

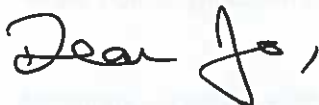
22 February 2017

Jo Connell
Chair
CCP and ACOD
Riverside House
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London SE1 9HA

DAME PATRICIA HODGSON
Chairman

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EA: Jane Rees
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dear Jo,".

Ofcom Proposed Annual Plan 2017/18 – response from Communications Consumer Panel (the Panel) and the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People (ACOD)

Thank you for your detailed and comprehensive response to Ofcom's proposed Annual Plan for 2017/18.

The unique expertise and insight provided by the Consumer Panel and ACOD remains essential to ensuring that Ofcom is held to account and that we maintain a strong focus on consumer outcomes across our diverse programme of work. In particular, we continue to benefit from the emphasis you place on access for citizens and consumers to good and affordable levels of service, honest information, decent terms and conditions and redress when things go wrong. These considerations are of special importance to the vulnerable in society.

Over the coming year we will continue to implement core elements of our Strategic Review of Digital Communications. This will include significant steps to improve consumers' experience, including introducing more stringent quality of service standards for Openreach; automatic compensation for consumers experiencing degradation or loss of service; and an enhanced focus on publishing more accessible, transparent and useful information on the performance of communications services. At the same time, this year we will be taking on our new regulatory responsibilities in relation to the BBC, which is a significant undertaking for Ofcom.

As mentioned above, we note from your response the significance of correcting unfair practices which diminish trust and prevent transparent relationships between consumers and communications service providers. In addition, we acknowledge the value of a streamlined and hassle-free switching process for consumers, particularly in the context of delivering effective choice and fair treatment for older, disabled or vulnerable consumers. We also share your concerns around the treatment of land-line only consumers, and will be paying close attention to the findings of our forthcoming narrowband market review as an indication of specific problems which require resolution in this area.

Your response emphasises the need to continue our collaborative work around publishing complaints data from Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) schemes, as well as making the case for a shortening of the current eight-week referral period and promoting wider consumer

awareness of the availability of ADR services. We also note your recommendation that we consider the potential role of proportional billing approaches in the implementation of our work on automatic compensation for consumers.

We recognise and share your concerns in relation to improving the coverage of fixed and mobile services on a UK wide basis, alongside the challenges to digital participation posed by deficiencies in connectivity and basic digital skills. In relation to the broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO), we appreciate the importance of ensuring that this programme of work helps to deliver an affordable, reliable and decent standard of connectivity which takes into account the needs of consumers and businesses across the UK.

We note your points on ways in which the management and allocation of spectrum contributes to wider consumer outcomes, either by enabling new products and services (such as those linked to the Internet of Things) or by linking coverage obligations to new 700MHz licences.

We very much welcome your renewed focus on the challenge of nuisance calls, which we recognise are particularly harmful and troubling for vulnerable consumers. We will continue to work with providers to monitor and block these unwanted calls, whilst engaging closely with the Information Commissioner's Office and international partners to deliver improvements in Caller Line Identification and enforcement.

On postal services, alongside our review of parcel surcharging practices, we will continue to monitor a range of Royal Mail performance characteristics including efficiency, quality of service, the financial performance of the universal service network and competition in parcels and letters.

We also recognise the role of Next Generation Text and video relay services in the delivery of truly accessible and inclusive communications services, as well as the opportunity provided by our current review of General Conditions to consider new requirements for communications providers to develop policies and procedures for identifying vulnerable consumers.

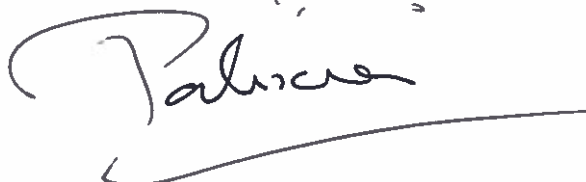
Our project team is in the process of finalising our Annual Plan, due for publication at the end of March. We will ensure that the team takes account of the responses received from all stakeholders, including the key issues raised by the Panel and ACOD.

As you know, we continue to welcome the Panel and ACOD's advice in ensuring that consumer outcomes and interests are placed at the very heart of our strategic and policy thinking.

We agree that maximising trust, transparency and fairness play a crucial role in underpinning effective and competitive markets for communications and broadcast services which benefit consumers in every community across the UK's regions and nations.

All good wishes - Thanks

Dame Patricia Hodgson

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.