2.4.08.

Ms. Sarah Evans,
Consumer Policy Manager,
Ofcom, Riverside House,
2A, Southwark Bridge Road,
London SE1 9HA.

Dear Ms. Evans,

I should like to put forward some points for your Additional Charges Consultation.

I am a pensioner, and I live from week to week on Pension Credit. I cannot pay bills by Direct Debit as I would be going overdrawn all the time - not knowing how much was being taken out of my bank account on which day! Neither do I have a computer to pay on-line. I really do think these charges hit the poorer people most.

For a start, I think it outrageous that any company should be allowed to charge "billing charges" - even the term seems implausible. It could snowball indefinitely to "charges for charges for charges for charges - - - - - - - for billing charges!! This should never have been allowed to creep in.

I dislike the way BT tries to disguise the Non-Direct Debit charges by rewording it as a discount for Direct Debit payment! If the charges are supposed to reflect genuine extra costs, then why are customers who only receive one bill every three months 'charged' the same billing charge as customers who receive a bill every month? I am also annoyed that I am often given less than a week to pay a three monthly bill. That does not even give me time to wait for Pension Day!

I also think one should be allowed a home telephone without having to sign up to any minimum contract period; and customers should be allowed to cancel a service when they wish, without a "Cease Charge" (providing they have not signed up to a contract period).

There is another point about which I am very sceptical, and I think BT was very evasive. They advertised for Option 1 customers

I telephoned to try and find out if there were any 'catches' to this, and I was assured there were none, and that BT was just trying to hold on to its customers. So I signed up for these free evening calls for twelve months. I was very taken aback when the paperwork came thanking me for signing up to Option 2! (I had been totally unaware I was signing up to Option 2!), and in the small print it says customers cannot downgrade. So presumably this means that at the end of 12 months, I will have to start paying Option 2 charges even though I was assured over the telephone that this was not the case! I ...

deception I therefore fully agree with you that companies must be clearer to customers. I have learnt over the years that one often gets wrong facts from BT "girls at the end of the telephone line". But I have also found it impossible to get letters answered by BT.

Occasionally I have been on the phone to BT for up to 30 mins pressing buttons, listening to music or recorded messages, and then been cut off, or I have given up, having not yet reached a "person"!! The customer cannot win. How is it possible that one cannot reach his telephone company by telephone?!

Well, there are a few points for your consultation. I applaud you for having it, and it appears to be very thorough and well organised — thank you.

Yours sincerely,