

Minutes of the 85th meeting of the Communications Consumer Panel
on 22 February 2012 at 9.00

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

Present

Consumer Panel

Bob Warner (Chair)

Fiona Ballantyne

Kim Brook (ex-officio member)

Colin Browne

Roger Darlington

Maureen Edmondson

Chris Holland (co-opted member)

In attendance

David Edwards

Fiona Lennox

Colleagues from the Federation of Small Businesses and the Communications Management Association (item 6)

Other Ofcom colleagues (items 3 and 4)

1. Declarations of interest

1.1 Roger Darlington declared his recent appointment to the Board of the Online Centres Foundation.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 26 January 2012, matters arising and progress on actions

2.1 Members **APPROVED** the draft minutes for signature by the Chairman.

2.2 Maureen Edmondson advised members that she would be stepping down from the Panel on expiry of her appointment on 31 March 2012.

2.3 It was **NOTED** that all current Panel appointments were due to end on 31 March. There was an expectation that appointments would be extended for a further period, which would allow Ofcom sufficient time to replenish membership. The Chairman would request formal confirmation of extension of appointments from Graham Howell, Ofcom Corporation Secretary. He would also raise Ofcom consultation processes with Graham Howell.

2.4 Members had received an updated actions list.

2.5 Members **NOTED** that Ofcom had published its consultation *Consumer switching* on 9 February, to which the Panel would submit a response, and Consumer Focus were undertaking a switching research project. It was suggested that Ofcom could be encouraged to include more questions on switching in its consumer surveys and that this could be raised with Ofcom's Consumer team.

2.6 Members had commented on a draft of the Panel's response to Ofcom's *Draft Annual Plan 2012/13* and the response had been submitted.

2.7 Members **NOTED** the information in the latest Panel Implementation Plan, providing a summary and strategic overview of Panel activities.

3. Spectrum auction update and not spots

3.1 Members had received a paper to update them on Ofcom's mobile coverage programme, in particular covering developments related to the 800 MHz/2.6 GHz spectrum award and the Government's Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP). Members' initial comments included:

- it would be useful for the Panel to meet BDUK;
- the Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales (ACW) was particularly keen to see improvements in mobile coverage; the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee had recommended that Ofcom impose a coverage obligation of 98% on one or more of the 800 MHz licences; the ACW's expectation was that this would translate into a lower coverage figure for Wales; it was **NOTED** that ACW advocated both a 'use it or lose it' approach to spectrum awards and national roaming to improve coverage.

3.2 Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting and there was discussion of the MIP, with Ofcom's role being advisory. Members **NOTED** that DCMS had commenced engagement with the devolved administrations and that a second consultation was expected shortly that would explore local issues related to procurement. In response to a query, Ofcom would review what constituted an MIP site, more specifically whether a site partially funded by the Nations would count for the purposes of any 4G obligation.

3.3 Discussion turned to information for consumers. Ofcom had already published a consumer guide on mobile coverage and intended to issue an amended guide in March. The draft guide was distributed and Panel members were invited to comment outside the meeting. Reference was made to lack of coverage on rail and London Underground networks. The Chairman confirmed that the Panel would respond to Ofcom's *Second consultation on assessment of future mobile competition and proposals for the award of 800 MHz and 2.6 GHz spectrum and related issues*. It was **AGREED** that a draft should be available in time for the next Panel meeting.

4. Digital participation

4.1 Members had been provided with papers to update them on the progress of the Panel's digital participation research project and to outline discussion areas covered in interviews. Ofcom colleagues joined the meeting.

4.2 A member emphasised the importance of the project taking into account the Panel's consumer framework for digital participation. It was confirmed that this had been discussed with the research agency and would be highlighted in the final research report. It was suggested that the research report would benefit from inclusion of a graphic to illustrate plateauing internet take-up in other industrialised countries.

4.3 There was brief discussion of lapsed users of the internet and the assumption that those offline were almost exclusively older people. Young people could also be offline/become lapsed users and Roger Darlington reported that he would be attending a related workshop at the Oxford Internet Institute on 23 March: *On the Periphery? Low and Discontinued Internet Use by Young People in Britain: Drivers, Impacts and Policies*.

4.4 Various other issues were raised, including: literacy, its role in digital participation; the need to develop alternative user interfaces, eg touch screens; and the potential for connected TV to be transformational.

4.5 It was **AGREED** that it would be useful for the Panel to brainstorm recommendations arising from the research findings and this could take place at the next meeting, at which members would be briefed by the research agency. The research project included a series of in-depth interviews amongst non-users of the internet in Glasgow and it was **AGREED** that, in due course, the Panel would host an event in the city.

4.6 It was **AGREED** that a comprehensive communications plan would be required to disseminate the research when published.

5. Communications strategy

5.1 Members had received a paper to outline a proposed Panel communications strategy for 2012/13. The strategy was discussed and Members indicated their preferences amongst the suggested uses of traditional and new media messaging.

The meeting adjourned to allow the Panel to host a stakeholder event as part of the consultation exercise on its draft work plan. The meeting then resumed.

6. Federation of Small Businesses and the Communications Management Association

6.1 Members were joined by colleagues from the Federation of Small Businesses and the Communications Management Association (CMA) and held a wide ranging discussion of communications issues affecting business consumers, including SMEs. In particular there was discussion of findings from the *Internet Opportunity Survey 2011*.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 There was no other business.