

July 2012



## Panel newsletter

### In short...

#### Panel chairs DCMS consumer perspective seminar

At the invitation of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Panel Chair Bob Warner chaired *The Consumer Perspective seminar*. This was the first in a series of seminars to discuss and develop policy options for the Communications Review. A summary and video footage of the event can be found on the DCMS website. Further responses are welcome before 14 September 2012...

[communications.review@culture.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:communications.review@culture.gsi.gov.uk)

[http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/news\\_stories/9186.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/news_stories/9186.aspx)

#### Consultation into role of regulated industries unit

Consumer Focus has launched a consultation into the design of the Government's planned Regulated Industries Unit (RIU). The consultation will look at how the unit is expected to operate and do business...

[www.consumerfocus.org.uk/files/2012/07/Regulated-Industries-Unit-design-principles1.pdf](http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/files/2012/07/Regulated-Industries-Unit-design-principles1.pdf)

#### Panel adds voice to ICT for disabled people discussion

Panel member Kim Brook attended the recent *ICT for Disabled People discussion* event hosted by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. He highlighted the importance of raising the issues discussed with DCMS as it develops the Communications Bill...

<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/post/events/past-events/ict-and-disabled-people/>

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### Latest news...

#### Bob Warner completes term as Panel Chair

Stepping down at the end of his term as Consumer Panel Chair, Bob Warner said that the growing importance of communications technologies in people's lives means that it will be even more important in future for consumers to have a strong voice: "That's why I'm pleased the Panel will continue to protect and promote consumer interests, with new Chair Jo Connell taking up the challenges for the future.

"I'm particularly pleased that during my year as Chair the Panel has campaigned successfully to

improve unsatisfactory mobile coverage, and ensured that consumers in each of the four UK nations will finally benefit from mobile coverage obligations and the new world of 4G.”

It is planned to merge the Advisory Committee for Older People (ACOD) with the Panel in the future, once secondary legislation under the Public Bodies Act is approved by Parliament.

“Under Jo Connell the Panel’s unique position will continue to help inform and shape future policy - and continue to achieve the best possible outcomes for communications consumers,” Bob Warner concluded.

[www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk)

### **Ofcom and operators need to deliver 4G benefits without further delay**

Commenting on Ofcom’s announcement about its plans for the forthcoming spectrum auction, Panel Chair Bob Warner said that UK consumers had already been waiting for some time for the benefits from 4G. He called on Ofcom and the operators “to deliver this without further delay”.

The decision to implement mobile coverage obligations for each of the nations “shows Ofcom has listened to our arguments. The roll out of mobile broadband will also ensure that people who have poor or non-existent mobile voice coverage will finally benefit too,” he added.

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/Spectrum%20auction%20comment%20final.pdf>

### **Informing the debate: Panel publishes 2011/12 annual report**

The Consumer Panel’s annual report *Informing the debate* has just been published, giving an overview of what it has achieved on behalf of communications consumers, and a taste of what it will be targeting in the coming year.

Chair Bob Warner explained that the Panel had used its expertise to look at a wide variety of issues from the communications consumer perspective to realise the best possible outcomes for people: “An aim that we have achieved by providing a range of authoritative evidence, stimulating robust debate and working closely with our partners.”

He highlighted how the Panel’s approach had led to a successful campaign to improve poor mobile coverage: “We have ensured that consumers across the UK will now benefit from mobile coverage obligations and 4G services.”

The Panel held a public consultation on its 2012/13 workplan and stakeholder event to ask for people’s views on the key consumer issues that it had provisionally identified. The Panel’s priorities for 2012/13 include: the future of communications regulation; online security and privacy; consumer information and decision-making; digital participation; mobile coverage and the spectrum auction.

“I know that the Panel will continue to use its expertise to deliver independent advice to Ofcom, Government, the EU, industry and others during the coming year,” Bob Warner said.

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/CCP%20AR%202011-12.pdf>

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/CCP%20Annual%20Report%202011-12%20welsh.pdf>

### **ISPs sign open internet voluntary code of practice**

Leading internet service providers (ISPs) have signed a voluntary code of practice in support of the open internet. Panel Chair Bob Warner said the move would build “on previous commitments by ISPs to provide transparent information to consumers about their traffic management policies”, adding: “I look forward to other operators also signing up to the code shortly.”

Facilitating the agreement with ISPs, the Broadband Stakeholder Group (BSG) explained that the initiative builds on the 2011 transparency code of practice, which makes clear and understandable information on traffic management available to consumers.

ISPs that have signed up to the code are now committed to:

- the provision of full and open internet access products
- providing greater transparency in instances where certain *classes of legal content*, applications and/or services are unavailable on a product, which will not be marketed as *internet access*. Signatories will be obliged to ensure that any restrictions are clearly communicated to consumers
- not targeting and degrading the content or applications of specific providers.

BSG, Chief Executive, Pamela Learmonth said the code meant that ISPs were making tangible commitments to the open internet: “ At the same time the code will also support an environment where new business models for internet-based services to the benefit of consumer choice can be developed.”

The full code is available at: [www.broadbanduk.org/openinternet](http://www.broadbanduk.org/openinternet)

### Rapid changes in communications, but many still can't get 2G

Responding to the publication of Ofcom's latest communications market research, Bob Warner Panel Chair Bob Warner warned against complacency, adding: “It's vital to remember that 11 million people (22% of adults) in the UK still did not use the internet at home, and far too many people and businesses still can't get decent 2G mobile coverage. I look forward to the realisation of benefits to consumers through the astute implementation of the Mobile Infrastructure Project.”

<http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/CMR%20FINAL.pdf>

### Ofcom consults Panel and other advocacy groups on draft copyright infringement code

Following Ofcom's publication of a draft copyright infringement code, the Panel took part in a discussion session with other consumer advocacy groups and the regulator to look at how the code could work in practice.

Under the draft code, qualifying ISPs would:

- notify subscribers of any reported infringements
- explain the steps they can take to protect their network
- advise them of how to access copyrighted content on the internet legally.

The revised draft code is available at:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/infringement-notice/>

### Consumer Forum for Communications

The Consumer Forum for Communications (CFC) is an informal group hosted by Ofcom to discuss consumer issues relating to communications. Consumer representatives can share information and views with each other, and with people who formulate and implement communications policies that affect consumers. The forum's aim is to help decision-makers to be as well-informed as possible about consumers' preferences and priorities.

CFC holds quarterly meetings at Ofcom that are open to all members. Representatives of the Communications Consumer Panel also attend. Discussions also continue between meetings, and the forum has its own Group site where members can discuss future topics and follow up on the latest debates. New members are welcome as are suggestions for new ways of working and new topics to explore.

To contact CFC write to the Consumer Forum Secretariat at: [cfc.secretariat@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:cfc.secretariat@ofcom.org.uk)

## July Panel meeting

This month's Panel meeting included:

- an overview of work relating to the Consumer Bill of Rights
- discussion about consumers' online security
- an update from Ofcom on the review of General Condition 9 (GC 9).

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