

July 2011

COMMUNICATIONS  
CONSUMER  
PANEL



## Panel newsletter

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### In short...

#### Roundtable success for Panel...

Together with the IIC (International Institute of Communications), the Panel hosted a successful roundtable discussion taking forward our research into online personal data. Watch this space for feedback and next steps.

#### Panel meetings...

To read minutes from previous meetings go to:

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/smartweb/angenda-and-minutes/2011>

#### Follow us on Twitter...

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### Latest news...

#### Spectrum auction a once-in-a-generation chance to increase mobile coverage

Responding to Ofcom's consultation, the Panel has said that the forthcoming spectrum auction presents a unique opportunity to extend mobile coverage across the UK. The Panel is asking Ofcom to consider setting coverage obligations for each of the UK nations and some English regions, or for money to be retained from the auction and a reverse auction run to upgrade rural coverage. Operators that successfully bid for this should be required to provide roaming for these areas.

The Panel argues that a pure market-oriented approach to delivering coverage for 2G voice services has reached its economic limit. It says that 3G and new 4G services are unlikely to extend beyond existing 2G coverage, and it doubts that consumer and small business needs will be met. Panel Chair, Bob Warner said: "This is a critical moment, and we have a unique opportunity to resolve the persistent problem of inadequate mobile coverage."

To read the Panel's response to the spectrum auction consultation go to <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Spectrum%20auction%20CCP%20response%202011.pdf>

## Annual report and work plan

Publishing the 2010/2011 Communications Consumer Panel's annual report *Putting the consumer first: the work of the Communications Consumer Panel*, former Panel Chair Anna Bradley said that she was "intensely proud of what the Panel has achieved over the last three years".

"We highlighted work on mobile coverage that brought the issue up the Ofcom agenda and persuaded operators and retailers to improve their coverage cancellation policies," she said. "We helped to secure the Government's commitment to universal broadband with our consumer research, and our framework for digital participation became the cornerstone of the Government's national plan to boost internet take-up."

Commenting on the Government review into consumer advocacy arrangements, she thought that Ofcom would continue to need independent advice "to articulate the consumer voice as a counterweight to the lobbying of industry and to pre-empt new issues of importance to communications consumers...A strong, independent consumer advocate is vital in ensuring that regulators and policy makers appreciate and address the issues that matter to consumers."

Introducing the Panel's work programme for the coming year, incoming Chair, Bob Warner, said that stakeholders' views had played "a significant part in shaping how the Panel is targeting its activity and action". He outlined the five key areas that the Panel will focus on proactively - the future of consumer advocacy, the future of communications regulation, reviewing progress on digital participation, how best to support consumers' decision making, and spectrum and mobile coverage.

Reiterating the Panel's commitment to being a strong consumer advocate, he added: "The Panel will be looking at issues from the consumer perspective to protect and promote their interests. We'll continue to use our expertise to deliver the best possible outcomes for communications consumers".

The Panel's Annual Report for 2010/2011 and the 2011/12 work plan *Putting the consumer first* can be downloaded from our website at: <http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/CCP%20AR%202010-11.pdf>

## Improved relay services to increase choice for users

Panel Chair Bob Warner said he welcomed Ofcom proposals to improve relay services: "Users will no longer be limited to accessing text relay through specialist equipment, which should give them an increased level of choice". The Panel had also asked Ofcom in February this year to look at how to introduce a video relay service. The current proposal is to make video relay available on a restricted basis. "The Panel would encourage Ofcom and users to learn from this proposed implementation, so that an informed decision can be made about how to extend the service in time, once usage has been established."

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Text%20relay%20comment%2>

## News from the Nations

Kim Brook, Panel member for Wales, reports:

On a recent visit to Wales, Prime Minister David Cameron addressed the National Assembly and announced the allocation of £56.9m as the Welsh share of the £530m destined to speed up the rollout of superfast broadband across the UK. Culture, Media and Sport Secretary of State Jeremy Hunt has suggested that if the Welsh Government matches this funding, it would bring superfast broadband to 90% of homes and businesses in Wales. Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science Minister Edwina Hart said "Providing next generation broadband (NGB) to all homes and businesses is a key priority for the Welsh Government." "We have a strong track record of investing to increase the availability and take-up of broadband in Wales. This funding will help us build on this and reach our target of all residential premises and businesses having access to NGB by 2015."

Meanwhile the Wales Office in Whitehall has published a report commenting that the lack of adequate broadband is one of the biggest frustrations for rural communities. In fact, it is more than a frustration for farmers. They are legally obliged to report animal movements online, and pay very large sums to access adequate broadband to do this.

Maureen Edmondson, Panel member for Northern Ireland, reports:

There is a pot of new money from the European Regional Fund for rural broadband, which is essential for people in Northern Ireland. EU Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster announced £500,000 of further funding for broadband trials. The cash supports 35% of total eligible project costs, and the EU says it wants very high specification services that can be replicated across the country on a par with the very best services available in major cities.

[http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-deti/news-deti-040711-foster-announces-500\\_000.htm](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-deti/news-deti-040711-foster-announces-500_000.htm)

Northern Ireland's Rural Development Minister Michelle O'Neill has met BT to discuss broadband provision in rural areas across the north of the country. This is the first of a series of meetings with a range of stakeholders with an interest in improving broadband access. She has stated that no "rural dweller should be disadvantaged because of lack of access to broadband".

[http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-dard-050711-broadband-improvements-essential?WT.mc\\_id=rss-news](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-dard-050711-broadband-improvements-essential?WT.mc_id=rss-news)

## Consumers should see outcomes from complaints schemes

Responding to the introduction of new rules to help customers resolve complaints, Consumer Panel Chair Bob Warner said that they were a significant step forward: "They will compel telecoms providers to inform customers about their rights to complain," but he added "consumers would benefit even more if they could see how many complaints are taken to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) schemes." The Panel is encouraging Ofcom, once the schemes are established, to look at ways in which the ADR schemes could publish the data so that consumers can make a real informed choice about which provider is

best for them.”

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Customer%20satisfaction%20final.pdf>

## Latest Ofcom report highlights importance of making sure no-one is excluded

Panel Chair Bob Warner said that it was hugely encouraging to see that the latest media literacy report from Ofcom “confirms that consumers are increasingly savvy and switched on users of new technology”. He emphasised that although nearly two-thirds of the population now use the internet regularly “this highlights the need to ensure that no-one is left out of getting the benefits of being online through lack of access. Too many people, especially in rural communities, still don’t have adequate broadband or mobile access.”

## July Panel meeting

This month’s Panel meeting included:

- Discussion of Ofcom’s consultation on DAB coverage planning
- Ofcom presented its latest work on consumer switching and associated research.
- Panel members were updated on the BIS *Empowering and Protecting Consumers* consultation.
- Ofcom presented findings from its latest media literacy research looking into internet use and attitudes.