



Payphone removals consultation

Background information

On the 14th March 2006 the Office of Communications (Ofcom) published a statement following their 2005 review of universal service in the Telecommunications market, which includes a requirement for payphone provision to meet reasonable needs. Part of that statement amended BT's obligations with regard to the removal of payphone service¹. Ofcom placed the responsibility for assessing any requests by BT to remove public payphones upon each local authority, including the initiation of a consultation process to canvas the views of the local community, generally involving other public organisations such as the parish or community councils. Any objections to the removal of individual payphones need to be objectively justified in terms of meeting the reasonable needs of end-users. The formal notification letter will include links to the guidance that can help you with this process.

BT has a regulatory obligation to ensure the adequate provision of public payphones throughout the UK² in order to meet the reasonable needs of end-users. However, much has changed in the UK communications sector, and continues to evolve, since this requirement was put in place well over a decade ago. The take up of mobiles, allowing people to make calls away from their home or office has changed the communications behaviour of most people in the UK and continues to do so - **figure 1** shows the very low percentage of people that now use Payphones and how this is continuing to decline.

Figure 1 - Use of Public Payphones

Proportion (%) of all respondents

	Jan 2015	Oct 2015
Total UK (2,045/2,136)	4%	3%
England (1,706/1,782)	3%	1%
Scotland (180/180)	6%	5%
Wales (99/106)	4%	1%
Northern Ireland* (60/68)	14%	8%
16 - 34 (601/664)	5%	3%
35 - 64 (895/891)	4%	3%
65+ (549/581)	2%	2%
AB (372/363)	3%	2%
C1C2 (940/1,016)	3%	2%
DE (733/757)	5%	4%

Source: Kantar Media Omnibus, January and October 2015

Base All UK adults aged 16+: January 2015: 2,045, October 2015: 2,136. * Caution: low base sizes in Northern Ireland.

Q.12 Which, if any, of the following communications services have you used in the last 12 months?

¹ http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/uso/uso_statement/

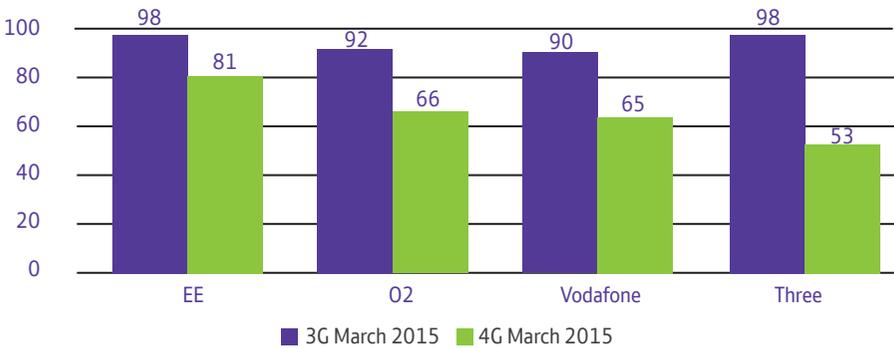
² excluding the Hull Area

93% of adults owned a personal mobile phone in 2015, of which 71% have a smartphone, a 5% increase on the figure for 2014, with 89.9m mobile phone subscriptions active in 2014³. Ofcom also reported in April 2015 that 98% of UK premises had either 3G or 4G mobile coverage in their direct proximity (see figures 2) with the majority (94%) having indoor coverage. This is significant because, so long as there is network coverage from a mobile provider, it's also now possible to call the emergency services, even when there is no credit or no coverage from your own mobile provider.

Figure 2

Estimated 3G and 4G premises coverage, by mobile network operator

Proportion of premises covered (%)



Source: Ofcom, based on predicted coverage data supplied by operators

Vastly improved coverage and access to cheap mobile calls means that many public payphones within BT's national estate are no longer necessary for the community they were originally intended to benefit. The overhead of ongoing maintenance and repair for fraudulent claims of lost money, cashbox theft, repeated vandalism and the overall significant decline in any genuine use or customer need, has led to some payphones falling below the quality standards we wish to maintain for the future. However, repairing and maintaining payphones that will continue to be of little or no community benefit is not a solution. Instead, we propose to remove payphones identified as unnecessary whilst retaining public payphones that are used, as well as those we have categorised as providing a social need. In this way we believe we can fulfil our regulatory obligations, improve the quality of the payphone estate overall and continue to meet the needs of your community.

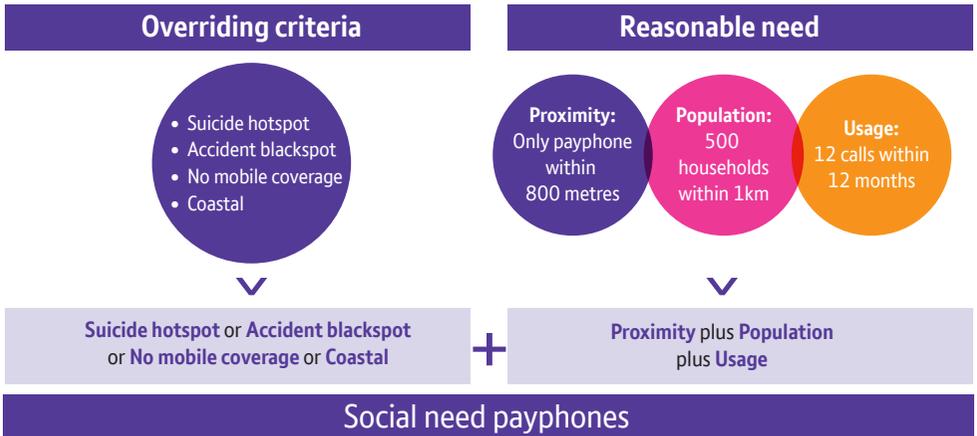
Through our Adopt a Kiosk scheme, communities will also have the opportunity to adopt any phone box for just £1⁴. The traditional, red phone boxes are part of our heritage and by opening them up for adoption, your community can keep these iconic landmarks and put them to great use.

³ <http://media.ofcom.org.uk/facts/>

⁴ The telephone equipment will be removed by BT

Uses made of phone boxes already adopted include a grocery shop, a wildlife information centre and the Community Heartbeat Trust charity has even installed defibrillators in some boxes. You can find out more about our Adopt a Kiosk scheme in the enclosed brochure.

The criteria for determining social need



As the model above shows, we're not consulting to remove any public payphones where there is a social need for retention. These have been identified as being located:

- in suicide hotspots
- in accident blackspots
- in an area without any mobile coverage
- within 400 metres of the coast

In addition to these payphones, we will not

remove payphones where there's a reasonable need. For this assessment we have used the following criteria, retaining payphones for which all three apply:

- is the only payphone within 800 metres
- had at least 12 calls of any type within a 12 month period
- the local population is not fewer than 500 households within 1 kilometre of the payphone.



Offices worldwide

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