

I have just become aware of Ofcom's Consumer Policy Review and I would to put forward my views as a citizen-consumer of the United Kingdom.

I believe that Ofcom has placed far too much emphasis on the business interests of the telecommunications companies and service providers at the direct expense of protecting the citizen-consumers.

Whilst calls to geographical numbers have undoubtedly fallen, other principal components of a telephone service have not. As a former BT Standard customer, I and nine million others have seen our underlying line rental rise by 50%.

I have been completely astounded that Ofcom has allowed such changes and even more so that it proposes to deregulate the pricing controls imposed on BT. These changes are proposed for less than six months from now, whereas the 0845/0870 saga continues through a tunnel that appears to be getting longer all the time.

With regards the latest 50p price hike; I can only describe it as playing into the hands of big business for Ofcom to support changes that increase BT's rates purely to allow its competitors to undercut it. Of course this will encourage competition, but it also leaves us paying more than we did previously!

Ofcom, quite rightly, identifies that there are consumers who haven't changed providers; presumably staying with BT. The summary also says that these consumers are typically older and more vulnerable. Ofcom should therefore be seeking to protect such consumers rather than letting BT increase its charges.

The regulator should also think ahead in order to protect consumers. Instead, it has a habit of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted, as is the case with introducing delayed payments to service providers using premium rate numbers, for example.

Following the unprecedented number of responses to the *NTS A way forward* consultation, Ofcom should make this a priority. Instead, a numbering review has now been issued, the findings of which could conflict with the outcome of the former NTS consultation. How many more verbose consultations is Ofcom going to issue before it does something about this?

I am strongly of the opinion that there is too little clear pricing information. Up until I had read the Plain English Summary of this consultation, I had never heard of 'PASS.' Perhaps Ofcom should extend such a 'quality of service mark' to telephone companies as well as independent information sites. After all, I think consumers are more likely to look to their provider for pricing information.

Whatever the legal technicalities, I believe that it is Ofcom's responsibility to ensure that communications providers and service providers make it clear the cost of using their service. To not do this would be like supermarkets not putting pricing labels on the ends of shelves. Of course this would never happen; but it is every day occurrence in the UK telecommunications market.

D. Lindsay