



# Digital Economy Bill

## Factsheet – Supporting Consumers

(clauses 2, 3 and 69-73)

### What are we going to do?

- give consumers the choice of the best telecoms services available to them
- make it easier for consumers to switch providers
- help consumers receive compensation when they don't get what they've paid for
- put compensation arrangements in the communications sector in line with utilities like gas and water

### How are we going to do it?

- Ofcom will have the power to require providers to make available more information to consumers, including complaints statistics and accurate broadband speeds
- open up more information to enable innovative apps and consumer tools
- require providers to follow procedures set by Ofcom when customers wish to switch provider, or when compensation is due

### Culture Secretary John Whittingdale said:

"We are more reliant on broadband and phone services than ever before. So we want it to be as easy as possible for consumers to spot the best deal for them, and switch providers quickly and easily if they want to.

"The measures we are introducing will help make sure consumers are better informed about the quality of these services and the switching process is much simpler. Also, in those cases when things don't go right, consumers will get automatic compensation."

### Background

Despite all the price comparison websites, information and search tools that the internet has to offer, consumers still struggle to choose the right services. Will my broadband really be at the advertised speed? Will I really be connected on Monday? Will I have a reliable connection? What is the 4G coverage like on my train commute? Choosing and switching communication services should not be a gamble.

The government is committed to ensuring that consumers are well informed about the services that are available to them, are able to act on that

information by easily switching provider if they choose to do so and are compensated quickly if they are not getting the service they paid for.

The Digital Economy Bill will give Ofcom powers to force providers to disclose data such as complaints rates, quality of service and broadband speeds, so people can make informed choices, making it easier and quicker for consumers to switch providers.

Open data brings transparency, accountability and innovation. For example, Transport for London's release of their service data has led to the development of hundreds of innovative apps which benefit consumers. The government wants to bring these benefits to the communications sector by making their data more widely available.

Ofcom identified switching as a priority in its strategic review of digital communications, and is this year consulting on mobile and triple-play (broadband, fixed line and pay-TV) switching. The government believes that consumers should only have to deal with the party that most wants their switch to go smoothly – their new provider. The bill will ensure that Ofcom can require communications providers to stick to specific switching arrangements that could, for example, eliminate the need to contact the provider you are leaving.

Communications services, and in particular broadband, are increasingly essential services like utilities. The government believes that consumers should be compensated automatically if things go wrong. This model already exists in the energy sector where consumers may be entitled to payment if service levels are not met. We want to ensure similar arrangements are in place for those who have their communication services disrupted and the bill will make explicit that Ofcom is given powers to achieve this.

## Key Questions and Answers

- **How will consumers benefit from these measures?**  
The bill aims to address the barriers that stop consumers actively engaging in the market. Ultimately, engaged consumers drive competition, which can drive prices down and quality up.
- **When will automatic compensation be available and how much?** Ofcom will consult further on the detail of the scheme which we expect to be in place from next year.