

## **ACNI input to Copper Retirement Second Threshold Consultation – submission to Ofcom**

### **Consultation : Approach to the copper retirement second threshold consultation – TAR 2026-31**

Ofcom’s Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland (ACNI) advises Ofcom on the interests and opinions of citizens and consumers in Northern Ireland in respect of communications matters. We are independent and our views do not represent the views of Ofcom or its staff.

Please accept this document as the committee’s submission to the above consultation regarding the approach to the copper retirement second threshold.

## **THE CONTEXT**

### **Full fibre coverage in Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland’s fibre rollout is comparatively advanced, with Ofcom reporting around 95% full-fibre coverage, the highest of any UK nation. Given this strong progress, Northern Ireland provides an important context for the copper closure consultation with the remaining unserved 5% represent the most difficult and hard to reach premises which are the most economically challenging to serve.

### **Demographics**

Northern Ireland has unique characteristics that warrant particular consideration in the copper retirement framework, including a significant rural population, dispersed settlements, and a higher proportion of consumers who may be vulnerable due to age, disability, lower incomes or reliance on legacy landline services. Rural and harder-to-reach communities can face greater challenges in network deployment and service migration, while vulnerable consumers may need additional protections and longer transition periods. These factors mean a “one size fits all” approach to relaxing the second threshold could risk disproportionate impacts in Northern Ireland if safeguards are not maintained.

## **COPPER RETIREMENT SECOND THRESHOLD**

### **The second threshold proposal**

The consultation proposes changing the “second threshold” for copper retirement so that, from 1 April 2029, Openreach could be treated as meeting the threshold when full fibre is available to 90% of premises in an exchange area, by allowing up to 10% of premises to be excluded from the calculation, rather than requiring 100% coverage.

ACNI supports the principle underlying the proposal, recognising the need for a pragmatic and proportionate approach to support copper retirement and the transition to full fibre networks.

## **Protecting Consumers**

Notwithstanding the support for the proposal, ACNI remains concerned about the impact on the remaining premises that do not yet have access to full fibre, many of which are likely to be difficult-to-reach properties or include consumers who are vulnerable and may be unable to migrate, or may require additional time and support to do so. While we support progress toward copper retirement, we are concerned that these consumers could be left locked out of the benefits of full fibre while simultaneously being locked into increasingly expensive copper-based services as price controls are removed. This creates a risk of disproportionate harm for those for whom full fibre is unavailable and/or are least able to absorb higher costs or navigate complex migrations.

ACNI request that the proposal is developed with adequate protections for those customers for whom either full fibre is unavailable or who have genuine additional needs that requires additional time and support to achieve full fibre migration. The protection proposals should ensure that no customer is both denied access to full fibre services, and at the same time locked into increasing expensive copper based services.

## **SUMMARY**

ACNI broadly supports the proposal to reduce the second threshold to accelerate migration off copper to full fibre services

ACNI request that adequate protections are put in place to ensure that no customer is placed in a position of being denied access to full fibre and locked into increasingly expensive copper based services.

ACNI request that protections are put in place for those customers who have access to full fibre services, but for whom there is a genuine need for additional time and support to migrate.

Ends  
7<sup>th</sup> May 2026