

Response to Ofcom consultation ‘Improving broadband information for customers’

Utility Warehouse welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofcom’s Consultation ‘Improving broadband information for customers’. Utility Warehouse is a multi-service provider, selling energy, fixed and mobile telecommunications services and financial services. We are a reseller of fixed and mobile telecoms services and have wholesale agreements in place with telecommunications providers whose networks we use to offer fixed and mobile telecoms services to our customers.

Ofcom’s proposals

We support Ofcom’s initiative to provide consistency in relation to the broadband terminology used in the industry. We do have a number of comments on the proposals, which are set out below:

1. Difference between Ofcom proposals and current ASA rules

Ofcom’s proposals only include the terminology used for point-of-sale and contractual information. Advertising falls in the remit of the ASA and is therefore not covered by Ofcom’s proposals. The current ASA rules on the use of the word ‘fibre’ in broadband promotions are different from Ofcom’s proposals in that the current ASA rules allow for part-fibre’ technology to be described as ‘fibre’. Whilst Ofcom’s proposals are likely to bring consistency at point of sale and in contractual information, there is a high likelihood that this consistency will not extend to advertising and that different terminology will be used for advertising, at point of sale and in contracts. This would increase consumer confusion and the risks associated with this, as set out in Ofcom’s consultation. We therefore recommend that any changes to the terminology are coordinated between Ofcom and the ASA, and that Ofcom’s guidance and the ASA rules will be updated in the same way and at the same time.

2. The terminology proposed by Ofcom

The terminology proposed by Ofcom is ‘fibre’, ‘cable’, ‘full-fibre’, ‘copper’ or ‘part-fibre’. Whilst we agree with ‘copper’ and ‘cable’ we are not sure about ‘fibre’

and ‘full-fibre’ and ‘part fibre’. Ofcom propose that both ‘fibre’ and ‘full fibre’ can be used for FTTP only. We question why there are two terms to describe the same technology and consider this could lead to confusion and consumers wondering what the difference is between ‘full fibre’ and ‘fibre’. We therefore propose to only use one to describe FTTP, with ‘full fibre’ probably being the clearer of the two.

In addition, we are not sure that the term ‘part fibre’ will be meaningful to consumers. Ofcom’s research indicates that this is the term with the lowest level of understanding (after fibre to the premises, which is not part of the proposals). It may be worth trying additional terms with focus groups to assess if there is a better term with higher understanding to describe FTTC.

3. *Adding the information to the contract summary*

Ofcom propose to add the broadband information to the description of the service in contractual information and contract summary. The length of the contract summary is prescribed and cannot exceed one A4-page for a single service. It is already hard to include all the mandatory information on one page, and with additional requirements, this will become increasingly difficult. It would be helpful if Ofcom would allow some flexibility in the length of single service contract summaries. We note that for two (or more) services, the length of the contract summary can be three A4-pages.