

Consumer Panel Minutes

11:30 – 16:30, 26 April 2023

Hybrid meeting

Attendees

Consumer Panel

Jenny Willott (JW)	Chair of the Consumer Panel
Jacqueline Minor (JM) <i>Teams</i>	Panel Members
David Thomas (DT)	
Jennifer Genevieve (JG)	
Carol Brennan (CB)	
Helen Dolphin (HD) <i>Teams</i> (items 2-9)	
Rick Hill (RH)	
Vaughan Williams (VW)	

Freya Whiteman (FW)	Secretariat
Sally Bland (SB)	

Invited Guests

Paul Smith (PS)
Anna Bowles (AB)
Sir Stephen Hillier (SSH) (item 4)
Helen Swanbury (HS) (items 5-8)
Liam Hassell (LH) (item 6)
Yacoob Woozeer (YW) (item 6)
Andrew McConnell (AM) (item 7)
Rob Crawford (RC) (item 7)
Jack Wilson-Mendy (JWM) (item 7)
David Oastler (DO) (item 8)
Germaine Faulkner (GF) (item 9)

Apologies

Walter Merricks (WM)
James Walker (J Walker)

Declaration of Interests

The register of interests, as circulated before the meeting, was taken as read.

1. Chair's Update

JW welcomed those present to the meeting. The minutes of the quarterly Panel meeting, held on 19 January 2023, were agreed and JW expressed her thanks to JM and DT for chairing the January meeting in her absence.

FW would be contacting members of the Panel in the near future regarding Panel meeting dates in 2024.

JW detailed some of the work that had been taking place since January and explained that she had met with the following people:

- Sir Stephen Hillier and Richard Moriarty in January
- Jeremy Newman regarding the Public Body Review, to which the Consumer Panel had submitted a response
- The ExCo PIE (Policy Information Exchange) which had included the Consumer Strategy on its agenda
- Ben Alcott, who was now responsible for the Passenger Advice Complaints Teams (PACT), which was followed by a workshop looking at PACT and customer service
- Paul Smith and Anna Bowles for regular updates
- Dr Ruth Mallors-Ray, Environmental Sustainability Panel (ESP) Chair, to discuss consumer environmental information and future collaborative working
- Consumer Panel Chairs meeting regarding how to measure the impact of Consumer Panel work
- Colleagues at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to discuss their work on the Future Flight Challenge and the Panel's work with the CAA's innovation team on embedding the consumer interest when developing new technology

JW added that she had been invited to speak at a Community Integration Panel event for the Future Flight Challenge, considering the role that public and consumer engagement can play when helping industry design accessible technologies.

JW noted that the Panel's key focus over the last quarter was on submitting written responses to various CAA and Government consultations. JW and CB thanked FW for her work in these areas.

On the Panel's behalf, JW gave thanks to WM for his contributions to the Panel since 2018 whose term ends in April. JW noted the intention to invite WM to a future meeting to present his views on key consumer issues and his perspective on his time on the CAA Consumer Panel.

JW reported that her term of appointment had been extended to the end of 2026 and HD's had been extended to April 2024.

2. Member Updates

JW invited updates from members on the work of the sub-groups and other developments since the January meeting and the following points were raised:

- JW, JG, WM and VW, had attended the PACT workshop the previous week, to understand more about the work of the team and where there were areas for improvement.
- VW had worked with the CAA's legal department regarding the use of the CAA's enforcement powers.

- The economic regulation sub-group had taken part in a workshop regarding the NERL price control review. A further meeting was scheduled for the following week.

In response to a question from CB on collaborative working with the Environmental Sustainability Panel (ESP), FW confirmed that conversations were ongoing and she envisaged that further joint work was planned in areas such as environmental information and green-washing.

3. CAA Update

PS provided an update on recent developments at the CAA, explaining that Richard Moriarty had stepped down as CEO and he and Rob Bishton (RB) would act as Interim CEOs, which SSH would expand on in the next agenda item. Oversight of the organisation had been divided between them and RB would be attending future Consumer Panel meetings. Both PS and RB would continue in their group Director roles, and outlined the changes made within their respective groups to facilitate the new arrangements.

4. Chair and Interim CEO Update

SSH joined the meeting and provided an update on CAA activities including Interim CEO arrangements. He highlighted the following:

- The Interim CEO arrangements were likely to be in place for a reasonable amount of time. Work was underway to launch the competition for the permanent position, and the intention was to appeal to as wide a range of suitably-skilled candidates as possible.
- SSH also updated on developments regarding the recruitment of Non-Executive Directors.
- The Arm's Length Body Review is in the process of being finalised, and due to report in the summer.
- The Board priorities had been agreed for 2023/24. These would be reviewed at the end of Q1 to take account of the conclusions of the Arm's Length Body review.
- A refresh of the CAA's strategy was planned to reflect the substantial sectoral changes that had taken place in recent years.
- The Heathrow price control review (H7) appeals were likely to be resource intensive.

SSH invited questions from Panel members:

VW noted the importance of the CAA being given effective enforcement powers. He also noted his work with the CAA on helping it make the fullest possible use of existing powers where this best benefits consumers, whilst awaiting new legislation. SSH agreed with the need for new powers, which was well known by Ministers and the CAA was hopeful that it had persuaded Government on the case for legislative change. PS and AB added that work was underway to consider VW's advice on the CAA's existing powers.

JM (referenced the situation regarding Wizz Air, where 94% of complaints to ADR bodies had been upheld. She suggested that it might be helpful to undertake a case study exercise in the future to explore this in more detail.

JW thanked SSH for his update and ongoing support for the Panel.

PS updated those present on some additional key areas of work:

- Industry performance over the Easter period had been good, despite the strikes at Heathrow. More staff were being brought in and levels of resilience were generally better than during the previous year. Air traffic control strikes in France were having a greater impact because of congestion caused by diversions.
- The Airline Accessibility Framework consultation had been published the previous day, and performance around PRMs had improved over the winter period although some residual problems around Heathrow and T5 remained.

5. CAA Consumer Strategy

HS joined the meeting to provide an update on the CAA Consumer Strategy. The first draft had been circulated with a plan for an updated version to be submitted to ExCo in June. It was intended that the Strategy would clarify the CAA's consumer role and further promote consumer interests across the organisation. HS welcomed feedback from members.

Overall, Members noted that they thought this was a very good piece of work and hoped it would be embedded across the organisation in due course. Some feedback was provided as follows:

- CB noted that the Consumer Principles could be included earlier in the document, with a supporting diagram of how they apply. CB suggested that terminology around vulnerable consumers should be changed to 'consumers at risk of vulnerability' or 'consumers in vulnerable circumstances' to reflect the fact that vulnerability can fluctuate, which HD and other members supported. CB also noted that there was room for improvement in first tier complaint handling, which needs clearer guidance.
- JM noted that the Strategy should be embedded across the whole organisation.
- DT noted that the Strategy could try to put parameters around what 'value' means to consumers and how this is assessed.
- RH welcomed the Strategy and queried who the intended audience was. He added that the CAA might want to review the Ofcom 'Fairness Commitments' as a useful cross-sector comparator, as well as the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland's 'Plane Facts' Guide.
- JG added that some slides might be difficult for consumers to understand, and suggested the CAA develops an infographic on the information that the CAA provides to help passengers along their journey, which could include guidance around making complaints.
- VW queried whether PACT's role could be included.
- JW noted that the Strategy was logical and well-presented, and she supported the comments raised by Members. JW suggested that references to vulnerability should also take into account the impact of new technologies, including the risk of digital exclusion and consumers who might become vulnerable due to increased use of Artificial Intelligence. She also noted that it would be important for the Strategy to focus on a holistic understanding of consumer information across a range of policy areas including consumer protection, safety, environmental sustainability and innovation.

HS thanked Members for their comments, which would be taken into account for the next iteration of the Strategy.

6. Airline Website Accessibility Audit

LH and YW joined the meeting to update those present on the Airline Website Accessibility Audit which was currently ongoing. YW explained the objectives of the targeted audit, which was focused on 11 airlines' websites and apps around key consumer journeys.

YC set out some of the emerging findings from the audit so far, which would hopefully drive improvements across the sector.

LH explained that 'speed dating' sessions were due to take place in May to give airlines, the CAA and Consumer Panel members the opportunity to hear directly from consumers with different accessibility needs on their experiences of using airline websites and apps.

Members welcomed Hassell's and the CAA's work in this area and looked forward to reviewing the audit findings. JW thanked YW and LH for their presentation.

7. CAA Communications Strategy

AM, RC and JWM joined the meeting and gave an update on the CAA's Communications Strategy. AM reminded those present of the changes to the Strategy over recent years and introduced JWM, who had been recruited to the team to work on consumer issues.

RC talked through the presentation slides detailing the overarching aims of the Communications Strategy and achievements. These included increasing proactivity on consumer issues, advocating and supporting CAA objectives, creating an integrated communications approach, developing and delivering a plan for stakeholder engagement, providing critical evaluation and developing a Social Media Strategy. He also discussed the media and political landscape and outlined the forward strategy and the timetable for implementation.

JWM detailed key statistics in relation to social media and the different platforms used by the CAA, noting that the aim was to move towards a more targeted approach to the promotion of consumer issues, such as passenger rights.

RH queried the number of clicks on the passenger section of the CAA website. AM noted that the pages were in the process of being updated and it was planned that these would be influenced by the approach taken in the newly updated ATOL website which was more consumer friendly. Accessibility would also be taken into account.

JG suggested the Financial Services Compensation Scheme as an example of a good campaign on deposit protection, which was well understood by consumers. AM and RC welcomed this, and noted that they would be happy to learn from other sectors.

RC discussed the visibility of the Panel and offered the team's assistance in helping further promote the Panel's impact and visibility across the CAA, including through blogs and Town Hall meetings. It was suggested that FW should liaise with the Comms team to discuss further initiatives, including the idea of developing a newsletter which had previously been raised.

JW thanked the Communications team for their update and asked that they keep the Panel informed of any areas in which they would like input.

8. Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill (REUL)

DO and HS updated those present on the REUL Bill. HS explained that from a consumer rights perspective the focus was on Regulation 261 (Passenger Rights for Flight Delays or Flight Cancellations), which is important to retain. It was thought that the majority of legislation would be preserved, including the PTRs and ATOL. Close contact was being maintained with civil service colleagues, particularly in DfT.

DO explained that since the update at the January meeting, progress in Parliament had been delayed by around two months and Royal Assent was now expected in May/June. The reason for the delay was unclear but it was necessary to ensure that retained legislation was not 'sunsetted' by omission, and that there was appropriate parliamentary scrutiny. The current sunset date remained planned for the end of 2023 but any further significant delay would risk implementation as plans could become undeliverable. He added that DfT were preparing different treatment options and statutory instruments and he and HS would keep the Panel up to date as things progressed.

JW queried whether there would be enough parliamentary time to deal with all of the statutory instruments if there was any further delay and DO confirmed that one of the options was for the automatic sunset date to be reviewed.

JW thanked DO and HS for their update.

9. CAA Service Design and Customer Experience

GF joined the meeting and provided an update on the CAA's approach to Service Design and Customer Experience. She went through her presentation, highlighting the following points:

- The difference between consumers and customers and how consumers could become customers
- The progress made on each step of the target operating model and the move from service delivery to customer experience
- Customer experience as a strategic priority and as part of the CAA's Strategy
- The benefits of a customer experience focus for the CAA taking into account the cost of complaints, efficiency and the Public Body Review
- The main customer groups that interact with the CAA's digital platforms, including stakeholders, individual members of the public, and organisations
- The CAA customer experience vision and the CAA experience principles underpinning the vision (acting as one CAA, making the complex simpler, taking responsibility, creating trust and building relationships)
- The scope of the project, pilot projects and resources and how the CAA was building vulnerability into service design

GF explained that an organisation called Cx Partners was being engaged as they were research specialists in the field. Research findings and recommendations would be presented to ExCo in due course and a customer experience toolkit would be produced for sharing and audit processes and there would be peer review of structures and a measurement of customer experience performance. Implementation was planned from September onwards, and GF offered to present an update to the Panel in due course to seek their feedback.

JW thanked GF for her comprehensive presentation.

10. AOB

The Chair detailed some of the work that would be prioritised ahead of the next Panel meeting.

- The Panel's Annual Report, which would be submitted to the Board in June and published soon after. As part of this, FW would be carrying out a gap analysis against the Panel's work programme to identify possible areas of focus for the remainder of the year.

- In June there would be an ExCo meeting on the Consumer Strategy and on accessibility, which JW was due to attend. In this context, the Panel Chair was expected to attend at least two Board meetings per year to discuss the Annual Report and other relevant consumer issues.
- The Environmental Sustainability Panel's work programme was due to be published shortly, and joint work with them was being planned. In addition, new consumer research in the area of environmental information might be taken forward.
- The Panel would draft a response to the CAA's proposed Airline Accessibility Framework consultation.
- The Panel's attendance at DfT's round table discussion on accessibility in June.
- Engaging with DfT and AvSec's work on messaging around new security rules on liquids, gels and laptops.
- PACT updating the Panel on progress following the April workshop.

JW asked members to let FW know of any additional items.

There was nothing further to discuss and JW thanked members for taking part. The meeting closed at 16.23hrs.