

This leaflet tells you:

- **What CfB is and what it does**
- **How you can help CfB**
- **What CfB did in 2002**
- **What CfB aims to do in 2003**
- **How to contact CfB**
- **Where to take up consumer complaints**
- **About the members of CfB**

Chairman's introduction

The Communications Act expected later this year means that CfB will cease to exist. Our last Report and Plans leaflet coincides with important developments in the regulation of communications. The Communications Bill specifies that in performing its duties the new Office of Communications (Ofcom) will be required to have regard to the needs of the interests of people in different parts of the UK and those living in rural and urban areas. The Ofcom Consumer Panel will have to be able to give informed advice on matters affecting small businesses.

If they are to achieve these objectives it is essential that Ofcom sets up the right mechanisms and that the Panel has the right structure. CfB believes that the Consumer Panel should have an advisory committee able to give advice on issues affecting small businesses. The wide range of issues affecting them makes this essential. In the time that remains CfB will use its influence to help achieve this aim.

What is CfB?

Communications for Business - CfB - is an independent body whose job is to advise Oftel on issues which affect small businesses in the UK. It is one of six Advisory Committees on Telecommunications (ACTs) and it was set up by the Director General of Telecommunications under the Telecommunications Act 1984. Each CfB member belongs to one of the other Advisory Committees and contributes to the work of those groups. CfB monitors and seeks to influence the operation and regulation of telecoms markets to protect and promote the interests of small businesses. In particular, CfB strives to give a voice to consumers who might otherwise not be heard in this fast changing industry, particularly:

- people working as sole traders;
- small businesses employing 50 employees or less;
- and those running businesses outside urban areas.

On issues affecting older and disabled people running small businesses in the UK, DIEL - Oftel's Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Disabled and Elderly People - would welcome views. Contact details are the same as for CfB.

How you can help CfB

To represent small businesses effectively we need to know your views and concerns. We always welcome contact from telecoms consumers - details of how to get in touch with us, through the Secretary, appear on the ACTs web site (at www.acts.org.uk) and in this leaflet.

What CfB did in 2002

- One of the most important ways CfB operates is by influencing Government and Oftel policy, often before that policy is published, and by responding to formal policy documents when they are issued. Our consultation responses are placed on our section of the ACTs website (at www.acts.org.uk/cfb/cfb-reports.htm). The documents we have responded to are as follows:

DTI proposals to ensure continuity of supply in the event of the insolvency of a telecoms operator

ICSTIS's consultation on DQ Service Guidelines

Consumer Protection Policy Review Guidelines

The General Conditions of Entitlement

Draft Communications Bill

Oftel's review of the fixed telephony market

Competition in international markets

Oftel's Draft Management Plan 2002/03

Wholesale Line Rental

- In our response to the *Draft Communications Bill* we argued for adequate representation of small business consumers in the new communications legislation that will create a Ofcom and a Consumer Panel.
- CfB successfully argued for inclusion of small businesses within the scope of the Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman (otelo - contact details are on the back page).
- The CfB Chair acts as the Chairman of the Telecoms Advisory Panel (TAP) - the forum that brings together the Chairmen of the six Advisory Committees on Telecommunications to co-ordinate their work and to raise matters with the Director General of Telecommunications.

- Members met in March (Belfast), June (London), September (Inverness) and December (London) 2002. Meetings included discussion of the Communications Bill, access to broadband and the Internet and other issues affecting small businesses, eg junk faxes.
- CfB took part in Oftel and industry working parties of key importance to consumers, including: Oftel's Directory Enquiries Consumer Sub-Group and the Industry Forum (working on Comparable Performance Indicators). Comparable Performance Indicators are published regularly and you can also find information on the web site: www.cpi.org.uk
- CfB members attended meetings of Oftel's Small Business Task Force (SBTF) which regularly publishes newsletters and information to small businesses. See the web site: www.telecomsAdvice.org.uk
- CfB took a keen interest in Oftel's Twinning with Poland project and argued the need to advise the Polish telecoms regulator on how to consult effectively with consumers and conduct research to assess requirements, customer satisfaction etc. The CfB Chair delivered a presentation to Polish officials on these issues in January 2002.

What CfB aims to do in 2003

- CfB will continue to respond to Oftel and Government consultations, take part in Oftel and industry working parties and work together with other small business and consumer organisations.
- CfB will continue to press for effective arrangements to represent the interests of small businesses under Ofcom and the Consumer Panel. The committee seeks to positively influence debates on the Communications Bill which will give powers to Ofcom and the Panel its remit (probably in late 2003).
- CfB will monitor the development of the new directory enquiry services as they become more widespread with particular care as to their services and interactions with small businesses. CfB attended the recent (Feb 2003) European Conference on Directory Enquiries, and gave presentations.
- CfB will continue its work with Oftel so that the new European legislation, to be implemented in the UK in July 2003, takes account of the needs of smaller businesses both in terms of compliance and their protection as consumers.
- CfB wishes to see the widest possible access for small businesses to new higher bandwidth services but has a particular concern for those businesses that lie outside the normal coverage areas. CfB welcomes continued roll-out of broadband services by BT and the cable operators.
- CfB will continue to take an interest in monitoring, collating and assessing complaints made by small businesses particularly where policy issues arise.

Members of CfB

Peter Sayers (Chair)	e-mail cfb@acts.org.uk , Consumer Communications for England (CCE) Member, Managing Director of an Internet company, Cheltenham
Ian McPherson	Member of the Northern Ireland Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (NIACT), Retired General Manager of the Northern Bank, Belfast
Alastair Robertson	Member of the Scottish Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (SACOT), Member of the BSI Consumer Policy Committee, Fife
Jon Simonds	Member of the Welsh Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (WACT), Local Government Officer - Powys C.C.
Stephen Smith	Member of the Advisory Committee on Telecommunications for Disabled and Elderly People (DIEL), Company Director, Hampshire.

Contacting CfB

CfB has a section on the web site of the Advisory Committees on Telecommunications (www.acts.org.uk) with information about CfB, its activities, its views and policy responses. CfB cannot deal with individual complaints. The committee can be contacted at:

The committee can be contacted at:

CfB Secretariat	Tel: 020 7634 8773
50 Ludgate Hill	Text: 0845 600 1318 (local rate)
London	Fax: 020 7634 8924
EC4M 7JJ	E-mail: cfb@acts.org.uk
	Web site: www.acts.org.uk

Where to take up consumer complaints

If you have a complaint about your telecoms company, please contact them first. If they do not resolve the complaint to your satisfaction or do not respond, you can contact the Telecommunications Ombudsman Service (otelo):

otelo	Tel: 0845 050 1614 (local rate)
Wilderspool Park	Text: 0845 051 1513 (local rate)
Greenall's Lane	Fax: 01925 430059
Warrington WA4 6HL	E-mail: enquiries@otelo.org.uk

You will be able to find out whether the company is a member of otelo and how to make a complaint. If your company is not a member, or you have an issue you want to raise about telecoms, you can contact Oftel:

Tel: 0845 714 5000 (local rate)	Fax: 020 7634 8843
Text: 020 7634 5370	E-mail: advice@oftel.gov.uk