

Ofcom consultation

I receive a great deal of correspondence from my constituents about poor service from telephone and internet companies. I am aware how much delays in getting repairs done, missed appointments and starting a new service costs in terms of time and money.






I have received the communication below from the Chief Executive of Ofcom. They are consulting on proposals to require phone and broadband to pay automatic compensation in these cases. The consultation ends on 5 June and you can access it at:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-1/automatic-compensation>

“Ofcom has today set out new proposals to require phone and broadband companies to pay automatic compensation – either a cash payment, or a credit on a bill – to customers who suffer slow repairs, missed appointments or delays to starting new services.

When a customer’s landline or broadband goes wrong, that is frustrating enough without having to fight to get fair compensation from the phone company. So we are proposing new rules to force providers to pay money back to customers automatically, whenever repairs or installations don’t happen on time, or when people wait in for an engineer who doesn’t turn up. This would mean customers are properly compensated, while providers will be incentivised to work harder to improve their service.

Compensation payments would be set by Ofcom, and designed to reflect the degree of harm suffered by consumers. Here is how Ofcom’s automatic compensation scheme would work:

Problem	A landline or broadband customer would be entitled to compensation if...	Amount of compensation
Delayed repair following loss of service	Their service has stopped working and it is not fully fixed after two full working days.	 £10 for each calendar day that the service is not repaired
Missed appointments	An engineer does not turn up for a scheduled appointment, or it is cancelled with less than 24 hours’ notice.	 £10  £20 £30 per missed appointment
Delays with the start of a new service	Their provider promises to start a new service on a particular date, but fails to do so.	 £5  £1 £6 for each calendar day of delay, including the missed start date

We estimate that our plans would mean up to 2.6 million additional customers could receive up to £185m in new compensation payments each year. Currently, there are 7.2m instances where landline or broadband customers suffer delayed repairs, missed appointments or delays to new installations. Financial compensation from companies, totalling around £16.3m, is currently paid out

in 1.1m of these cases.

Around one-third of small and medium-sized enterprises choose residential landline and broadband services and would also benefit from our compensation proposals.

We are consulting until 5th June and plan to publish a statement at the end of the year”.

With best wishes

Helen

Reassurance to all EU citizens living and working in the Wokingham constituency

I have always said to those worried that I am sure all EU citizens living and working legally in Wokingham now will be free to stay if they wish after Brexit. The UK government has always indicated that is it wish, but pointed out we need the same assurance for our citizens living on the continent. At last Mr Juncker, the President of the Commission, seems to have said as much. He regards, he says, such a matter as one of “respecting human dignity”. He said “This is not about bargaining”. Exactly.

I will continue to press the EU to do the right thing, as I want all to be reassured that there will be no forced evictions of people following Brexit. I know we all in Wokingham want those full reassurances. We seem to be much closer to them today.

The President of the Commission gets it right at last

Mr Juncker in his recent interview at last acknowledges that granting the right to stay and to work on the continent for all those UK citizens who currently do so is “about respecting human dignity.” He now says “This is not about bargaining”.

I have been a sustained critic of the EU’s refusal to live up to decent

values and reassure all UK citizens living in the EU that they are free to stay if they wish. I am therefore glad The Commission has now shifted its position. I have long been reassuring all EU citizens in the UK who ask that they will be welcome to stay and work here if they wish, as I assumed the EU would not in the end throw UK citizens out. It is just bizarre that it has taken them so long to say so, and strange that even now it is not a formal statement by the rest of the EU as a whole.

If anyone in the UK remains worried about the EU's intentions then they should write and lobby the Commission and their MEPs. The UK government has always been clear it does not intend to threaten EU citizens living in the UK.

What should be the age to receive your State pension?

We have received a couple of reports this week discussing the age at which people should be entitled to a State pension based on their NI contributions.

Current policy is to raise the age from 65 to 66 in 2020, and to 67 in 2028. As people live longer, so the cost of their pensions rises without a proportionate increase in their contributions over their working lives. Whilst the state retirement scheme is a pay as you go one, where each generation pays for its parents generation out of current NI payments, individual pension entitlement is still based on your past contribution record.

The Cridland report suggests raising the age to 69 between 2037 and 2039 and going higher thereafter. The Government Actuary suggests 69 by 2053-5, with another variant bringing in 69 as early as 2040.

The Report also raises the issue of whether after the end of this Parliament there should be some change to the triple lock. Currently the government is pledged to increase pensions each year by the highest of earnings, prices (CPI) or 2.5%. Dropping one or two of these requirements could make progressive savings to the total cost. In recent years the 2.5% minimum has meant pensioner incomes rising faster than incomes in work.

I would be interested in your thoughts on all this. There does seem to be a good case to say that as longevity rises there should be a proportionate rise in the pension age to keep some balance between an individual's contributions when working and their pension receipts. Allowing the triple lock has helped narrow the gap between pensioner incomes and working incomes. There is an issue in how much further people think that should go.

The extreme Centre

I see Mr Blair and others are out and about complaining that the centre is not strong enough. He thinks the centre ground needs reinforcing, as he dislikes the way it is assailed by Brexiteers of all persuasions, and by the Corbyn tendency in the Labour party. He still sees new Labour as ideal, as the perfect balance between "the extremes". It is high time this piece of self serving nonsense was exposed to some criticism.

The problems with New Labour were their three main extremisms.

They took an extreme view about UK intervention in Middle Eastern wars, believing we could use military force to create liberal democracies in various Middle Eastern countries. The public disagreed, and the results of their military actions despite much bravery and heroic effort by our forces were disappointing. They did not understand or manage the politics of the Middle Eastern countries well, relying too much on force.

They took an extreme view about the ability of the economy to withstand a huge build up in public and private debt and credit, before making an even more extreme judgement to bring some banks crashing down for no good reason. They told us they had abolished the boom-bust cycle, only to preside over the biggest boom-bust since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

They took an extreme view about EU integration and government. Whilst telling us each Treaty was a mild tidying up exercise with all the potency of the Beano, they signed the UK up to a comprehensive cradle of laws and controls making democratic government in the UK difficult. They always denied the public a referendum vote on their centralising tendencies, always denied their significance, and always claimed when challenged that EU laws were for the best regardless of what they said. Their EU actions led directly to the referendum which they helped lose.

Mr Blair needs to grasp that the world has moved on from New Labour. We now know their economic claims were false, as their era ended with major recession and banking crash. We know their EU policy was based on the lie that the EU was only of interest to Conservatives, and that nothing important was happening. We know their policy of favouring large corporations and encouraging cheap labour from the continent to take the low paid jobs they created was not popular with many voters.