



**The Communications Consumer Panel
and the Advisory Committee for Older and
Disabled People
Annual Report 2018/19**

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Foreword

Representing the needs of UK communications consumers, citizens and micro-businesses in 2018/19 and beyond: a stronger voice in a fairer market

This is an important year for the Panel - I am delighted to be the incoming Chair at a time when Ofcom is increasing investment in the Panel so that we, in turn, can strengthen the consumer voice in our sectors and improve outcomes. I also want to pay tribute to the Panel's outgoing Chair, Jo Connell for her leadership which has delivered this strengthened role. As Ofcom's Chairman, Lord Burns has noted, Jo's "work with the Panel and ACOD during this time has ensured that Ofcom has taken into consideration the needs of people across the UK - some potentially disenfranchised because of a lack of network or responsive customer service, others at risk of being ill served by providers because of a lack of understanding of their individual needs or circumstances."

Communications services are integral to the everyday lives of consumers, citizens and micro businesses and we work to ensure that their perspectives are at the heart of the debate. Our sector specialism and expert experience and understanding allow us to robustly challenge telecoms policy development from a position of strength, supported by sound evidence and resulting in pragmatic actions based on real world solutions. The Panel's understanding has enabled it to promote potentially key policy interventions, such as the current discussion about the possible implementation of rural roaming.

Highlighting the interests of those who may not always be heard by the industry, for example, consumers in vulnerable circumstances, and representing the views of people from around the UK, are important parts of our role, as is working with charities, consumer groups, communications providers (CPs), Ofcom and other policy and industry stakeholders. Collaboration, constructive challenge, facilitation of discussion informed by robust evidence and clarity of purpose remain central to our approach and the Panel works to influence before, during and after policy development - through a variety of methods and channels. Our work results in significant policy changes - we contribute expert advice to ensure consumers' interests are high on the agenda - when we anticipate consumer detriment, or identify it occurring, we work with those who can make a difference - Ofcom, CPs and UK and National Governments.

In the last year we've provided expert advice and guidance on a wide range of topics including future plans for the public switched telephone network, spectrum awards, consumer engagement, contract renewal and the accessibility of content.

We've achieved a number of tangible gains for consumers - with UK consumers saving significant sums from the provision of free caller line identification alone. From October 2018, Communications Providers had a new, wider obligation to consult with the Panel with a particular emphasis on consumers in vulnerable circumstances. I look forward this year to working more closely than ever before with partners from around the UK - together we can make a difference.

Rick Hill MBE, Chair of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

“We are determined to improve the consumer experience in telecoms, and a strong consumer voice is a crucial part of this effort. The appointment of someone with Rick’s experience, alongside the 50% increase to the Panel’s budget, will be instrumental in delivering this.

We will continue to consider what additional measures Government can take to support the work of the Panel and UK consumers.”

Margot James MP, then Minister for Digital and Creative industries

“The Panel’s role is critical in helping to hold Ofcom to account and ensure we maintain a strong focus on the consumer. I am delighted to welcome Rick as Chairman. He brings enormous experience and understanding of the needs and interests of consumers. We look forward to working with Rick as the Panel enters an exciting phase in its development as a leading consumer advocate.

I am very grateful for Jo’s contribution over the past nine years. Under her leadership, the Panel and the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People have become a stronger voice for consumers, particularly those in more vulnerable circumstances.”

Lord (Terry) Burns, Ofcom Chairman

Who we are and how we work



About us

The Panel's objective is to:

“protect and promote the interests of consumers, citizens and small businesses in the communications sector by giving advice to Ofcom, the EU, Government, industry and others.”

Consumers and citizens are at the heart of everything the Panel does. Our purpose is to provide leadership on consumer issues in the sector, and to help ensure that people who use communications services are treated fairly and can benefit fully from what is often a complex and fast-moving marketplace. Our work is broad - embracing telecommunications services of all kinds, post, aspects of broadcasting and digital inclusion. And our work is authoritative - influencing Ofcom, Communication Providers, Governments and the consumer landscape.

The Communications Consumer Panel is the independent body set up under the Communications Act 2003 to represent the sector's consumers. We pay particular attention to the needs of people whose circumstances make them permanently or temporarily more vulnerable; older people and people with disabilities; people in rural and urban areas; people on low incomes; and micro businesses, which face many of the same issues as individual consumers.

We also serve as the Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled people (ACOD), in which capacity we provide expert advice to Ofcom on issues relating to that constituency - including aspects of portrayal and harm in relation to content depicting older and disabled people on television, radio and other services regulated by Ofcom.

How we work on behalf of consumers, citizens and micro businesses across the UK communication sector

Our members have experience and expertise in many different fields, including accessibility, consumer advocacy, dispute resolution, the telecoms, digital and content industries, access services, micro and small business, the third sector, social policy and market research.

Four members of the Panel attend Ofcom's Nations Committees for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales respectively. This provides a strong bilateral link with the UK nations, and helps inform the Panel's work. This is an area we plan to strengthen even further over the coming year.

We engage with stakeholders to help inform the advice that we give to Ofcom and to keep the interests of consumers, citizens and micro businesses high on the agenda across the sector. We also engage with a range of other organisations working on behalf of these constituencies - including those representing older and disabled people. There are many facets to advocacy for consumers (including micro businesses) and citizens and it is essential that the different elements work together to make the communications sector work better for everyone. The greater the number of touchpoints between consumers and citizens; and policy makers and industry, the stronger the voice of consumers and citizens will be.

We commission research, often of a qualitative nature, to really bring alive consumers' experiences for policy makers and industry. We are distinctive in our role as a "critical friend" to Ofcom, rather than a public campaigning organisation. Our unique relationship with Ofcom, made possible by a Memorandum of Understanding, gives us early, confidential access to the regulator's thinking and means we can proactively influence decisions that affect consumers.

We make early, robust, high quality interventions as a result of Ofcom sharing information and ideas in confidence with us from the very start of policy making, ensuring that consumer and citizen interests are at the heart of Ofcom's thinking throughout. The level of trust we have fostered in the sector enables us to effectively influence communications providers and the regulator, and to hold Ofcom to account.

The Panel's Work in 2018/19

We want all communications consumers across the UK to be able to enjoy high quality, affordable, reliable services supported by excellent customer service whatever their needs.

The limit of the Panel's resources in 2018/19 - both financial and the size of the executive team - directly impacted upon the extent of our work so there was a need to focus on key areas most likely to affect consumers. Accordingly, our work plan aimed to encompass and prioritise those issues. At the same time, we sought to enable effective monitoring of a broader range of topics so that the Panel and ACOD could react flexibly to emerging areas of concern.

We applied two "tests" to the issues we considered addressing:

- What is the scale of the issue for consumers, citizens and micro businesses?
- What difference can the Panel and ACOD make?

We put these plans out to consultation - our final workplan for 2018/19 can be found at the links below:

- [English - Communications Consumer Panel Work Plan 2018/19 \(PDF\)](#)
- [Cymraeg - Blaenoriaethau a Chynllun Gwaith 2018/19 y Panel Defnyddwyr Gwasanaethau Cyfathrebu ac ACOD \(PDF\)](#)

We approach our work in two main ways:

- **Key areas of engagement:** substantial proactive work to push an issue up the regulatory or policy agenda or seek a specific change in policy.
- **Keep under review:** The Panel has kept many other issues under periodic review - particularly where we have previously raised concerns and stimulated action - and intervened where appropriate.

Key areas of engagement:

- Broadband/mobile coverage and quality of service
- Nuisance calls and texts
- Unfair policies and practices
- Customer service and complaints handling
- Access services (subtitling, audio description and signing) on broadcast and on-demand content
- Future of voice calls (migration from the public switched telephone network (PSTN) to voice-over internet protocol (VOIP))

Areas kept under review:

- Progress on implementation of policies that are designed to protect consumers, for example:
 - consumer related objectives highlighted in the Strategic Review of Digital Communications 2016, including pricing complexity, consumer information and switching
 - consumer-focused policies set out in the Digital Economy Act 2017
 - the broadband USO
 - Ofcom's revised General Conditions
- Post - quality of service
- Affordability and debt
- Digital Participation
- Internet of things, data privacy and security
- Micro businesses' experience of communications, as consumers
- Spectrum Strategy (including 700MHz coverage obligations)
- Consumer implications of regulatory/policy changes arising from Brexit

We work on these areas through a number of channels including policy interventions, research, stakeholder meetings and advice.

Policy interventions and advice

Throughout the year the Panel engaged with stakeholders across the UK, across regular Panel meetings, bilateral meetings, events, inviting feedback on our plans and social media.

Monthly formal Panel meetings provide a key channel for us to remain alert to current issues across the sector. Ofcom is able to share proposed policy interventions early on in their development, allowing for insights on both sides and an informed, constructive debate. A range of other stakeholders also provided updates on their own work for discussion and to inform the Panel. A selection of items covered during the Panel meetings can be found in Annex 4.

During 2018/19, we've highlighted the need for improvements to ADR schemes, to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and we're pleased to see the new proposals that the UK Government has subsequently published. Reducing the referral period to four weeks has been a key aim for the Panel and, should it now happen, will be a significant step in improving outcomes for consumers. The consumer roundtables held by DCMS have helped to bring together key players in this area and we were pleased to be able to contribute our expertise.

We give providers advice, feedback and input - often based on our research findings, but also as a result of other evidence that comes to our attention. One such example is the review of providers' websites we regularly conduct - and which has frequently enabled us to highlight areas where improvements can be made. We've also made a number of

recommendations about good practice on customer service issues and approaches to dealing with consumers in vulnerable circumstances.

Consultation responses

We have provided expert input into a wide range of formal policy consultations by Ofcom, Governments and other policy-makers across the UK whose work may impact on the lives of communications consumers, citizens and micro businesses. This has enabled us to provide a voice for consumers, citizens and micro businesses across the UK directly to Governments, regulators and consumer bodies.

In July 2018, we responded to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) 'Modernising Consumer Markets' Green Paper. We highlighted ways that communications markets and unregulated markets could be improved to benefit consumers, citizens and micro-businesses. We view it as essential that all involved in the communications sector work collaboratively to improve the market for consumers, citizens and micro businesses - particularly people in vulnerable circumstances, who may rely on these services in sometimes life-or-death situations and who may rely on non-profit making services.

We set out our proposals to facilitate more discussion and debate across the sector, as well as more focused research. We highlighted the need for a culture of fairness to all consumers, to underpin all providers' policies and practices and welcomed the subsequent strengthening of the Panel. We also applauded Ofcom's subsequent work with providers to build a set of Fairness Commitments and the proposed development of a Fairness Framework.

Our response to BEIS' consultation can be found here: [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to BEIS' Green Paper: Modernising Consumer Markets \(PDF\)](#)

In September 2018 we responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on a consumer body for Scotland. The Panel responded to the report of the Working Group on Consumer and Competition Policy for Scotland, and the Scottish Government's response, in May 2016 and the Scottish Government's call for evidence on a consumer and competition taskforce in April 2017.

We welcomed the opportunity to comment further on the proposal to establish Consumer Scotland to further protect Scottish consumers. Former Panel Member Mairi Macleod, and Panel Member Rick Hill MBE were pleased to be involved in the development of the draft policy prior to the publication of the report and we highlighted their involvement and our continued support of the Working Group's recommendations. We supported the focus on improving the representation of consumers in Scotland and highlighted that we favour a collaborative model so that the best outcomes for consumers can be achieved. We encouraged a consideration of the needs of micro businesses within the remit of the new body, as these businesses face many of the same challenges faced by individual consumers and are equally unable to draw on the resources held by larger businesses. We also favoured a research and evidence-based approach to examine and identify consumer

issues and to establish lasting solutions. We look forward to working closely with the proposed Consumer Scotland body in helping to address consumer challenges in Scotland.

In February 2019 we responded to the Welsh Commissioner's consultation on Making Wales the Best Place to Grow Old. We noted that it is difficult for older consumers to stay informed and make their voices heard if they cannot access communications services. We encouraged the Commissioner to press for greater high quality mobile and broadband coverage across Wales in order to help older consumers to stay connected and to access the services that they need. We encouraged the Commissioner to work with Ofcom to support measures to ensure that consumers receive fair deals from their communications providers and are supplied with services in a way with which they are able to engage.

Also in February we responded to Ofcom's Annual Plan. We welcomed its clarity and broadly supported it, although we emphasised that we would like to see quicker and stronger action in some areas. In particular we:

- welcomed Ofcom's commitment to universal coverage and fairness to customers;
- looked forward to engaging with Ofcom to enable us to act on the plans we set out for strengthening the consumer voice, in our response to the BEIS Green Paper, 'Modernising Consumer Markets';
- supported Ofcom's engagement in UKRN and with stakeholders and Governments across the UK, to ensure the protection of consumers - particularly people in more vulnerable circumstances - and we will continue to work with CPs to encourage them to understand and fulfil the needs of all their customers;
- welcomed Ofcom's future-focus in terms of the risks of online harms and in ensuring the resilience of networks;
- urged Ofcom to move faster on pricing practices in respect of handset and airtime charging;
- urged a greater focus on Royal Mail quality of service performance against targets;
- urged Ofcom to continue to give nuisance calls a high priority;
- expected Ofcom to include the issue of non-co-terminus contracts in its pricing review; and
- urged Ofcom to do all it can to bring about the mandatory promotion of the Priority Fault Repair service by CPs.

In March 2019 we responded to DCMS's draft statement on its first Statement of Strategic Priorities for Telecoms. In our response we:

- noted that we support DCMS' ambition for world class digital infrastructure and for the UK to become a world leader in 5G but encouraged DCMS to define 'world class' and 'world leader' so that it can measure outcomes more easily;
- supported an 'outside-In' approach to coverage and would urge that a broader view of national roaming is included so that a wider range of consumers can benefit from it;
- noted that we would like to see a culture of fairness embedded into all CPs' policies, underpinned by an understanding of situations that can make it more difficult for consumers to navigate and use services in the communications sector;

- stated that we believe a clearer definition of vulnerability that could be used across the sector and flow through to CPs' vulnerability policies would be useful - including a recognition that consumers may move in and out of periods of vulnerability based on their circumstances;
- urged DCMS and Ofcom to push for a commitment by CPs to invest in making communications services easier to use, fair and affordable, for all consumers;
- agreed that industry and Ofcom need to work together to secure the long-term sustainability of postal services, but also urge closer attention to the needs of today's postal services users.

A full list of consultations that the Panel responded to in 2018/19 can be found in annex 2.

Research

We commission independent research which tells the stories of real consumers' experiences of the communications sector and share these insights with Ofcom, providers and other stakeholders. Our research this year included:

'Still Going Round in Circles'

In July 2018 we published [Still Going Round in Circles: Complaint Handling in Telecoms](#). This research examined communications providers' handling of complaints to see what progress has been made since the Panel's previous research in this area five years before - and where improvements were still needed.

Additionally, we were particularly interested to understand how people were using Alternative Dispute Resolution services (ADR) and to assess if complaint handling processes were accessible to all consumers, particularly people in vulnerable circumstances.

We made a series of recommendations arising from the research so that the opportunities offered by existing and emerging communications services are inclusive and fair, and so that the market succeeds in meeting the needs of us all. The Panel's recommendations can be found in our cover report: [Still Going Round in Circles: Complaints handling in telecoms \(PDF\)](#)

Low income consumers' experiences of the communications sector

"They took my money from my account and said I had to wait 28 days before I could get it back. That's too long to wait."

Steven, 47, mobile customer with very low income, Bristol

The Panel's 'Still Going Round in Circles' research had highlighted that customers with very low income, or who were potentially financially vulnerable, suffered particular harm from financial losses incurred when difficulties with their provider arose. We wanted to understand how well communications providers handled their customers' needs when their finances posed a problem.

In 2018/19 we commissioned independent, qualitative research from PwC to understand how well communications providers engaged with people on lower, sometimes unpredictable incomes (such as zero-hour contracts). We sought to learn more about not only the barriers, but any examples of good practice that we could share with providers and policy makers. We will publish the research shortly and will share key findings and our recommendations with industry, policy makers and consumer groups across the UK in the coming months.

Digital accessibility and usability in the communications sector

“They [websites] are really bad. Hard to find things. They aren’t designed with disabled people in mind.”

John, 37, London, mobile customer with a visual impairment

The Panel’s 2018 research ‘Still Going Round in Circles’, highlighted a difficulty for some consumers in using providers’ websites. We therefore sought to evaluate the digital presence of the key players in the communications sector to assess whether its accessibility and usability met the requirements of users who have specific access needs.

We commissioned DAC, the Digital Accessibility Centre to conduct a benchmarking exercise, to allow us to speak to key players in the communications sector about their digital presence and the impact this could have on consumers and citizens who have additional access needs.

DAC assessed typical user journeys, using a combination of technical analysts and users with additional needs. Websites were tested at ‘A’ and ‘AA’ WCAG standards and a technical report produced that could be shared with industry experts so that changes could be made, including comments from actual users to give depth to the technical details. We will be providing detailed technical feedback to CPs and other organisations so that they can make improvements.

Key areas of engagement during 2018/19:

When we anticipate consumer detriment, or identify it occurring, we work with those who can make a difference - Ofcom, communications providers and UK and national governments. Our sector specialism and expertise mean we can challenge in a constructive environment, offer comprehensive advice and influence the development of policy so it delivers for consumers and citizens.

We have established trusted relationships with communications providers, where honest conversations take place in a “neutral space” without the regulator present. As a result, providers will often share confidential information with us - which aids our thinking and enables us to make progress.

We’ve identified and advised on a number of common themes across our key areas of engagement this year: the protection of consumers in vulnerable circumstances; quality of service; affordability; and the protection of consumers’ and citizens’ personal data.

Broadband/mobile coverage and quality of service

“If our landline goes down, I have to walk up to the top of that hill over there, to get a mobile signal.”

Ron, 73, dual-play, rural area in Gloucestershire

Consumers and businesses now expect universal, reliable call and data coverage both indoors and outdoors.

Throughout the year the Panel has continued to encourage Ofcom to use its spectrum management powers more creatively and to mandate national/domestic roaming, so that consumers in all parts of the UK have reliable coverage and a choice of providers.

In our work with Ofcom on the Award of the 700 MHz and 3.6 - 3.8 GHz spectrum bands, we have strongly encouraged Ofcom to require that the increased mobile coverage offered as a result of the spectrum auction is brought to harder to reach communities as a matter of priority. We believe that Ofcom should ensure that no provider has control over spectrum without using it to improve consumers’ and micro businesses’ experiences and that a market intervention is required beyond setting coverage obligations on the winners of spectrum auctions and recommended that national roaming is implemented to fulfil that role. We’ve constantly raised the issue with providers and are pleased to see the development of proposals in this area - albeit needing to be backed by legally binding commitments.

We discussed our concerns with Ofcom and DCMS on these matters and also highlighted the needs of micro businesses, who need a level playing field with larger businesses which may be able to afford faster and more reliable internet connections.

As we outlined in our responses to DCMS' Barrier Busting Taskforce, the Panel believes that all consumers in the UK have a right to expect consistent and high-quality internet connectivity in their home. Availability and access to the internet should be treated as essential - given its importance to consumers, citizens and businesses (especially micro businesses). We're therefore supportive of the action being considered by the Government to allow infrastructure changes to enable high speed internet to be made available to households across the country; and we welcome moves to create a legislative and regulatory environment which encourages investment and militates against barriers to deployment.

We've highlighted with Ofcom, DCMS and providers the need for secure and robust communications services - during the year we saw serious incidents which highlighted the concern and inconvenience that outages can cause. The security of services is paramount as we become ever more reliant on communications as individuals, businesses and a society.

Nuisance calls and texts

In January 2019, according to Ofcom's research, 43% of adults with a landline telephone received a nuisance call on their landline¹ These calls pose more than a nuisance to vulnerable consumers who may be unable to leave home independently and rely on their phone for social connection and medical reasons.

Our continued encouragement for Ofcom to require the provision of free caller line identification (CLI) met with significant success in 2018/19 when it became mandated as part of the revised General Conditions. This saved affected consumers up to nearly £30 a year each.

We've worked with Ofcom and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), supporting regulation that allows the ICO to hold to account Directors of companies making nuisance calls, resulting in numerous enforcement actions which will benefit consumers.

We have also encouraged providers to work on network-level call blocking software and have been encouraged by developments in this, though there is still work to be done, particularly in tackling nuisance calls from international numbers. Ofcom estimates that the providers which routinely block nuisance calls at a network level have collectively prevented at least one billion nuisance calls reaching their customers over the past year². We're working to encourage the provision of network-level nuisance call disruption by all providers.

¹ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/134834/Consumer-complaints-data-tables.pdf

² https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0029/139970/nuisance-calls-joint-action-plan-2019.pdf

Unfair policies and practices

“When I asked to speak to a manager, they said there was no manager. When I asked for their name, they said they weren’t allowed to say. I just can’t imagine running a business like that.”

David, 54, broadband, Bristol, micro-business owner

“It was obvious it was a mistake. I was so angry. It was my money, not theirs, and they had no right to keep hold of it. They’re a big money-making-machine. Bullies, they don’t care about the small man.”

Bob, 47, mobile, Bristol, potentially financially vulnerable

The Panel has worked on a number of unfair policies and practices that were affecting consumers, citizens and micro businesses. We identified and raised a number of unfair practices; we’re pleased to have achieved progress in some areas (free CLI; reduction in line rental for some BT customers) but we do not believe that overall a culture of fairness is currently at the heart of the industry.

Our ‘Still Going Round in Circles’ research (see page 11) added to a weight of evidence that consumers did not trust that their provider was putting their experience before other business objectives. Ofcom’s Comparing Service Quality report provided further evidence to support this, as highlighted by the Panel at a workshop with Ofcom, industry and consumer bodies in September 2018 (Panel Member Chris Holland’s speech can be found here: <https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/speeches-articles-presentations-and-events-/speeches-articles-presentations-and-events>)

The Panel drew its evidence and concerns to the attention of Ofcom, DCMS and providers in a series of Panel meetings, bilateral meetings and stakeholder events. We suggested that providers publish and commit to a consumer charter so that consumers know what to expect and could trust that they would receive a good level of service, following the example of the Financial Services industry’s ‘Treating Customers Fairly’ principles and going further where possible. We welcomed Ofcom’s subsequent work to develop a set of Fairness Commitments and a Fairness Framework.

- Mobile handset overpayments

In early 2017 the Panel raised concerns with Ofcom about some mobile customers (Ofcom estimate approximately 1.4 million³) being overcharged after their contracts end. This unfair practice by some mobile providers takes the form of people continuing to pay for a handset even though they have paid off the cost of that handset during the life of the contract. In other words, as their tariff initially includes both a handset and a service

³ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/new-measures-fairness-for-mobile-customers>

element, consumers are continuing to pay a monthly amount that includes both. This is exacerbated by some CPs taking a passive approach when it comes to informing consumers of their options. We have continued to highlight this issue and welcome that Ofcom is now taking steps to address it.

- Consumer engagement and end of contract notifications

The Panel has previously highlighted the harm to consumers and micro businesses of a lack of clarity in the terms and conditions in telecoms contracts, and those terms and conditions being too burdensome for most consumers to fully absorb and understand. We consider that Ofcom's consumer research shows further clear evidence that residential consumers and small businesses (including micro businesses) suffer the harms outlined by Ofcom in the consultation document as a result of a lack of communication from CPs about the end of their initial contract term.

The Panel is strongly in favour of consumers receiving clear, timely, communication from CPs regarding their current contract status and the end of their current contract term. We are, however, mindful of the need to guard against overloading consumers, especially those who may become overwhelmed by large volumes of correspondence, with information that may not be directly helpful in terms of making informed choices. A balance needs to be struck between the current absence of relevant information and so much information that a consumer is unable to engage with it. We continue to work with Ofcom and communications providers to reach a balanced outcome that enables consumers to make informed decisions about their requirements.

- Directory Enquiry calls

The Panel had highlighted previously to Ofcom the impact of the cost of Directory Enquiry calls on people who have limited or no alternative methods to find a telephone number when they need one. Ofcom's estimate that 450,000 UK adults have paid £2.4 million more than expected for calls to directory enquiries in a 12-month period shows that market forces alone were failing to serve users of directory enquiries.

We were therefore pleased to see Ofcom acting on our concerns and we firmly support the proposal to impose, without delay, a cap on the cost of calls to directory enquiries services. These charges were unacceptable and unjustified, for all consumers but are particularly pernicious for consumers in vulnerable circumstances.

Customer service and complaints handling

"I felt like I was belittled... because they keep on asking the same questions. It's always the same and you've already tried that even before you've made the phone call. It's common sense that you would unplug it and try it again. So, you feel very stupid and very irritated ... it's their attitude. You're just a number."

Angela, 37, Bristol, broadband customer on a very low income

"I called them and said I'm not happy and said, "I want to complain". She [call-handler] wrote it all down and said someone would be in touch with me. I never heard anything, and so I thought, you know, just forget it."

Anne, 62, Glasgow, mobile customer

The Panel has long championed good customer service and swift access to an easy to follow complaints process and prompt referral to an ADR scheme. Ofcom's Comparing Service Quality report, published in May 2018, showed that consumers were still not receiving a consistently good level of customer service, illustrated in the table below. The Panel challenged Ofcom to engage urgently with Communications Providers to improve their results significantly, and to share best practice with each other.

Satisfaction with	Broadband	Landline	Mobile
Ease of finding contact details	63%	62%	65%
Ease of getting through to the right person	50%	49%	53%
Courtesy/politeness of agent	65%	64%	67%
Doing what they said they would do	55%	58%	59%
Logging the query	49%	54%	55%

(Data from Ofcom's Comparing Service Quality report, May 2018.)

Our 'Still Going Round in Circles' research has also helped to bring a strong consumer voice to this issue and we discussed our findings and recommendations with providers at a series of meetings during the year.

"Eight weeks? I'm not going to wait for that long (to escalate to ADR)"

Matt, 38, sole-trader, mobile, Manchester

Our research also highlighted a lack in consumers' awareness of ADR. We strongly urged Ofcom, providers and ADR schemes to raise awareness of these free and independent services and while the number of deadlock letters being sent to consumers is rising, we want to see 100% of consumers who are entitled to a deadlock letter receiving them.

We've also continued to highlight our belief that it is wrong for a consumer to have to wait eight weeks before they can take their complaint to an ADR scheme. We've continuously pressed Ofcom to reduce the referral period to a maximum of 28 days.

We encouraged Ofcom and the ADR schemes to publish more data on their case outcomes and are pleased that this is now happening on a regular basis - albeit not yet including the level of detail that we believe could be really useful for consumers.

We're pleased to see the UK Government now considering action on improving customer outcomes in ADR across sectors including the communications sector.

Access services (subtitling, audio description and signing) on broadcast and on-demand content

"Subtitles do make a big difference, because you are able to keep up with everything that's going on. Even watching films, you can share with your friends, you can talk about it. Without subtitles, you can feel completely shut out."

Paula, 43, hearing impaired, London

Our 2017 research 'Access to Broadcast and On-Demand Content: Time to Catch Up!' highlighted the impact on viewers when a lack of access services left them excluded from programme content. Television is vital to consumers' and citizens' participation and inclusion in daily life and society; it helps people to keep up with news and current affairs, but also to share experiences with friends and family. The way audiences consume television content has changed fundamentally in recent years - but whether it is accessed as linear or on-demand content, television should be equally accessible to all.

We outlined a series of recommendations to improve the situation and met with a range of stakeholders across the broadcast and on-demand sector to highlight the vital importance of access services and encourage awareness and availability.

We believe that providing access services means giving people who have specific access needs equivalent access to programmes as people who can view and listen to all programmes and anything less is unfair.

We responded to Ofcom's consultation on the requirements to be set for on-demand programme services providers and await further developments. We believe that subtitling, audio description and signing should be available and easily accessible on on-demand programme services, to at least the same levels required of linear broadcasters. We urged Ofcom to set targets for access services on on-demand programming as soon as possible and to monitor progress and strongly encouraged industry to invest in improving access services. A collaborative awareness campaign about access services is needed, backed by a robust and effective complaints and feedback mechanism, across all providers of programme services, so that consumers can easily give feedback on the quality and availability of access services.

Future of voice calls (migration from the public switched telephone network (PSTN) to voice-over internet protocol (VOIP/all-IP networks))

“Oh no. I need my landline. I couldn’t do without that. My alarm system is tied to the phone. It’s connected to the smoke alarms. That’s a big worry.”

Cynthia, 74, landline, resolved, Glasgow, mobility and dexterity impairment

By 2025 the existing copper network (PSTN) will be ‘switched off’, although some consumers may choose to switch voluntarily, earlier than 2025. The Panel’s concern is that consumers are protected and do not incur additional costs brought about by the switchover. Of particular concern is the maintenance of service for people who rely on communications enabled life-saving services and the provision of service in a power cut to people who do not have a mobile phone as backup. The Panel engaged across the UK with Ofcom, third sector organisations, industry and local councils, to bring evidence and consumer insights to the attention of those who can act to protect consumers in vulnerable circumstances.

We also urged Ofcom to ensure that battery back-up is available for those who need it and that access to emergency services is mandated for eight hours for those most at risk⁴, emphasising the needs and circumstances of remote rural communities. We are delighted to see work underway by industry and Ofcom to address this, and will continue to take a close interest to ensure consumers are protected from unintended consequences of this once-in-a-lifetime change

Panel changes in 2018/19:

- Rick Hill MBE became Chair of the Panel and ACOD from the beginning of April 2019;
- Jo Connell OBE DL, completed her term as Chair of the Panel and ACOD at the end of March 2019;
- Dr David Holden was appointed as a Panel Member from March 2019;
- Richard Spencer and Kay Allen OBE were appointed from December 2018;
- Jaya Chakrabarti MBE completed her term as a Panel Member in November 2018; and
- Karen Lewis was appointed as the Panel’s Member for Wales in May 2018.

All Panel Member appointments were approved by the Secretary of State.

⁴ <https://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/ccpacod-response-to-proposed-guidance-on-protecting-access-to-emergency-services-in-a-power-cut-july-2018-final.pdf>

Annex 1: Panel Members 2018/19 - biographies

Jo Connell OBE DL (Chair)

After a career in IT, Jo retired as Managing Director of Xansa plc in 2003. She was a Trustee of Help the Aged from 1991 and Chair from 2004-2009 where she played a key role in facilitating and supporting the charity's merger with Age Concern England to create Age UK, the UK's largest older people's charity.

Since 2001 Jo's roles have included being a Non-Executive Director at many information technology and communications companies including RM plc and THUS Group plc. Jo was also Chair of the Hospice of St Francis, Berkhamsted, Master of the Information Technologists' Company in 2008/9 and Pro Chancellor and Chair of the Board of Governors at the University of Hertfordshire until August 2013.

Jo is currently Chair of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists charity and a trustee of the Hertfordshire Community Foundation. In 2008 Jo was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant for Hertfordshire. In 2012 she was awarded the OBE for services to older people.

Rick Hill MBE (Member for Northern Ireland; Chair from April 2019)

Following degrees in Applied Maths and Church History, Rick worked as a parish minister for 17 years. He left church work in 2007 to develop a portfolio career. He is Owner/Director of Titanic Gap Ltd, Media Consultancy. He is Deputy Chair of the Independent Press Standards Organisation.

Rick has previously been Chair of Northern Ireland Screen Commission, Chair of The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Chair of Consumer Focus Post and member of the Consumer Focus UK Board, a member of the BBC Audience Council for Northern Ireland and BBC Broadcasting Council for Northern Ireland. He was made MBE for services to Broadcast Media 2014.

Kay Allen OBE (Member from 1 December 2018)

Kay has worked for B&Q, BSkyB and Royal Mail. She has been a Commissioner on the Disability Rights Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. She also served as a NED on the Department for Work and Pensions PDCS Board.

In 2010 she was asked by Downing St to look at Responsible Business Practice of small business as part of the Big Society Team. As a result, she created the on line digital platform 'Trading for Good' which is now owned by Business in the Community.

She has run her own successful bespoke consultancy for 10 years specialising in Responsible Business and Diversity and Inclusion. A qualified performance coach Kay helps others to succeed. Kay is a Fellow of St Georges House Windsor, A Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. In 2010, she was awarded an OBE for services to Equality.

Amanda Britain (Member for Scotland)

Amanda has experience spanning research, public services, and organisational change in Scotland. In all roles, she has championed the interests of people who are socially or economically excluded. She is currently supporting Scotland's national Technology Enabled Care Programme, is an advisor with Life Changes Trust dementia programme, and an associate with Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

In 2012, Amanda was appointed a Board Member of the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, and in 2016 was elected Chair. She is Vice Chair of Iriss, a charitable company that aims to build the capacity and capability of the social services workforce in Scotland, and a member of Alzheimer Scotland's Human Rights and Public Policy Committee.

In parallel, Amanda has chaired the Peter Gibson Memorial Fund, which in September 2016 published Championing Consumers, a history of consumer advocacy in Scotland 1974-2014.

Jaya Chakrabarti MBE (Member until 30 November 2018)

Jaya is a passionate advocate for engaging business with community through technology to improve people's lives, and was honoured with an MBE in 2014's honours list, 'For services to the Creative Digital Industries and the community in Bristol'.

Jaya co-founded digital agency Nameless in 1999, which became one of the leading creative digital agencies in Bristol. Jaya worked closely with clients including the RFU, Cancer Research, Sony Playstation, Warner Bros, the Home Office and the Food Standards Agency. Following her MBE Jaya set her sights on tackling modern slavery using big data, and set up the social enterprise TISCreport.org in 2014 (Transparency In Supply Chains Report). TISCreport.org is now the world's largest open data anti-slavery register, built to

Government standards, with over 42k organisations with applicable modern slavery statements. It has gathered momentum incredibly quickly and is officially backed by Welsh Government.

Outside work Jaya has led projects on democratic engagement, net neutrality, education, privacy, protecting children, women's rights and human rights. Jaya presently serves as Vice President of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Initiative. Locally, she has been involved in many cross-sector initiatives with education and technology to increase social inclusion through the use of technology.

Dr. David Holden (Member from 1 March 2019)

David currently also sits on the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA)/HAL Consumer Challenge Board (CCB), tasked with providing scrutiny to ensure that the current £15bn Heathrow expansion plans, regulatory price review and five-year business plan is driven by the understanding and prioritisation of the needs of its current and future consumers. The CCB challenges and scrutinises HAL's business plan to determine whether it meets the requirement of 'high quality consumer engagement'.

David has direct and extensive experience of working on large-scale consumer insight projects for Vodafone, BT, O2, EE, France Telecom, 3, Sky, Inmarsat, Talk Talk, Carphone Warehouse, Ericsson, Nokia, Virgin Media, Cable and Wireless and Alcatel.

Chris Holland (Member for England)

Chris Holland was Head of Specialist Dispute Resolution at BT where he was responsible for a wide range of specialist customer service areas, including all aspects of BT's membership of Ombudsman services: communications. He helped implement the telecommunications ombudsman service (Otelo), and until March 2011 was a non-executive director of the Ombudsman Service Ltd. He was Chairman of the Otelo Members Board between 2006-2011. Chris held a number of customer services roles in BT, including heading the Chairman and Chief Executive's Service Office between 1987-2001. He was Chairman of the Postal Redress Scheme (POSTRS) between 2013-2015; and was an organisation healthcheck consultant with Time to Change (a mental health charity).

A qualified counsellor, Chris has done voluntary work with young people. Currently he acts as a consultant across all dispute resolution schemes offered by IDRS Ltd, including the Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CISAS); he runs his own consultancy company; and he is a member of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer. Chris

was also appointed as Independent Complaint Reviewer for the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR) in November 2016.

Karen Lewis (Member for Wales)

Karen Lewis spent the first part of her career as a teacher and lecturer in English and Media before moving into the field of community development. She then joined the BBC in Wales, initially to produce Education and Community Action programmes, before becoming founder Senior Producer of the BBC's award winning Digital Storytelling initiative 'Capture Wales'. She was later appointed Partnerships Manager for Wales, responsible for the BBC's Learning Partnerships, social action campaigns and charity broadcasts in the nation.

She left the BBC to become Director of a Research Centre in the Faculty of Creative Industries at the University of South Wales, where she led a range of research and public engagement projects in the field of digital storytelling, before joining the Wales Co-operative Centre in her current role as Director of Communities and Inclusion. She retains a strong relationship with the University of South Wales, where she is a Visiting Fellow. For the past 12 years Karen has worked in the field of Digital Inclusion, leading on Welsh Government's Digital Inclusion programmes. She was appointed as a member to Ofcom's Advisory Committee Wales in 2015.

Richard Spencer (Member from 1 December 2018)

Richard has 30 years' experience in consumer and SME mobile and fixed telecoms markets in the UK and abroad, most of which was spent at BT. His career has encompassed telecoms pricing, strategy, policy, business ethics and regulation. For the final seven years Richard was Director of Corporate Social Responsibility, playing a key role in architecting the company's programmes designed to have a positive impact on society and the environment.

Richard holds a degree in History (Manchester), a Master's in Business Administration (Warwick), and is currently studying for a degree in Theology, Ministry and Mission (Durham). In addition, he has trained as an executive coach.

Richard is a non-executive Director of the East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust and is trustee for a charity in Colchester which provides daytime support to homeless people. He volunteers at a winter night shelter, and supports a charity working with vulnerable young adults.

Craig Tillotson

Craig has enjoyed a successful and varied career over the last 30 years in the telecommunications and payments industries as a business unit leader, board director, strategy consultant and entrepreneur. In 1997 he joined T-Mobile UK as Strategic Development Director. In 2001 he joined Vodafone UK as Product Management Director. In 2003 he became Strategy and Wholesale Director and in 2007 took over the leadership of the UK Consumer Business Unit.

From 2012 to 2018 Craig was the Chief Executive of the Faster Payments Scheme, the UK's world leading realtime bank-to-bank payments system. Craig was also Executive Chairman of Paym, the mobile payments service from 2014 to 2018.

In 2014 he was appointed by the Financial Conduct Authority to be a member of the new Payment Systems Regulator's statutory Panel, where he served until 2018.

In 2018 Craig became co-founder and CEO of the Smart Request Company Ltd, a FinTech start-up business working to develop the UK's first competitive Request for Payment service.

Craig graduated from Cambridge University with a degree in Computer Science and spent the early part of his career as a strategy consultant with McKinsey & Company. For many years he was a specialist telecommunications reserve officer in the Royal Corps of Signals where he was awarded the Territorial Decoration (TD).

Rick Williams

Richard Williams is the Managing Director of Freeney Williams Ltd, a disability and diversity consultancy. He is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, an Associate of both Business Disability International and the Business Disability Forum and is the Chair of Age UK Brighton and Hove.

Rick is an experienced consultant and trainer with expertise in all areas of disability and their impact on individuals and organisations.

Annex 2: Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD responses to consultations in 2018/19

- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to DCMS' draft statement on its first statement of strategic priorities for telecoms \(PDF 148KB, opens in a new window\)](#) March 2019
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's consultation on Award of the 700 MHz and 3.6-3.8 GHz spectrum bands](#) March 2019 (PDF 133KB, opens in a new window)
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's Annual Plan \(PDF 172KB, opens in a new window\)](#) February 2019
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to the Welsh Commissioner for Older People's consultation on making Wales the best place to grow old \(PDF, opens in a new window\)](#) February 2019
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's consultation on improving consumer engagement \(PDF 175KB, opens in a new window\)](#) February 2019
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to DCMS' Barrier Busting Taskforce on ensuring tenants' access to gigabit-capable connections \(PDF 84KB, opens in a new window\)](#) December 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to DCMS' Barrier Busting Taskforce on new-build developments: delivering gigabit-capable connections \(PDF 92KB, opens in a new window\)](#) December 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's consultation on Helping Consumers to Get Better Deals in Communications Markets - Mobile Handsets \(PDF 131KB, opens in a new window\)](#) November 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's consultation on End of Contract and Out of Contract Notifications \(PDF 91KB, opens in a new window\)](#) October 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to The Scottish Government's consultation on a Consumer Body for Scotland \(PDF 132KB, opens in a new window\)](#) September 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's proposed cap on calls to Directory Enquiries numbers \(PDF 33KB, opens in a new window\)](#) August 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's proposed guidance on protecting access to emergency organisations during a power cut \(PDF 140KB, opens in a new window\)](#) July 2018

- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to BEIS' Green Paper: Modernising Consumer Markets \(PDF 419KB, opens in a new window\)](#) July 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's consultation: Improving mobile coverage - Proposals for coverage obligations in the award of the 700 MHz spectrum band \(PDF 53KB, opens in a new window\)](#) May 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to DCMS' consultation on its Security by Design policy and draft Code of Practice \(PDF 39KB, opens in a new window\)](#) May 2018
- [Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD's response to Ofcom's consultation asking, "How should On-Demand Programme Services be made accessible?" \(PDF 198KB, opens in a new window\)](#) April 2018

Annex 3: Financial Report

	Actual 2018/19	Budget 2018/19
Panel Member Fees	122,213	108,512
Panel Member Expenses	14,272	12,180
Support (inc. Advisory Team, research, consultancy, stakeholder relationships and design and publications)	237,299	244,809

Annex 4: Panel meetings

Agenda items included:

Updates and policy items from stakeholders:

- Nuisance calls and texts (ICO)
- 'Secure by Default' (DCMS)
- Behavioural Insights (Ofgem; Behavioural Insights team, Cabinet Office)
- Superfast broadband take-up (Broadband Stakeholder Group)
- the Phone-paid Services Authority
- Citizens Advice
- the UK Regulators' Network
- the Institute of Customer Services

Communications policy issues on subjects such as:

- Migration to IP networks
- Spectrum strategy
- Mobile coverage
- Postal services
- Broadband USO
- Mobile roaming and bill limits
- Nuisance calls and texts
- Accessibility and Vulnerability
- Access to broadcast and on-demand content
- Brexit and the telecoms sector
- Consumer engagement; end of contract notifications
- Complaints and ADR
- Directory enquiries
- Media Literacy
- Ofcom's Annual Plan