand the impacts on consumers should communications providers reduce non-direct debit payment options following the Payment Surcharge Regulations, emanating from the European Union's 2011 Consumer Rights Directive. Members **NOTED** that communications providers did not currently appear to have plans to change the payment methods available to their customers but stressed the principle that it was important that non-direct debit paying customers continued to have flexibility and control over their payments.

6. UHF strategy implementation

6.1 Members had been provided with a paper and Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting for discussion of the implications of re-purposing the 700 MHz band for mobile and consequent re-planning of DTT and the PMSE sector. It was Ofcom's view that re-purposing could result in significant benefits for citizens and consumers.

6.2 Amongst a number of issues discussed by the Panel, Members expressed doubt about the need to change the use of 700 MHz, in particular following the recent re-purposing of the 800 MHz band for 4G mobile data services. Concerns were expressed that there could be dis-benefits for consumers and citizens, that if reallocation were to proceed and that there was a need for coverage obligations. The question was also raised of who would bear the costs in modifying DTT infrastructure. It was **AGREED** that the Panel would respond to Ofcom's *Consultation on future use of the 700 MHz band -Cost-benefit analysis of changing its use to mobile services* . The Ofcom team offered to engage in a follow-up discussion.

7. Future of Freeview

7.1 Members had been provided with copies of Ofcom's document *The Future of Free to View TV* and Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting. There was discussion of issues including the continuing high demand for free to view

linear viewing, with sports coverage noted as an important driver; of whether speculation about the future allocation of spectrum could diminish the value of DTT; the availability of HD channels; the future-proofing of equipment; and the need for continued innovation in the free to view sector.

8. Arqiva

8.1 A colleague from Arqiva joined the meeting to talk to Members about the company's activities, its main customers being terrestrial broadcasters and mobile phone operators, its main asset being a network of radio, television and mobile transmission sites. He spoke about Freeview and the future of TV, WiFi and public sector spectrum release, and Arqiva's role in the Government's Mobile Infrastructure Project. Members discussed their concerns relating to the potential reallocation of spectrum bands, including 2.3 and 3.4 GHz; the need for further testing of equipment; and the number and location of mobile coverage not-spots and grey spots. Members would be provided with further information in relation to the latter point.

9. Microbusiness research

9.2 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting and Members had been provided with a near final draft of Jigsaw's microbusiness research report; the Panel's proposed conclusions based on research findings; and a communications plan for publication. Members made a number of detailed comments and suggestions concerning the three documents, which would be revised in the light of discussion. The research was expected to be published in the Summer.

10. PSB Review

10.1 Members had been provided with a paper providing a view of the market context and copies of the PSB Review's Terms of Reference, the latter published in May. Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting to brief the Panel/ACOD further. It was NOTED that audience research would be undertaken as part of the review, with findings available in the Autumn when they could be shared with Members. Members **highlighted a number of issues including** the need to capture citizen objectives within the study; the need to reflect consumer needs in addition to audience expectations; how to measure quality; and the importance of access services.

11. Citizen interests

11.1 Members had been provided with a paper and Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting to brief members on a short Ofcom project leading towards publication of a short document focusing on how communications services have supported the interests of citizens over the past 10 years. Members made a number of suggestions for inclusion including the importance of the availability of emergency SMS, the accessibility of and value of services for disabled people, USO and sustainability in relation to postal services, the need for robust minimum broadband speeds, citizen needs, security and safety

elements related to the internet and consumers' confidence in networks.

12. Any other business

12.1 The previous day Fiona Lennox had attended a meeting hosted by DigitalUK on the future of Freeview.

12.2 Members had been provided with a set of papers to update the Panel on recent corporate responsibility activity in Ofcom. It was AGREED that the papers would be tabled for discussion at the next Panel meeting.

12.3 Members noted papers received for information, which included papers on recent developments and news related to the communications sector and an Ofcom consumer affairs update.

.....ChairmanDate