

# News story: A New Champion for Mobile and Broadband Customers

The government will legislate to create this new advocate which will have the power to stand up for consumers, ensuring they get the right treatment from mobile, broadband, pay-TV, and landline providers.

This brings Telecoms in line with other essential services sectors, such as energy, water, post or transport which already have dedicated, independent and well-funded consumer advocates.

Well-resourced consumer advocacy plays a vital role in markets. The new advocate will:

- Conduct research and use it to highlight areas where the consumer experience can be improved
- Represent consumers in key policy and regulatory debates, as the rollout of full fibre broadband and 5G mobile technology gathers pace
- Provide direct support and advice to consumers, particularly the most vulnerable, who can struggle to engage with what is an increasingly complex market, as the Extra Help Unit does in the energy sector
- Work directly with industry to help them improve consumer outcomes, for example by bringing together industry best practice
- Support our digital connectivity ambitions by running campaigns to help consumers get the best deals and upgrade to better and faster services, similar to the Big Energy Saving Week

Minister for Digital Margot James said:

“It’s clear that some mobile and broadband customers are vulnerable to unfair business practices.

“We’ve already strengthened Ofcom’s powers to improve outcomes for consumers but a strong, independent consumer champion will empower customers and hold telecoms companies to account, as well as working with them to drive improvements in their services.

“The consumer advocate will help deliver a Britain that works for everyone putting more money into the pockets of ordinary working people.”

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will launch a

consultation outlining further details over the summer, including options for creating the new advocate and how it could be funded.

As part of its modern Industrial Strategy, the Government is committed to improving consumer confidence alongside continued investment in the roll out of faster, more reliable broadband and mobile technologies across the UK.

Telecoms consumers are getting increasingly good value for money with the geographical coverage of faster and more reliable broadband and mobile networks increasing, and average monthly spending falling over the last decade. However, issues with the consumer experience in the sector remain, including the existence of a number of unfair practices, including:

- People still being charged for handsets that they have already paid off, with Ofcom estimating UK mobile customers could be overpaying by up to £330 million each year
- Loyal broadband customers paying a 'loyalty penalty' of nearly £1 billion each year according to the CMA
- The Institute of Customer Service Satisfaction Index revealing telecommunications and media consistently compares poorly against other markets, ranking second last in January 2018 and third last in January 2019, ahead of Utilities and Transport
- Households that sign up to combined TV and broadband packages being hit with loyalty penalties of up to almost £700 a year, according to Which?