

BT Payphone Closures

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Recommendation: that the Committee agrees or amends the draft final notification as set out in Appendix “A” as the Council’s response to the proposed closure of 25 payphones within Copeland.

BACKGROUND

On the 8th June 2008, British Telecom (BT) started a consultation period regarding a proposal to re-align payphone provision to meet consumer demand. BT states that this is due to changing consumer pattern with a drastic increase of Mobile Phone ownership, which has resulted in the number of calls being made from BT payphones be reduced by half. 99% of UK homes now have a home phone, and 90% have a Mobile Phone. Currently, there are 61, 792 payphones in Great Britain and 60% of these no longer cover their costs.

PROPOSALS

BT proposes to remove 25 public payphones within the Copeland District. These are in the following locations:

- Ulpha
- Monk Moors, Eskmeals
- Broad Oak, Ravenglass
- Corney
- Silecroft (two locations)
- The Green, Millom
- The Hill, Millom
- Screel View, Whitehaven
- Overend Road, Whitehaven
- The Square, Parton
- Cliff Road, Whitehaven
- Holmrook
- Wellington, Gosforth
- Main Street, Frizington
- Moor Row
- Parkside Road, Cleator Moor
- Bankend View, Bigrigg
- Dent View, Egremont
- Hinnings Road, Distington
- Haile, Egremont
- Lamplugh
- Cross Gates Lamplugh
- Ennerdale
- Winder, Frizington

THE FIRST NOTICE

The Council published notice of its first notification in respect of these closures in the Whitehaven News on 28 July 2008. The notice stated that the Council wished to retain all of the payphones earmarked for removal.

The deadline for the receipt of representations on the notification is 27 August 2008. So far 35 representations have been received. These are at Appendix "B".

This report was written before the end of the deadline for representations and the final notice will which take into account these representations will be drawn up following that deadline. As soon as it is completed it will be sent to the Committee along with any additional representations received.

In addition to the letters received, further evidence has been gathered through visiting each of the affected payphones, taking into consideration their ability to make a phone call, the mobile phone network coverage, and the overall condition of the payphone. Photos of those visits will be displayed at the meeting.

THE FINAL NOTICE

The Ofcom Guidance states that the "local veto" is such that BT must not bring its proposal into effect if it has received any written objection to the proposal by the council within the period ending 90 days (6 September 2008) after the period on which written notice was first given.

The Committee are asked to consider the responses to its First Notice and agree or amend as appropriate the final notice.

In doing so Ofcom recommends that a number of factors are taken into account.

SUGGESTED FACTORS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN MAKING THE DECISION

The Ofcom guidance states that it is considered reasonable that these factors may influence the decision made. This is not an exhaustive list.

- The demographics of the local population. Communities in areas of low incomes are more likely to rely on a call box.
- Number of households in the locality of the call box, and the effect that removing the call box would have on the local community.
- Mobile phone network coverage.
- The facility for making emergency calls in the area. In rural areas, mobile phone signal strength may be low and mean that call boxes are more needed.
- The revenue from the call box.

THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The decision must be:

- Objective,
- Justifiable,
- Not discriminatory,

- Proportionate and transparent.

The Council must also take the following Requirements into account in arriving at its decision.

The Six Community Requirements from Section 4 of the Communications Act 2003

1. To promote competition in the provision of electronic communications, networks and services, associated services and facilities and the supply of directories;
2. To contribute to the development of the European internal market;
3. To promote the interests of all persons who are citizens of the European Union;
4. Not to favour one form of, or means of, providing electronic communications, networks or services i.e. to be technology neutral;
5. To encourage network access and service interoperability for the purpose of securing competition in the electronic communication networks and services markets and the maximum benefit of customers of communications providers; and
6. To encourage compliance with standards necessary for facilitating service interoperability and securing freedom of choice for the customers of communications providers.

CONCLUSION

The Committee is invited to consider the draft final notification and agree/amend it as the Council's response to the proposed closure of 25 payphones within Copeland.

List of Appendices

Appendix "A" – Final notification – to follow

Appendix "B" – Letters of representation

Appendix "C" – Press coverage and research on whether local organisations could have the upkeep and line rental paid for by their community

Appendix "D" – Mobile Phone Coverage

List of Background Documents:

None