



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

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Mr Sam Ghibaldan
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Our Ref: TO2024/05906/NR

Dear Mr Ghibaldan,

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 December to the Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms, Sir Chris Bryant MP, regarding your various concerns on the PSTN migration and offering recommendations. I am replying as a member of the Ministerial Support Team and apologise for the delay in your receiving a response.

We would also like to thank you for your acknowledgement of the recent agreements which the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has made with the telecoms industry.

As you mentioned, the way landlines work in the UK are changing, with providers moving from the old analogue landline network, also known as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to new Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, which delivers voice calls over an internet connection. To note, the landlines are not being removed, but their underlying technology is being moved from PSTN to VoIP. The upgrade will be delivered by the telecoms industry in a phased approach over the next few years, with the network expected to be fully upgraded to VoIP services by January 2027.

The migration from the PSTN is an industry-led decision and is driven by necessity. The old network is becoming increasingly unreliable and prone to failure, with some telecoms companies finding it difficult to source certain spare parts required to maintain or repair connections. In 2024, there was a 45% increase in the number of PSTN incidents reported. VoIP is also more resistant to severe weather as the cables used are waterproof and less prone to damage during a storm or other severe weather events.

While these changes are necessary, your concerns regarding wider resilience challenges are understandable. Ofcom, the independent telecoms regulator, has issued guidance on how telecoms companies can fulfil their regulatory obligation to ensure that customers have access to emergency services during a power cut. The guidance was issued following a consultation with the general public as well as telecoms providers and Ofgem, looking at data on the average length of UK power outages. This guidance states that providers should have at least one solution available that enables access to emergency organisations for a minimum of one hour in the event of a power outage in the premises. This solution should be suitable for customers' needs and should be offered free of charge to those who are at risk as they are dependent on their landline. These are minimum standards, and in practice many providers are offering solutions which exceed them, such as longer life battery back-up units and 4G enabled handsets. You can read Ofcom's full guidance at the following address:

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/123118/guidance-emergency-access-power-cut.pdf.



Customers who are moving to VoIP services and are reliant on their landline should discuss their situation and requirements for a back-up solution with their provider before they are moved on to VoIP services.

Regarding your concern around protection of vulnerable customers, the government secured new agreements with the telecoms industry on 18 November 2024 to enhance protections for vulnerable people during the PSTN migration. This includes an agreed definition of which customers will require additional support during their migration. The guidance can be found [here](#).

When drafting this guidance with industry and other relevant stakeholders, it was necessary to strike the right balance between identifying individuals in need of support without being intrusive. Communication providers will take different approaches as to what information they collect from their customers, but, as set out in the guidance, we expect customers to be asked about whether they use technology-enabled care (or 'telecare'). If they are not, we encourage them to raise this issue with their communication providers and/or with government.

Regarding your recommendation for raising awareness and partnership with key stakeholders, government are engaging regularly with the telecoms industry who are working to launch an industry-led national awareness campaign in the coming months. The purpose of this campaign is to accelerate the accurate identification of telecare users throughout the UK by their respective communication providers to ensure that they are given additional support during their PSTN migration journeys.

The government and Ofcom are also engaging regularly with industry to monitor their plans for raising awareness of the PSTN switchover. Ofcom has placed an obligation on communications providers to engage in effective communication with customers about any change to their service. Communications providers are responsible for their respective consumer base. They will contact customers to inform them about any plans to migrate their landline services prior to the switchover. Most communications providers will do this on a region-by-region basis.

It may reassure you to know that we are engaged with a wide range of relevant stakeholders for whom the PSTN migration impacts, which includes other government departments, Ofcom, local authorities, industry associations, and charities. We regularly attend awareness raising events hosted by local authorities and encourage them to share resources and lessons learned. Additionally, a webpage is available on GOV.UK about the PSTN migration as a way to increase public awareness. This resource provides guidance about how consumers can prepare for the switchover and where they can find additional information. The webpage can be found [here](#).

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Ministerial Support Team