

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 14 June 2018 at 10.30

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

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Jo Connell (Chair)

Amanda Britain

Jaya Chakrabarti

Karen Lewis

Rick Hill

Chris Holland (by phone)

Craig Tillotson

Richard Williams

In attendance

Adrian Ball

Jenny Borritt

Fiona Lennox

Ofcom colleagues

Item

Welcome and introduction

1. Declarations of Members' interests

There were no new interests to declare.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 17 May 2018 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting of 17 May were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair with minor amendments.

3. Information security update

Members were given an update on aspects of Ofcom's information security policies that were relevant to their role.

4. Nuisance calls update

The Panel were invited to comment on ideas and circumstances around future research into nuisance calls. Points raised by the Panel included:

- the need for diary research to continue, as a useful time-series of data that had been previously collected and a way to show that Ofcom was acting in this area;
- the distinction between harm to called parties and the fraudulent activity resulting from nuisance calls;

- a suggestion to measure consumers' perceptions of the level of harm;
- a suggestion to research the impact on hard to reach and/or vulnerable consumers;
- consider links with academic institutions acting in this area;
- research into nuisance calls to mobile users might be useful; and
- initiatives were being made in Scotland following the recent roundtable.

5. Consumer Engagement

The Panel was updated on Ofcom's plans to consult on end of contract notifications (ECNs). The team looked at non-process barriers to engagement using quantitative research. Points raised by the Panel included:

- the accessibility of the format used for the end of contract notification (the team said they would share letter templates with the Panel for feedback and advice);
- the distinction between marketing material and an informative ECN;
- the broader context of unengaged consumers who may benefit from an out of contract notification;
- the issue of non-coterminous contracts;
- comparison with other sectors and how yearly statements or summaries are sent to all consumers e.g. banking;
- links with household bills management tools and information;
- the option of using third parties to design the ECNs and bills, as demonstrated to the Panel by Ofgem and the Behavioural Insights team during the previous month's meeting; and
- including automatic phone unlocking as part of the ECN.

6. Vulnerability

Members were invited to input to Ofcom's position on consumer vulnerability. Points raised by Members included:

- the difficulty in producing a meaningful definition for the umbrella term 'mental health' and in addressing the needs of relevant consumers;
- the barrier-removing, social model of disability;
- how utility companies share information about vulnerable consumers and the potential for the communications industry to do the same;
- how the new General Conditions might benefit vulnerable consumers;
- Ofcom's monitoring of the full gamut of the communications' sector - the (fewer than ten) major providers cover 80-90% of the market; the rest are served by the remaining c.1.5k providers;
- how providers might promote the availability of (often loss-making) services for vulnerable consumers;
- the need for clarity around the compliance with sector-specific regulatory provisions and the Equality Act 2010; and

- the need to consider children as consumers of communications services as children participate in communications much more than in other regulated sectors.

7. Consumer update

The Panel was updated on consumer priority areas. Points raised by Members included:

- nuisance calls: the opportunity for Ofcom to consider supporting the initiatives from the Scottish roundtable on nuisance calls and the need to continue the diary research referred to in the Nuisance Calls update;
- the need for complaints handling and customer service to be handled together, to encourage CPs to raise the bar in customer service;
- Standalone Fixed Voice-Only pricing: the need to ensure that the reduction had been implemented as planned and that all consumers who were entitled to a reduction had received one; uncertainty regarding which CPs have access to information on whether their landline customers have broadband and why;
- Alternative Dispute Resolution: publication of information about the cases that the ADR services receive and case outcomes; whether it was agents or machines that answered calls within the two-minute metric; and comparability of data; suggestion to add ADR data to the Ofcom quarterly complaints bulletin;
- Early Termination Charges: Virgin Media were notified of Ofcom's decision regarding its investigation, on 21 May; a question unrelated to this investigation was raised - whether non-coterminous contracts were covered under the General Conditions (GC9.3);
- Mobile coverage: the team would be invited to present an update at July's meeting.

8. Post update

The Panel were updated on topics in Post such as basket pricing, the background of parcel pricing over recent years and affordability of postage stamps. Points raised by Members included:

- the suggestion to monitor 2nd class postcode performance despite the lack of regulation.

9. Modernising Consumer Markets - BEIS' Green Paper

The Panel noted the key points of the Green Paper and discussed a draft response. A response would be submitted by the deadline on 4 July.

10. Any other business

The Panel did not have any other business.