



Meg Hillier MP
Chair, The Committee of Public Accounts
c/o Clerk of the Committee of Public Accounts
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Jonathan Oxley
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Dear Meg Hillier MP,

I am writing in response to the Committee's report *Consumer Protection*, published in July 2019, in my role as Chief Executive of the UK Regulators' Network (UKRN). The UKRN brings together regulators from the UK's financial services, utilities and transport sectors to work collaboratively for the benefit of consumers and the economy. We currently have thirteen members, including the FCA, Ofcom, Ofgem and Ofwat, the four regulators in your report.

We welcome the report's recommendations and the focus on working collaboratively. UKRN is an important vehicle for regulatory collaboration, and we will be working with the four regulators named in the report on taking forward the recommendations. We have agreed with those regulators that the UKRN will be a key mechanism through which they, with other UKRN members where relevant, will work together to develop consistent approaches to common problems for consumers across sectors, and will develop joint strategies where appropriate.

This will build on existing collaborative work already happening through the UKRN, including:

- The UKRN, FCA, Ofcom, Ofgem and Ofwat have been working closely with the Office for the Public Guardian to develop a set of **consistent guidelines on power of attorney** for use across the telecoms, water, energy and financial services markets. These guidelines help deliver an easier, and more consistent experience for consumers across these sectors, at what is inevitably a difficult and stressful time for those affected. We conducted extensive consultation across industry and consumer groups to ensure the guidance is sensitive to the different regulatory contexts and meets the needs of consumers, consumer advocates and frontline staff. The guidelines were published in May 2019.
- The UKRN has, in collaboration with Ofgem and Ofwat, been working with water and energy companies on data sharing to ensure companies are better able to identify and support consumers in vulnerable circumstances. Safe and secure sharing of data across water and energy companies, with customer consent, can reduce the burden on consumers in vulnerable circumstances and enable companies to offer them seamless priority support. In November 2018 we published a report showing energy and water companies are making progress in putting this kind of data sharing in place and are on track to roll this out across energy and water companies in England and Wales in 2020, although continued focus will be required to overcome challenges around customer consent, staff training and data quality. In March this year, Water UK and ENA published their response to the **report**, setting out the key milestones to England and Wales roll out. UKRN, Ofgem and Ofwat continue to support the project, and UKRN is working with Ofcom and the Northern Ireland Utilities

Regulator to explore whether lessons from the project can be rolled out in other areas and/or to other sectors, including telecoms.

- UKRN have also been working closely with the FCA, Ofcom, Ofgem and Ofwat to identify existing best practise and develop agreed minimum standards for consumers in vulnerable circumstances. We have been working with a range of experts as we develop this work, including organising workshops with Scope, Money and Mental Health and Citizens Advice. A publication setting out how regulators will be taking this forward will be published later in 2019.

More examples of the ways in which UKRN members have been working together are set out in our annual report and forward work plan, available on our website here:

<https://www.ukrn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/UKRN-Forward-Work-Programme-19-20-Final.pdf>

We also recognise that the nature of the challenges facing consumers in our sectors mean we need to do more. The work plan sets out the substantial increase in the resourcing for 2019/20 made by members, in the form of both additional funding and staff. It also sets out our ambitious plans for further collaboration across a wide-ranging programme of work organised around two key themes: vulnerability and infrastructure and investment, including a major new project looking at improving outcomes for vulnerable consumers across the sectors we regulate, including telecoms, financial services, water and energy.

We also note the Committee's recommendation that the regulators should work together to identify and where possible address policy and legal barriers to protecting consumers. We have agreed with the FCA, Ofcom, Ofgem and Ofwat that the UKRN will provide this mechanism. As an example, our recent letter to the National Infrastructure Commission sets out two key areas we have identified where changes could be made that would facilitate more effective joint working: improving regulators' ability to share data with each other and extending any changes made to the CMA's consumer enforcement regime to Ofcom, Ofgem and Ofwat (the three regulators subject to that review), as well as to other regulators with concurrent powers who would find this helpful. A copy of that letter is attached for your reference.

We hope this response is helpful and provides reassurance that the UKRN and our members are committed to working together to deliver improved consumer outcomes. We would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised in more detail with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Oxley
Chief Executive, UKRN