

Your response

Question	Your response
<b>Question 1:</b> Do you have any comments on Ofcom's proposed Work Plan for 2026/27?	Confidential? – N

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# Ofcom Plan of Work 2026/ 2027: Response from Citizens Advice

## 1. Role of Citizens Advice

1.1 Citizens Advice is the statutory advocate for postal consumers in England and Wales. Our role is to make sure postal services meet the needs of consumers - particularly those in vulnerable circumstances - and small businesses. We have on-the-ground insights from our network of 300 local offices, who see firsthand the impact of problems with our postal service, both in terms of the impact on individuals and additional demands on already-stretched frontline services. This is combined with years of postal policy expertise in our national team. Together, they allow us to represent consumer interests in questions related to postal services.

1.2 In addition to our role in post, Citizens Advice also represents consumers in energy and cross-cutting markets. Our connection to frontline advice gives us insight into the issues that people are facing across the telecommunications market. Last year, we supported over 31,000 consumers with a telecoms-related issue and more than 22,000 with telecoms debt.

Our comments on Ofcom's Plan of Work for 2026/27 are set out below.

## 2. Postal services

2.1 We are pleased to see that Ofcom plans to "closely monitor Royal Mail's quality of service performance and progress with USO reform implementation". With it now being over half a decade since Royal Mail met either its 1st or 2nd quality of service targets, the company has been clear that its plan for quality of service improvements is centred on USO reform. The changes made so far are estimated by Ofcom to generate between £250m and £425m in savings for Royal Mail. We would therefore expect the regulator - in its commitment to "ensuring that markets work well for consumers" - not only to monitor quality of service and outcomes for consumers and businesses, but also to take action if the company is failing to ensure that the savings offered translate to service improvements - particularly in the absence of market competition.

2.2 There are also implications of USO reforms for bulk and access mail. Given a significant volume of important and time-sensitive correspondence flows through these channels, we would like to see the regulator looking at the implications of service reductions on the shift from the current D+2 access service to the new D+3 alternate weekday service. While Ofcom's initial assessment was that this "would not have a significant negative impact on most users" - in part because those users could make adjustments to their operations<sup>1</sup> - this impact should be reviewed. The experiences of those we support with postal problems as part of our frontline advice reveals that the effect on individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Ofcom, [Review of the Universal Postal Service and other postal regulation](#) 7.32

when letters from health services, government agencies, creditors or legal services are delayed can be the most damaging. A 'barcode' scheme to expedite vital NHS correspondence is already being trialled - but the regulator should be monitoring whether such distinct options, combined with competition from other providers and changes in user behaviour, is in fact ensuring that delays to vital correspondence are not being further extended by USO reform.

2.3 The affordability and pricing of postal services remain vital elements of the USO and should therefore be reviewed as part of the process. Within this consultation, we would like to see clearer consideration being given to the role of the postal USO in protecting the needs and priorities of consumers in a monopoly market. With Royal Mail now having been offered opportunities to make significant service reductions, questions of pricing and affordability now offer significant opportunities to provide fair counterbalance for consumer interests. This could be achieved through making Royal Mail's ability to raise rates on price-protected products conditional on the quality-of-service improvements the company has promised.

2.4 On parcels, the workplan sets out Ofcom's plans to continue its monitoring of 9 parcel markets, looking in particular at measures to improve the handling of complaints and treatment of disabled customers. However, we would now like to see Ofcom's work in this area extend beyond simple monitoring. It has been more than two years since the new guidance on complaints and accessibility conditions were put into effect. However, our latest analysis of the parcels market suggests this still is not translating into improved consumer outcomes. Our parcels league table, published in November 2025 found:

- Accessibility continued as the lowest scoring category, as it has been every year for the five years we've been running this research. Out of the 20% of people who had an accessibility need to share, 37% were unable to share this and 56% had a problem with their last parcel delivery, compared to 37% of the general population.
- On complaints, despite Ofcom's new guidance taking effect in 2023, in 2025 we are only 2 percentage points improved from scores in 2021 when comparing the proportion of people who had a delivery problem that they struggled to resolve (47% in 2025, versus 49% in 2021).
- Our findings are consistent with Ofcom's own recent research. This found that more than two thirds of parcel users had experienced a delivery issue in the past

six months. When comparing parcel companies' performance in handling contacts and complaints, average net satisfaction ratings were just 47%. And very little improvement was evident since guidance was strengthened in 2023 - complaints handling satisfaction had

improved by just 3 percentage points and disabled consumers remained significantly more likely than the general population to experience delivery problems (73% vs. 65%).<sup>2</sup>

2.5 Given strengthened guidance in these areas has not led to clear or sustained improvement, Ofcom should be re-thinking its monitoring approach. In particular, we want to see the regulator breaking down accessibility findings by company - as they currently do for complaints - to incentivise further action in this area. And we also need to see enforcement action, including fines and, wherever necessary, regulatory intervention to improve outcomes for consumers - particularly as both five years of our parcels research and three years of Ofcom's confirm the same companies are underperforming year on year.

### 3. Telecommunications services

#### Reviewing the impact of changes to our rules on in-contract price rises

3.1 While we welcomed Ofcom's ban on inflation-linked mid-contract price rises in 2024, our evidence suggests there have also been unintentional, but substantial downsides for affordability in the switch to a 'pounds and pence' approach. Ofcom stated it believed inflation-linked price rises left consumers with too little certainty and clarity<sup>3</sup>, but it's becoming increasingly clear that the system which has replaced this entails clarity at a cost.

3.2 Rates of price increases under the new 'pounds and pence' system have become more expensive than price rises consumers saw under the previous inflation-linked policy. Recent analysis by uSwitch has found that millions of UK broadband consumers could face an 11% price increase this April - over three times the current rate of inflation.<sup>4</sup> This raises obvious questions about companies profiteering from this change, which Ofcom's review should be investigating.

3.3 We're also concerned about some of the disproportionate impacts on more vulnerable consumers. 1 in 4 people claiming Universal Credit are struggling with their broadband costs.<sup>5</sup> 1 in 4 people have taken some form of action to pay for broadband, such as cutting back, going without essentials, falling behind on other bills or borrowing money.<sup>6</sup> Citizens Advice helped approximately 35,500 people with telecoms issues in 2024. This has more than doubled in the past 5 years.

3.4 While many mobile networks have tiered their price increases, based on the amount of monthly data in a customer's package, we have not seen this from broadband providers, leaving

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<sup>2</sup> Ofcom, [Best and Worst Parcel Firms for Customer Satisfaction Revealed](#), October 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Ofcom, [Ofcom bans mid-contract price rises linked to inflation](#), 2024.

<sup>4</sup> This is based on the average monthly broadband bill (£35.90) and the price increase amount that many UK customers will receive (£4 per month), compared to the inflation rate (3.2%, as of 15 January 2026).

<sup>5</sup> Citizens Advice Polling, April-July 2025

<sup>6</sup> Citizens Advice Polling, April-July 2025

those who need or want to opt for cheaper packages paying a disproportionately larger increase than those on more expensive rates. Given Ofcom's commitment around offering 'choice and fairness' for consumers, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances, we would like to see these points fully investigated in the forthcoming review.

### **Omission of digital inclusion**

3.5 We were disappointed not to see reference to digital inclusion in the plan of work. Under Ofcom's function to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters, addressing digital inclusion should feature. Ofcom's data shows that around 89% of UK individuals (16+) are home broadband users, whereas 4% are mobile data users only, 3% are non-internet users and 1% only use internet outside of the home.<sup>7</sup> While we welcomed the Blue Marble research 'Exploring Digital

Disadvantage' (February 2025), we challenge the omission of digital inclusion in this plan of work. If AI, online safety and consumer pricing is within Ofcom's remit, addressing digital exclusion to protect vulnerable consumers and excluded citizens must also feature alongside.

### **Mobile connectivity**

3.6 We are pleased to see a focus on mobile connectivity, but we remain concerned that the source of much of the connectivity data comes from providers themselves. We would be interested to understand what - if any - independent research Ofcom plans to undertake to explore issues around connectivity directly with consumers.

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<sup>7</sup> Ofcom, A demographic deep dive into internet adoption: Analysis using Ofcom's Technology Tracker 2024, March 2025