

# **Consumer Panel Minutes**

## **1100 – 1600, 10 October 2024 Earhart Meeting Room**

### **Westferry/Teams**

#### **Attendees**

##### **Consumer Panel**

Jenny Willott (JW) Panel Chair  
Carol Brennan (CB) Panel Members  
David Thomas (DT)  
Helen Dolphin (HD) *Teams*  
Jacqueline Minor (JM)  
James Walker (JWa)  
Jennifer Genevieve (JG)  
Rick Hill (RH)  
Vaughan Williams (VW)

Freya Whiteman (FW) Secretariat  
Alison Harris (AH) Minute Taker

##### **Invited Guests**

John Cottrill (JC) (items 1 to 10)  
Anna Bowles (AB) (item 2 onwards)  
Rob Bishton (RB) (item 4) (Teams)  
Gary Cutts (GC) (items 5 & 6)  
Sophie-Louise O'Sullivan (SOS) (item 6) (Teams)  
Selina Chadha (SC) (items 1 to 4)  
Rosie Whitbread (RL) (item 7)  
Claire Lambert (CL) (item 7)  
Nikki Circou (NC) (item 8)  
Jay Heath (JC) (item 8)

#### **Declaration of Interests and Minutes**

The register of interests, as circulated before the meeting, was taken as read and no further declarations were made. The Minutes of the July meeting were approved.

##### **1. Chair's Update**

JW welcomed the members to the meeting and particularly welcomed JC from the Communications Department who will be attending all Panel meetings going forwards and welcomed SC who is joining in person for the first time as the new Group Director of Consumers and Markets.

JW set out the key developments since the last Panel meeting in July, noting that it had been a particularly busy quarter:

- The Panel's away day was held in late July, where members went through the progress made against the previous work programme. Savanta also presented an update on the latest consumer insights and colleagues across the CAA presented sustainability and innovation updates. This all came

together, along with some interesting horizon scanning material, to help inform the areas of focus for the new work programme. The away day also included a discussion on ways of working and how to build on the Panel's impact and visibility across the CAA, which FW will update on later in the agenda.

- The Panel's Annual Report was published in August, which was delayed due to the General Election.
- The Panel submitted its response to the Law Commission's consultation on aviation autonomy, which was a complex task.
- The recruitment process has started to replace two members (CB and HD) whose terms end next March. JW requested the members share the advert with their contacts.

JW updated on her meetings with CAA colleagues. JW met with the CAA's Chair yesterday and also had her first introductory meeting with SC. Last month, JW met with Tim Johnson (Director of Communications, Strategy and Policy and Chief of Staff), Sophie-Louise O'Sullivan (Director of CAA Future Flight Programme and Head of Future Safety and Innovation) and with Harry Armstrong (Head of Sustainability). She also met with Jonathan Spence (General Counsel and Company Secretary). JW also met with AB on a monthly basis.

FW attended the Communications' Hub to give an overview of the Panel and their work for information.

In terms of external meetings, in August JW and FW attended the Consumer Panel Chairs meeting. This included an interesting discussion on the pros and cons of statutory versus voluntary panels and the role of regulators in providing information to educate consumers. In September, JW also met with Tim Alderslade to discuss a range of topics including consumer rights and sustainability. JW also met with Ruth Mallors-Ray, Chair of the Environmental Sustainability Panel, to discuss areas of collaboration and arrange a joint "lunch and learn" session on the interactions between consumer and environmental policy objectives.

## **2. Members' Update**

JW asked members to consider the draft proposal for new sub-groups, which aligns with the key areas of focus in the new work programme and to send FW any preferences.

JW asked members to update on their activities over the last quarter:

- HD has been asked by DfT to join their accessibility task and finish group.
- On consumer environmental information, a workshop was held last week with sustainability colleagues on the draft principles consultation. FW will draft a written response on behalf of the Panel.
- Members had been regularly inputting to the design of the Aviation Consumer Survey. Fieldwork had just launched, and an initial debrief is planned towards the end of October.
- The innovation sub-group held a workshop with CAA colleagues on how to align the AI and Consumer Principles.

- The economic regulation sub-group met CAA colleagues in July to discuss the Gatwick commitments consultation.
- JWa and HD would be taking part in user testing for the new ATOL claims portal, and a workshop would be held in December to discuss the project in more detail.

### **3. New Work Programme**

FW thanked members for their comments, and provided an overview noting that the document drew on a wider evidence base compared to previous work programmes. JW thanked members for their comments and asked any further comments to be sent to FW. FW confirmed the intention is to publish in early November (date to be confirmed). Members were happy to sign off the work programme.

### **4. Update from CAA's CEO and Head of Consumer Policy and Enforcement**

RB noted that he and the CAA's Chair recently met the Transport Minister, who had attended the Farnborough Air Show. The new Government had a strong consumer focus, particularly in relation to accessibility and vulnerable passengers which was encouraging from a CAA perspective. In this context, there was a discussion on the poor treatment Frank Gardiner received on a recent flight which had gained notable press.

RB went on to note that the Minister was looking for reassurance from the CAA that consumers know their rights and was keen to understand the CAA's views on resilience following the NATS failure last August. SC noted that she is considering options for more funding in the consumer area, which will lead to more consumer benefits.

There was a discussion on the CAA being given more consumer powers. In this context, it was noted that while the Government was supportive, in the first instance it was looking for evidence that the CAA had exhausted the limitations of its existing powers.

AB provided a consumer update to the Panel. This included an update on ADR, the increase in requests for special assistance and the wheelchair information request. AB also updated on economic regulation including the H7 timetable, Outcome Based Regulation Mid-Term Review and Gatwick commitments consultation.

### **5. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Update**

GC was welcomed to the meeting to update the Panel on recent consumer research undertaken by the UKRI Future Flight Challenge (FFC).

GC provided an overview of the FFC. Its objective is to 'knit together' a viable ecosystem to enable future air mobility with new forms of transport, supported by safety case frameworks and robust legal frameworks. The FFC includes 20 challenge programmes and over 100 projects in areas including drones, advanced air mobility and regional air mobility. GC noted that public and consumer attitudes, acceptance and trust were a crucial part of enabling the FFC.

GC highlighted a couple of exciting projects including the development of the UK's biggest drone highway, Skyports and Bicester Motion plans for the UK's vertiport testbed.

GC noted that the FFC had completed the development phase (phase 2) and was currently in the demonstration phase (phase 3). It would gradually pivot into the industrialisation phase (phase 4). Phase 4 focuses on enabling services to become commercially viable, fostering investment and increasing levels of production to bring down costs. To commercialise Future Flight, GC outlined that a number of technical prerequisites are needed, including airspace solutions to accommodate new entrants, system reliability, aircraft capability, infrastructure and regulation. Alongside the technical side, a number of socio-commercial prerequisites are also needed including customer demand, people capital, adaptability, viable economics and the social licence. GC noted that there needs to be sufficient demand to allow for economic viability, and they wanted to avoid the risk that future flight is only available at a premium for wealthy members of society.

On the social licence, GC considered this was an important tool for gaining sufficient public support around future flight, and reducing the risk of strong opposition, and that there might be a role for the CAA and Panel in this space. In this context, GC highlighted that the social science research undertaken as part of the FFC was purely an academic exercise trying to ascertain the public's attitudes towards future flight rather than trying to nudge them towards a particular outcome.

GC went on to outline the key findings from two studies recently undertaken as part of the FFC - a Public Deliberative Dialogue and Future Flight Survey.

GC and the Panel discussed the findings, including the public's perception of the CAA's role in the area of future flight. GC and Panel members went on to discuss the 14 principles from the Public Deliberative Dialogue, including whether they could form part of a future 'social licence.' In particular, members felt principle 10 (designing future flight technologies with accessibility in mind from the start), was particularly important, and HD felt future flight was a good opportunity to fix problems in the current aviation system. This was followed by a discussion on whether the design of new modes of future flight could build in more inclusive design to cater for different wheelchair/mobility aids.

JW thanked GC for introducing the Panel to this fascinating area and invited him to return to the Panel at a future date.

## **6. Future Safety and Innovation / BVLOS Update**

JW welcomed SOS to the meeting who provided an overview of Future Safety and Innovation (FS&I), which delivers the CAA-led part of the FFC. In 2019, the CAA set up the Innovation Hub using funding from the Regulatory Pioneers Fund, which was put in place to offer advice and guidance to innovators and to create an enabling regulatory environment for innovation in the UK. In 2021, this Hub was split into two resulting in the Innovation Advisory Services team and the Innovation Hub. In 2023, a technical innovation team (FS&I) was set up to deliver the large programmes of changes required to enable innovation across the UK.

FS&I brought together different teams across the CAA and introduced a programme approach to delivering the wide ranging activities in these areas. This included General Aviation (GA), Remotely Piloted Systems (RPAS) Unit, Design and Certification Team, Emerging Policy Specialist roles and Challenge Leads. A new team was also set up to trial and test new concepts.

SOS outlined a success story in FS&I around the drone approval process using a service called PDRA01. In the past this would take 3 months, with many forms to complete across different systems. This had now been streamlined and was much more efficient, with forms now taking under 30 minutes on average to review

SOS went on to outline the CAA's role in the FFC, including key strategic outcomes around BVLOS (Beyond Visual Line of Sight), eVTOL (electric vertical take-off and landing) and a network of new vertiport operations between 2024 – 2030.

JW raised the uncertainty around demand in the market for future flight, and the issue of trade-offs in respect of constrained airspace. SOS noted that constrained airspace was one of the biggest challenges, in terms of how to integrate new entrants into an already constrained airspace, referencing section 70 of the Transport Act 2000 which requires the CAA to maintain a balance between safe, efficient operations and fair, equitable access for all airspace users.

DT queried whether there was any read across or commonality with autonomous driving. SoS noted that in areas including liability there is likely to be some cross over.

JW thanked SOS for her presentation and noted that the Panel was happy to help FS&I develop guidance in other areas similar to the previous guidance the Panel had helped shape on how the Consumer Principles could apply to Advanced Air Mobility. SOS though this could be useful and took an action to consider this further.

## **7. Space Update**

JW welcomed RW and CL to the meeting. RW provided an overview of the CAA's role in regulating the commercial spaceflight industry in the UK, noting that the CAA enables space activities which are safe for the public, in line with UK national security and interests and meet the UK's international obligations.

RW went onto outline the team's core regulatory activity and current priorities, including regulating 14 organisations holding orbital licences for 729 satellites, 2 spaceport licensees, 1 vertical launch (Saxavord) and 1 horizontal launch (Spaceport Cornwall) and 1 range control licensee.

The team uses an 'outcome focused' safety regime, which mirrors the regulation of the chemical processing and the oil and gas sectors, which is different from the CAA's approach to regulating aviation safety, which is more prescriptive.

For example, in space activities applicants and licensees must demonstrate that they understand the major hazards and risks arising from their spaceflight activities, and take the necessary steps to reduce such risks as low as reasonably practical (ALARP).

There was a discussion around major hazards including events with the potential to cause significant harm to people and/or property.

RW and CL provided an overview of the UK's vertical spaceport (Saxavord) in the Shetlands, whose risk profile has more in common with an oil refinery than an aerodrome, and whose licence permits a maximum of 30 launches per year – which is in part constrained by adverse weather.

Members raised questions around 'space debris' and who is responsible for managing this. RW noted that this was a significant issue, and required international agreement and global solutions, as every nation is responsible for managing their own debris.

RW provided an insight to her team's plans for 2025 including monitoring improvements, developing technology and continuing to work with government bodies and other departments in the CAA and Government. In particular, there is a two-year programme with secondments from the CAA's Medical Team to support DfT's commitment to enable human participation in spaceflight activity. The CAA's space team also works with space regulators around the world to promote high standards and support the long-term goal of interoperability.

JW thanked RW and CL for their fascinating presentation and invited them to return to the Panel at a future date.

## **8. ADR Update**

NC and JH were welcomed to the meeting. NC provided an overview of the planned review of the CAA's ADR entities and consumers' overall experience of ADR, and noted that they were seeking the Panel's views on:

- Whether the CAA's planned scope for the review sufficiently covers the consumer ADR journey.
- Whether the Panel has any additional suggestions on what the review should assess.

NC noted that the review was focused on two key areas: (1) the consumer experience of complaints escalations using ADR; and (2) the ongoing expertise of ADR entities, including recruitment and training practices, quality control processes and reviewing how ADR entities respond to their mistakes and complaints. Expertise requirements were previously assessed by the CAA, but the CAA wanted further assurance that that ADR entities continued to meet these given significant increases in case volumes in recent years. The CAA planned to go out to tender to find an independent consultant to look at and report on these areas in respect of different ADR entities, how they compare and to consider what improvements could be introduced to improve consumer outcomes.

As part of this, the CAA will also examine the role of the Independent Assessor. This role was introduced by the CAA in 2018 to ensure consumers had an independent escalation point for service complaints and to provide the CAA with independent visibility of issues within ADR.

NC and JH set out potential bidders/firms who might be suitable for the ADR review, and asked for members views or recommendations. Recommendations were provided by various members of the Panel for the CAA to explore. Members also recommended that the CAA speaks to the Ombudsman Association and considers the independent review of the Financial Ombudsman in 2018, which had some useful recommendations on how to incentivise staff appropriately around the volume, quality and speed of resolving complaints.

NC asked if the review should include feedback from consumers about their ADR experience. Members felt it would be most useful to talk to consumers during the process to understand their experience, and not at the end when they have/have not received compensation. AB noted that it might not be possible to engage with consumers directly due to GDPR and they might need to go through the ADR bodies instead.

JW noted that there should be a focus on informing consumers during the process, so they are regularly updated. This is likely to give consumers a better perception of the ADR process.

Overall, members considered the review was focusing on the right areas and offered to continue providing support where needed. NC thanked the Panel for their input.

### **9. Consumer Panel Visibility Update**

FW provided an update on progress made in improving the Panel's visibility across the CAA, which was an action from the Panel's away day in July.

FW provided a 'work in progress' demo of the Panel's new intranet page which is only accessible to CAA staff. The aim of the intranet page was to introduce the Panel to a broader range of CAA colleagues and to clarify how they can help colleagues embed the consumer interest across different policy areas. A range of testimonials from CAA colleagues would also be uploaded on the intranet page to demonstrate the benefits of engaging with the Panel at an early stage.

Members were supportive of the new page, and considered it was a good step in improving the visibility of the Panel. HD asked that accessibility be considered, and FW noted that this would be reflected in the next iteration of the intranet page. A further demo would be provided at the next Panel meeting.

### **10. AOB/Actions**

There was nothing further to discuss and JW thanked members for taking part. The meeting closed at 1600.