

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 16 November 2017 at 10.30

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

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Jo Connell (Chair)

Amanda Britain

Jaya Chakrabarti

Rhys Evans

Rick Hill

Chris Holland

Craig Tillotson

In attendance

Jenny Borritt

David Edwards

Adam Gayton

Fiona Lennox

Colleagues from the Phone-paid Services Authority (item 8)

Other Ofcom colleagues

1. Declarations of Members' interests

1.1 Chris Holland informed the Panel that he would be undertaking consultancy work for the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR) during December.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 19 October 2017 and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the meeting of 19 October were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair. Members **NOTED** that Millie Hyde-Smith was representing the Panel at the UK Council on Deafness annual conference, taking place at the same time as today's Panel meeting.

3. Consumer update

3.1 Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting. An update paper had been provided to give Members an overview of Ofcom's consumer priority work areas, progress, next steps and milestones.

3.2 At an earlier Panel meeting a member had raised the possibility of customer data leaks at offshore call centres. An Ofcom colleague had followed this up and it was **NOTED** that the communications provider (CP) concerned had assured Ofcom that it had relevant controls and checks in place.

3.3 There was discussion of issues including nuisance calls for which complaints had generally been trending downwards, although there had been a recent spike - Ofcom was continuing to engage with CPs; complaints

handling, Ofcom was pursuing action plans with a number of CPs; automatic compensation and how this measure would be communicated to customers; broadband USO; review of call costs; the future of voice, which would be an agenda item at the next Panel meeting, an Ofcom data pack would be shared with the Panel and Members highlighted concerns and risks such as remote control and monitoring systems, eg waterway sluice gates, sheltered housing and personal alarms; and mobile coverage.

3.4 There was discussion of ADR. The Panel **NOTED** that in October the ADR schemes had published sets of quarterly communications complaints data. Members commented that it would be useful if Ofcom publicised the availability of the data and if it was consistent across the two schemes, to allow ease of interpretation and allowed cross-CP comparison. Ofcom colleagues would be meeting the ADR schemes to explore the usefulness, or otherwise, of their complaints data; and ADR would be discussed further at the January Panel meeting.

3.5 A Member raised an issue related to mobile data allowances. An Ofcom colleague would look into the matter.

3.6 There was discussion of Ofcom's recent announcement that BT's landline-only customers would see their monthly bills cut by at least £7 per month and the merits of the price cut being applied to all BT land-line customers. The Panel would be provided with more details in relation to the exact customer group likely to benefit.

4. CSR update

4.1 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting for discussion. Members had received a paper on Ofcom's Diversity and Inclusion Programme (DIP), which comprised a review of the progress Ofcom had made since publishing its Single Equality Scheme three years ago and a proposed set of objectives and actions. Ofcom planned to consult shortly. The scope of the DIP would be copied to Members.

4.2 Members made a number of comments, including the need to factor in age as a diversity characteristic; greater emphasis required on disability, issues relating to self-declaration; and Ofcom's recruitment policies.

5. Consumer Engagement

5.1 Members had received a paper and Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting to update them on responses to a call for inputs (CfI), emerging findings from qualitative consumer research and next steps for Ofcom's project to help consumers to engage with communications markets. Members would be provided with details of Ofcom's research sample.

5.2 Members raised issues including the difficulty of engagement for consumers living in areas where there were no alternative suppliers, eg coverage from a single mobile operator; limits to the usefulness of price comparison websites, eg for consumers with visual impairments; the need to take into account the access requirements of people with different disabilities and the experience of vulnerable consumers; switching and the risk appetite of consumers on low incomes or those living in a cash economy; engagement with other sectors as comparators; trust; and

concrete measures to encourage consumers to consider switching, eg automatic unlocking of handsets at the end of a mobile contract and information for customers about the tariff they will be moved to. In relation to Cfls more generally Ofcom was encouraged to post responses on its website as they are received as a way to stimulate further responses.

6. Mobile bill limits

6.1 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting and Members had been provided with a paper. Ofcom was responsible for the enforcement of a new regulatory requirement for all mobile service providers to offer bill limits to their customers and was seeking the Panel's views on a set of related FAQs for consumers.

6.2 Issues raised by Members included the application, or otherwise, of bill limits to mobile roaming and the need for clear guidance; exclusion of premium rate calls due to the limits of legislation (the Digital Economy Act 2017) and the suggestion that there was an opportunity for Ofcom to apply soft powers; management of consumers' expectations; the suggestion that explanation of 'bill limit' should be the first in the list of FAQs, followed by the question of how to obtain a bill limit; the need for FAQs in plain English; and customers with multiple accounts in need of multiple bill limits, eg parents with teenage children.

7. Comparing Service Quality

7.1 Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting and Members had received a paper to update the Panel on Ofcom's work towards publication of an annual report with CP-specific performance metrics, giving CPs an incentive to improve service quality and to better equip consumers to make informed purchase decisions.

7.2 Members' comments included the need to spell out the meaning of the 'net promoter score' (NPS); the risk that all providers may achieve a similar level of NPS; the need to understand where consumers search for information; and a need for consistency, eg what constituted a service fault. The Ofcom team would return to the Panel as the project progressed.

8. Phone-paid Services Authority

8.1 Colleagues from the Phone-paid Services Authority (PSA) joined the meeting to report on the recent work of the PSA, providing context with data on consumer spend on phone-paid services; market trends including the decline in DQ services and growth in digital services; complaint trends; policy and enforcement priorities; and research into customer care and complaint handling. Issues raised by Members included the need for clear announcement of call charges for calls made via DQ; bill shock and lack of consumers' understanding leading to inadvertent purchases via their phones.

9. Post

9.1 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to provide Members with a Post update, covering issues including Royal Mail Quality of Service, delivery targets and Ofcom monitoring; variations between postcode areas; and forthcoming user needs research.

10. Panel workplan and unfair policies and practices

10.1 Members reviewed both the Panel/ACOD's 2017/18 priorities, and considered what its areas of focus should be in 2018/19, and a 'top 5' list of unfair policies and practices as identified by the Panel. Topics discussed included ADR; CLI; the premium rate services regime; CP billing practices; broadband USO; the future of PSTN; and possible Panel research. It was **AGREED** that the Panel's long list of unfair policies and practices would be recirculated to Members, to consider whether any reordering of priority was required, and that as many of the issues remained significant challenges, the Panel's new workplan would not be a significant departure from the current workplan.

11. Any other business

11.1 Members had been provided with an information paper to update them on the progress of the 700 MHz clearance programme and discussed proposals to prioritise households that lose access to PSB services. It was the Panel's view that the priority should be vulnerable consumers. The team would feed this back to the policy team.

11.2 Members were updated on recent discussions with Futuresight on the scope and methodology of the Panel's next research project on effective complaint handling, including the qualitative research that would be carried out via interview and a desk research proposal. Futuresight would attend the December Panel meeting to discuss pilot interviews, interview questions and the draft scope of the desk research.

.....ChairDate