

Minutes of the meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD

on 28 January 2015 at 9.30

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

**Present**

Consumer Panel/ACOD

Jo Connell (Chair)

Jaya Chakrabarti

Rhys Evans (appointment awaiting confirmation)

Rick Hill

Chris Holland

Mairi Macleod

Craig Tillotson

Bob Twitchin

In attendance

Dame Patricia Hodgson, Ofcom Chairman (items 7 and 8)

Jenny Borritt

David Edwards

Fiona Lennox

External visitor from the BBC (item 8)

Other Ofcom colleagues

**1. Welcome and introduction**

1.1 The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting, including Rhys Evans who was the Member designate for Wales, subject to DCMS approval.

**2. Declarations of Members' interests**

2.1 Jaya Chakrabarti declared her role as a director of a new company called Semantrica Ltd, set up to use company data to produce a social earnings index.

2.2 No other interests were declared that were not already listed on the Panel's website.

**3. Minutes of the meeting on 11 December 2014 and matters arising**

3.1 The minutes were **APPROVED** for signature by the Chair.

3.2 The Panel **NOTED** that, following Members' comments on a draft, a response had been submitted to the Cabinet Office's consultation on the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (potentially to enable the future implementation of a national public emergency alert system); that statistical data updating material contained in the Panel's *Bridging the Gap* research report would be circulated shortly to Members; and that Ofcom would shortly publish a report on the imposition of a financial penalty on Sambora Communications for persistent misuse of an electronic communications network or electronic communications services, ie for

making nuisance calls.

#### 4. Consumer Experience report

4.1 Members had received a briefing paper on Ofcom's *The Consumer Experience of 2014* research and policy evaluation reports. The reports would be formally launched at an Ofcom event that afternoon, to be attended by Panel Members, and at which the Panel Chair would be speaking about the Panel's recent qualitative research with micro businesses.

4.2 Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting. The Panel welcomed the research and policy evaluation and discussion touched on issues including access to fixed broadband services, data speeds, quality of service, mobile coverage, switching and lost and stolen phones. This year Ofcom had conducted consumer research among landline-only customers and of concern to the Panel was the issue of recent and rising line rental prices as a standalone service, including a likely disproportionate impact on older and disabled people.

#### 5. Landline prices

5.1 Members had received a paper and details of recent Ofcom research to examine the demographic make-up and attitudes of landline-only customers. Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting for discussion.

5.2 Members expressed concern about the rising prices in this area. Discussion focused on customer inertia and a lack of switching and the possible reasons for this, eg the demographic profile of landline-only customers (predominantly older people), a fear of loss of service, literacy rates, absence of a financial safety net if needed, and limited awareness of tariffs and of alternative providers. Members asked to be kept closely informed about the development of the project.

#### 6. Ofcom SME research

6.1 Members had been provided with a paper on emerging findings from Ofcom's project to assess market outcomes for SMEs. The issues being explored by Ofcom were infrastructure availability; retail market provision; wholesale market provision; and empowerment and protection. Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting for discussion.

6.2 Members **NOTED** that a number of Ofcom's findings chimed with the Panel's micro businesses research and there was discussion of issues including broadband and effective service-level agreements; fault resolution; digital skills; availability of information; customer service; ADR awareness; and SME use of residential contracts.

6.3 Members would welcome a more detailed discussion with Ofcom about the Panel's research and the SME work being undertaken by Ofcom.

#### 7. Ofcom Chairman

7.1 The Panel welcomed Dame Patricia Hodgson to the meeting and held a private session.

## 8. BBC iPlayer subtitling

8.1 A colleague from the BBC joined the meeting to deliver a presentation about BBC video on demand subtitling. Issues discussed included subtitling availability on multiple screens and platforms; BBC Sign Zone; divergent standards; BBC iPlayer; and subtitle research, including work on the positioning of subtitles.

8.2 It was AGREED that the Panel would write to the BBC Trust in relation to the question of the development of a common open source player and to request publication of statistics on accessibility of VOD content.

## 9. Access services update

9.1. An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting, amplifying on a paper provided to Members, to update them on Ofcom's ongoing programmes of work to measure the quality of live subtitling, the third of four rounds currently in progress; on accessibility features of electronic programme guides; on signing arrangements for low-audience channels; and on signing arrangements for non-domestic channels. The Panel would be updated again in April/May.

## 10. Panel workplan 2015/16

10.1 Members had been provided with a draft Panel work plan 2015/16 for comment. Following discussion, an updated draft, including further detail on the Panel's Key Areas of Engagement, would be copied to members for final comment. The document would then be published for consultation.

## 11. Panel inclusive communications research

11.1 Members had been provided with copies of the successful tender for the Panel's research into how communications providers interact with older and/or disabled consumers. An Ofcom colleague joined the meeting to provide more details of the project scope, which would include 40 depth interviews, some of which would be filmed, and it was **AGREED** that the research agency should consider the inclusion of Welsh language speakers. A colleague from the agency would attend the February Panel meeting to provide a project progress update.

## 12. Any other business

12.1 Rick Hill highlighted the recent experience of rural consumers in Northern Ireland who had experienced a deterioration in broadband speeds. It was **AGREED** that this matter could feed into a wider piece of work by the Panel on the experience of rural consumers.

12.2 Members **NOTED** the contents of a paper providing an Ofcom Corporate Responsibility update and welcomed the regulator's positive activity in this area.