

## Communications Consumer Panel National Stakeholder Hubs

### The communications consumer voice, UK 2025 Summary of insights from our stakeholders

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#### Cross-UK Overarching Themes

Across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, several **common challenges** emerged:

##### 1. Connectivity and Infrastructure

- **Rural and remote areas** face persistent issues with broadband and mobile coverage.
- **Storm damage** (e.g. Storm Éowyn in NI) exposed vulnerabilities in above-ground infrastructure.
- **Migration to Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP)** raised concerns about emergency access and awareness, especially for older and digitally excluded consumers.

##### 2. Digital Exclusion and Literacy

- Lack of **digital skills**, **affordable devices**, and **reliable internet** continues to exclude many, especially:
  - People who have lived through generations of changes in technology
  - People with specific access requirements
  - People who are not fluent in English or who are new to the UK
  - People living in circumstances of financial uncertainty
  - People living in rural remote areas
  - People who move house often (for example, short-term renters)

##### 3. Affordability

- Rising costs of broadband, mobile, and postal services are disproportionately affecting individuals and groups of people who are already experiencing exclusion due to, for example, some of the reasons listed above.
- **Social tariffs** remain underutilised due to poor awareness and accessibility.



### 4. Online Safety and Scams

- A **rise in scams**, including AI-driven fraud and sextortion, was reported across all nations.
- There is a **lack of redress mechanisms** for online harms—calls were made for an ADR-style system for digital platforms.

### 5. Accessibility

- Concerns about the **accessibility of complaints processes**, especially for those with age-related or sensory impairments.
- Scotland was praised for services like [Contact Scotland British Sign Language video translation](#), but access still depends on digital tools and there was some anxiety around budgetary certainty required to retain these services.

### 6. Loneliness and Isolation

- Particularly acute in rural and remote areas, including coastal areas, and among older people.
- Loss of local radio and community services can exacerbate loneliness for people who have used these services to stay connected to local news while unable to leave their home independently.

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## Specific Highlights from each Nation's Hub

### England

- **Rural Services Network** highlighted funding disparities and service centralisation.
- **ILC-UK** and **Wavelength** raised concerns about ageing populations in coastal areas and loneliness.
- **Citizens Advice** and **Age UK** flagged affordability, scams, and digital exclusion.
- **UK Safer Internet Centre** called for an ADR mechanism for online harms.

### Northern Ireland

- **Storm Éowyn** caused major outages, revealing infrastructure fragility.
- **Advice NI** reported the highest digital exclusion and personal debt levels in the UK.
- **CCNI** raised concerns about postal reliability and affordability.
- **Roaming charges** near the Republic of Ireland border remain a financial burden.

### Scotland

- **Ofcom Scotland** noted improvements in 4G and fibre coverage, but rural gaps persist.

- **The Alliance** and **COSLA** raised concerns about VoIP awareness and postal delays.
- **Consumer Scotland** and **Citizens Advice Scotland** highlighted telecom dissatisfaction and digital poverty.
- **Scottish Government** flagged postal delivery issues to islands and lack of VoIP awareness.

#### **Wales**

- **Mencap** warned of exclusion from a cashless society.
- **RHCW** raised concerns about healthcare access, loneliness, and AI in health apps.
- **NFWI** and **CMA** highlighted online violence against women and scams.
- **Welsh language** and rural surcharges were noted as unique challenges.

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#### **Key Priorities identified for the Communications Consumer Panel and Ofcom:**

- Champion digital inclusion across all demographics and geographies.
- Promote awareness of social tariffs and of digital transitions (such as migration to VoIP)
- Advocate for Online Safety reforms, understanding where gaps lie, from a consumer view
- Support community-led solutions, and fair access to postal and telecom services, especially in rural, remote and island communities.