

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 23 September 2015 at 10.30

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

Present

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Jo Connell (Chair)

Jaya Chakrabarti

Rhys Evans

Rick Hill

Chris Holland

Mairi Macleod

Craig Tillotson

Bob Twitchin

In attendance

Jenny Borritt

David Edwards

Fiona Lennox

External visitor from Rica (item 10)

Other Ofcom colleagues

1. Declarations of interest

1.1 Chris Holland informed Members that the Postal Redress Service (POSTRS) council had been dissolved and as a result he was no longer involved with POSTRS.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 23 September 2015 and matters arising

2.1 Subject to minor amendment, the minutes of the meeting of 23 September were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair.

2.2 Members **NOTED** that Claudio Pollack, Content, Consumer and External Affairs (CCEA) Group Director, would be leaving Ofcom at the end of the year and that it was Ofcom's intention to create two new groups from CCEA, a content group and a consumer group.

2.3 Members were pleased to learn that since the last meeting lost/stolen liability £100 caps had been introduced by EE, Vodafone and O2, following on from earlier implementation by Three and Virgin Mobile.

2.4 The Panel was concerned by the results of an independent study into Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), *Facilitating Access to ADR*, and published recently by Ofcom. The Panel would raise ADR at its next round of meetings with communications providers (CPs) and include comment in the Panel's next monthly bulletin.

2.5 It was **AGREED** that the Panel/ACOD would pursue issues related to the accessibility of online AV content by arranging a meeting with the BBC Executive.

2.6 Members **NOTED** that at a recent meeting of the Consumer Forum

for Communications some concerns had been raised about the operation of the Next Generation Text Service.

3. Panel inclusive communications research

3.1 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting. Members had received copies of a revised draft Inclusive Communications research report based on work undertaken by Rica on behalf of the Panel, a desk research report on cross-sector provision, including utilities and the NHS, and the Panel's own report and recommendations.

3.2 Members were pleased with the reports and recommendations and made a number of comments, including some drafting comments that would be pursued outside the meeting. Consideration would be given to pre-publication release of the report to CPs and to inclusion of recommendations for consumers, ie not just CPs. Members requested sight of the Panel's report and recommendations when redrafted and thanked colleagues for all the drafting work they had undertaken.

4. ADR study and next steps

4.1 Colleagues from Ofcom joined the meeting to brief members on next steps following recent publication of *Facilitating Access to ADR*. Ofcom planned to develop a set of metrics to assess the use of ADR over time; had met and would continue to meet CPs to discuss ADR. The Panel urged and said it expected to see improvements and **RECOMMENDED** the publication of ADR case and complaints data. Members **NOTED** that Ofcom planned to begin a review of ADR in the Autumn.

5. NGTS update

5.1 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting and provided members with a set of slides covering recent qualitative research *Text Relay Services: User Experience (Stage 2)* on issues including use of the NGT Lite mobile app; NGTS usage; satisfaction and ease of use data.

5.2 There was discussion of issues including possible provision by BT of a BSL video on NGTS call set-up; lack of availability of some number ranges on some mobile networks; and take-up levels of NGTS. Members **NOTED** that 1st Quarter usage data was available on the NGTS website.

6. Disabled people's use of communications services

6.1 Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting. Members' had already received the draft of Ofcom's *Disabled consumers' use of communications services* quantitative research report and had provided comments. The team thanked the Panel for its previous input - and particularly its suggestion about briefing sheets, which had now been produced. There was discussion about dissemination of the research, one of its purposes being to raise awareness, one channel being the Panel's monthly bulletin. Ofcom was now considering a qualitative research exercise and the Panel/ACOD would

consider collaboration and how to extract key data from Ofcom's quantitative research, which would be published shortly. Further thought would be given to the value of an information sheet.

7. Market consolidation

7.1 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to update Members on market consolidation developments. Regarding the merger, the Competition and Markets Authority expected to notify its provisional findings by the end of October, and the takeover had been notified to the European Commission on 11 September.

8. Fixed line policy update

8.1 Having provided a paper, including data on usage and revenues, Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting to update Members on recent fixed telephony line rental price increases. Issues raised by Panel Members in discussion included a need for cohort analysis that could explore whether certain groups of consumers were suffering detriment, eg older and disabled people; consumer inertia, with some people on inappropriate line/call packages; and the suggestion that CPs be required to automatically put customers on their best fixed deals.

9. Consumer update

9.1 An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting for discussion. Members had received Ofcom's monthly progress report on the range of issues and activities contained in its Consumer Action Plan.

9.2 Members **AGREED** that it would be useful to continue to receive the report, supplemented by a cover note on other consumer work areas not contained in the Action Plan. The Panel highlighted the importance of ensuring that issues for microbusinesses were not lost in broader initiatives on SMEs. The team agreed that the Panel's views would be communicated to Ofcom's Policy and Management Board (PMB).

10. Networked Nations report

10.1 Colleagues from Ofcom joined the meeting. Members had received a paper to outline Ofcom's emerging findings on availability of fixed and mobile broadband services and proposals for publishing this information in ways accessible to consumers and stakeholders. The Panel welcomed both the proposed 'Networked Nations' report and Ofcom's plans to disseminate information.

10.2 The Panel **NOTED** in particular issues about the definition of the signal threshold level required for robust coverage. Issues raised by Members in discussion included the increasing divide between best and worst broadband availability; further suggestions on information dissemination; and the impact of interventions like MIP and the December mobile coverage deal and whether these initiatives were on track.

11. Ofcom Consumer Strategy

11.1 Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting for discussion. Members had received a paper on high-level findings, emerging conclusions and recommendations from an audit exercise to determine how consumers and consumer outcomes were taken into account in Ofcom’s day-to-day work. The team reported that at the beginning of the Summer it had used the Panel’s consumer interest toolkit to evaluate Ofcom consumer engagement.

11.2 Issues discussed included use/monitoring of social media to identify emerging consumer trends; the Panel’s recommendations to improve Ofcom’s consultation processes; the availability of consumer information in accessible formats; and the application of a consistent planning and prioritisation framework.

11.3 Members **NOTED** an Ofcom proposal to establish its own ‘panel’ of consumers, which it could use to test policy ideas through surveys and focus groups. The Panel would work closely with Ofcom on that initiative.

12. Ofcom’s Annual Plan 2016/17

12.1 Members had received a paper and Ofcom colleagues were present as part of the early stage of the 2016/17 Annual Plan process to identify and collate possible priorities. Ofcom planned to share a first draft of the 2016/17 Annual Plan with the Panel at its meeting in November.

12.2 Members commented that extension of mobile coverage should remain high on Ofcom’s list of priorities and that it would be useful to segment rural, ie a difference between deep rural and urban proximity. A number of other suggestions were made and noted by the Ofcom team.

13. Any other business

13.1 Members **NOTED** a written briefing on Ofcom’s upcoming Q2 2015 telecoms and pay TV complaints report.

13.2 Mairi Macleod had attended an Ofcom Scotland Communications Market Report event in Glasgow.

13.3 Fiona Lennox reported on *Delivering Britain’s Digital Future*, an event hosted by BT and held the previous day. With the Chairman, she would be meeting BT immediately after the Panel meeting and would follow-up some of the issues raised at the event.

13.4 Rhys Evans highlighted the 38 Degrees campaign on planned obsolescence. He would make enquires about Which? activity in this area.

13.5 A response to Ofcom’s discussion document *Strategic Review of Digital Communications* was being drafted and Members were invited to alert Fiona Lennox to any issues for inclusion.

13.6 Members were alerted to a number of other Ofcom consultations and requested to be available to provide input and comment.

.....ChairDate