

Review of Postal User Needs

- The Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales (ACW) welcomes the opportunity to provide advice to Ofcom on the Review of Postal User Needs.
- The ACW welcomes the scale of Ofcom's research on user needs and welcomes many of the findings. However, Members note that the scale of the research, while large, is less robust on vulnerable sub-groups such as rural consumers; business consumers especially SMEs; and disadvantaged urban consumers. Furthermore, members feel that simplistic performance measurements based on volume of flows or frequency of deliveries fail to address customer experience issues in rural areas of Wales. A more sophisticated analysis is required which assesses consumers' attitudes to quality of service which means different things in different areas. The ACW desires more information on the possible impact of any changes to the USO on the different types of consumers in Wales, perhaps working in association with other Wales-based consumer advocacy bodies such as the new Regulated Industries Unit.
- The ACW expresses its concern that the hypothetical questions put to research participants had been misrepresented in the media as live options. There was little enthusiasm for either a reduction in the current level of service or for an alternative to door step delivery.
- Members note that Wales has a long tradition of distance selling, partly as a consequence of Wales' topography and demography, with a preponderance of modest-sized farms in rural areas and urban settlements constrained in size by the relatively hilly geography.
- Members were concerned about the potential damage to consumer interests in Wales, especially in the light of Wales' high level of dependent households.
- Members believe that there will be a risk to the delivery of parcels if the debate concentrates exclusively on letters. This would be particularly unfortunate when viewed in the light of the change in the balance between letters and packets that is already occurring in the marketplace.
- With regards to Royal Mail's current relationship with the Post Office network, which significantly and positively impacts on households faced with collection issues around non-delivery of packets, Members feel that if Post Office Ltd's effective monopoly of Royal Mail's services was to be compromised, there will be implications for the Post Office network which ought to be taken into account.