Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 25 February 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

Apologies
Bob Twitchin

In attendance
Jenny Borritt
Fiona Lennox
External visitor from research agency (item 4)
External visitor from the IPO (item 9)
Other Ofcom colleagues

1. Welcome and introduction **1.1** The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting. Members **NOTED** that the appointment of Rhys Evans had been confirmed, as the new Panel/ACOD member to represent the interests and opinions of people living in Wales.
2. Declarations of Members' interests 2.1 Of relevance to item 10, Rhys Evans informed the Panel that he had been involved in a training project for the Civil Service, which the IPO had also been involved in. 2.2 In respect of item 13, Chris Holland reminded the Panel that he acts as a consultant across all dispute resolution schemes offered by IDRS Ltd, including the Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CISAS), and also that he is the Chairman of the Postal Redress Scheme (POSTRS). 2.3 Also of relevance to item 13, Rick Hill reminded the Panel of his involvement with production companies. This work could include discussions about the sale of intellectual property rights, as a method of funding future productions.
3. Minutes of the meeting on 28 January 2015 and matters arising 3.1 The minutes were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair. 3.2 The Panel and ACOD's draft work plan for 2015/16 had been

published online for consultation on Monday 23 February, in English and Welsh. Respondents would have a month to make any comments.

3.3   As discussed previously, the Panel would write to the BBC Trust in relation to the accessibility of online content and the publication of relevant metrics.

3.4   Rhys Evans reported on a telephone conversation with an MP in Wales who had been positive about the Panel and ACOD's work and had offered support. Rhys Evans advised that the MP had spoken positively about Tech Nation and had a strong interest in seeking improvements in Welsh language TV output.

4.   Panel research

4.1   An Ofcom colleague and a research agency colleague joined the meeting to update Members on the early stages of the commissioned *Inclusive Communications* research project, including an illustrative "pen portrait" of three interviews, describing the issues faced by people of differing ages and locations and with different impairments. It was **AGREED** that case studies would be produced as part of the research project. Members were advised that 32 of the 40 interviewees had been recruited and that the research agency was endeavoring to source Welsh language interviewees. Members agreed to share the research discussion guide with Ofgem.

5.   Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Review

5.1   Having provided a paper to the Panel in advance, two Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting for discussion. It was **NOTED** that in the previous week Rick Hill had attended an Ofcom PSB Review roundtable aimed at consumer groups and that Ofcom's consultation would close on Thursday 26 February.

5.2   Members commented that in order to make use of video on demand (VOD) services, broadband access needed to be available to all viewers, and at speeds of at least 10 Mb/s; that the multiple VOD players should be rationalised into one way of accessing content; that older viewers had wanted to see their Nations and regions portrayed in PSB; and that a balance must be struck between traditional and new content. The Panel would submit a response to the consultation.

6.   Ofcom Disabled consumers' communications access and usage consumer research

6.1   Having provided a paper, two Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting to update Members on Ofcom's research plans. They briefly explained the research strategy for previous years.

6.2   The Ofcom colleagues asked for Members' views on the format of the research for 2015 and presented three options. After discussion, the preferred option was one large report, which could be tailored to particular audiences/interest groups, using briefing sheets. Following the launch, roundtables could be held to promote the research to specific audiences. ACOD **AGREED** to continue close liaison with the team and help facilitate the promotion of the research through roundtables.

7.   Political update

7.1   Two Ofcom colleagues gave an update on political and parliamentary matters. Items discussed included the agreements intended to improve mobile coverage, progress on an agreement on a cap on lost/stolen mobile bills; the de-criminalisation of the TV licence fee; industry consolidation; the BIS Select Committee on Post; Broadband - Universal Service Obligation; data and privacy; and the digital skills agenda.

8.   Industry consolidation

8.1   Having provided a paper in advance, an Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to update the Panel on the process for the consideration by the competition authorities of potential industry mergers.

8.2   The Panel discussed the timing of any such process and relevant jurisdictions. Any such cases would be assessed as at the state of the market on the date the merger was notified. There was also discussion of potential impacts on consumers and current network sharing arrangements. It was **AGREED** that the Panel would write to the Competition Markets Authority and Craig Tillotson would prepare some notes for a forthcoming discussion.

9.   IPO – online copyright and consumers

9.1   Having provided a paper, colleagues from the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) joined the meeting. There was discussion of the concept of "ownership" of online content rights and the need for portability, whilst preventing fraud and enabling businesses to continue to trade.

9.2   Members' felt that the issue of fraud should be tackled as a "big data" problem in its own right and should not prohibit consumers from accessing the content they had paid for. Additionally, making content more portable could mean that the UK's accessible content could benefit those in other EU states. It was **NOTED** that an IPO report would be published in May/June, when IPO colleagues would return to update the Panel.

10. Consumer update

10.1 Members had been provided with a paper and an Ofcom colleague joined the meeting for discussion. Members **NOTED** developments in switching, and that Ofcom was seeking ideas about low cost reforms to the 'gaining-provider-led' (GPL) switching process.

10.2 Members discussed the recent agreement to lower the ICO's threshold for investigation, the length of numbers used for relay numbers, the publication of complaints data, lost and stolen mobile bills, charges for emoticons and the recent Which? report on 118 changes.

10.3 The transparency of costs for the 118 directory enquiries service was discussed. Members considered that transparency alone was insufficient. As the service was of particular use to people who were unable to use the internet, the cost may be unaffordable to the target audience. The Ofcom colleague **AGREED** to share the feedback with relevant colleagues and report back to the Panel.

11. ADR

11.1 Having provided a paper, two Ofcom colleagues updated Members on issues relating to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

11.2 The update included the extension of Ofcom's monitoring of complaints-handling processes for a further twelve months (compared to previous extension periods of six months) and a project analysing consumer complaints and use of ADR. There was discussion of ways of reducing the timeframe and the importance of all communications providers being registered with an ADR.

11.3 There was discussion of how ADR use could be promoted. It was **NOTED** that 'deadlock' could be reached in fewer than 8 weeks if the complaint had "reached its natural course". Ofcom colleagues would attend a future Panel meeting to discuss the findings of the study prior to publication.

12. Any other business

12.1 There was no other business.

…………………………….Chairman   …………………………….Date