

## Strengthening the consumer voice in the communications sector

To effect real change in the communications sector, there needs to be much greater collaboration between appropriate consumer bodies, who can bring to bear a range of vital expertise and evidence. This can be achieved through a variety of means, enabling greater consistency, a stronger voice for the Nations and resulting in greater input into Government thinking and policy development.

### 1. Greater interaction between the Panel, consumer stakeholder groups and the devolved nations

- a) *Consumer Hubs*
- b) *Nations and English Regions-specific Hubs*
- c) *Establishing a network of Memoranda of Understanding*

### 2. Strengthening the Panel's ability to influence industry

*Industry Forum facilitated by the Panel, for industry representatives to discuss ways that they can work more effectively to support consumers, particularly those in more vulnerable circumstances*

### 3. Researching ways to better inform consumers and citizens, increasing the Panel's research outputs on communications consumer matters and supporting public campaigns

- a) *Consumer Information*
- b) *Research programme*

### 4. Exploring how the Panel could better support Governmental thinking, and especially the DCMS telecoms consumer policy team

#### 1a) Consumer Stakeholder Hub

As outlined in our [response to the Modernising Consumer Markets Green Paper](#), to strengthen the consumer and citizen voice across the UK we believe that a consumer stakeholder Hub should be established with a core membership of consumer bodies from across the UK to meet together quarterly. This body will ensure that the voices of consumers and citizens in more vulnerable circumstances are clearly heard by the Regulator.

#### 1b) Nations and Regions-specific Hubs

A separate network of four Hubs for the Nations and English Regions will specifically strengthen the consumer and citizen voice across the UK by ensuring input from local areas into communications sector advocacy. Panel Members representing the Nations of England, Northern

Ireland, Scotland and Wales are ideally placed to convene, quarterly, a wide range of stakeholder representatives in their respective Nations.

The Nations and Regions-specific Hubs will include representatives of consumers, citizens and micro businesses and they will be designed to be inclusive. Where relevant, expert third party organisations, relevant Government or Ofcom officials may be invited to attend a Hub.

We will consider holding an occasional joint meeting of the Hubs.

### 1c) Establishing a network of Memoranda of Understanding

In addition to establishing clear terms of reference for the Hubs to outline ways of working, a network of Memoranda of Understanding will be established or renewed between the relevant bodies. This will include consumer advocacy bodies across the UK Nations and Regions such as the Consumer Council NI and Citizens Advice Scotland.

## 2) Strengthening the Panel's ability to influence industry: Industry Forum

We will establish a quarterly Forum to engage Communications Providers and Alternative Dispute Resolution Schemes to highlight issues (including treating all consumers fairly), debate solutions and disseminate successful approaches and best practice. It is vital that this takes place in an environment where views can be exchanged freely and openly by providers.

### 3a) Consumer Information

We strongly believe that the Panel can expand its role in facilitating the provision of useful and meaningful information to consumers. This is about thinking creatively about how to make the smartest use of existing sources of data.

To improve the profile and impact of such sources of information and Ofcom's Accreditation Scheme, we suggest that the Panel explores how to best use them, working together with stakeholders such as Which? to ensure that we build on their experience and success of schemes such as the Trusted Traders Scheme. This would enable ongoing dialogue and form the basis of recommendations to Ofcom.

### 3b) Research programme

Undertaking a small number of additional pieces of research a year will not only offer insight and serve to facilitate discussion about the issues affecting consumers but also provide robust evidence to inform the work of consumer organisations such as Citizens Advice, Which?, Citizens Advice Scotland and the Consumer Council NI and charities who are working directly with consumers and citizens. We will engage with stakeholders to ensure that the research we undertake is additive and enhances or complements work undertaken elsewhere.

Additionally, we propose a meeting between Panel Members and consumers and citizens. In future, we will also explore using a meeting of the Industry Forum to ensure constructive discussions between senior industry representatives and customers of their service.

#### 4) Exploring how the Panel could better support Governmental thinking

The Hubs and Forum outlined above will form a valuable channel of information allowing Governments and policy makers to get real insight into consumers' experiences. To make best use of this information and data, the Panel Executive will produce a regular report on issues facing consumers and citizens in the sector. This report will be of benefit to a range of stakeholders including DCMS, devolved Governments and Ofcom and will be made publicly available.