



THE RT. HON. JACOB REES-MOGG M.P.  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR NORTH EAST SOMERSET

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON  
SW1A 0AA

Philip Edwards, Esq.,  
Clerk to Hinton Blewett Parish Council,  
4 Valley View,  
Clutton,  
Somerset, BS39 5SN.

17 May 2022

*Dear L. Edwards,*

Please find enclosed a letter that I have received from Nadine Dorries, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in response to the representations I made on your behalf.

I hope that the Secretary of State's letter is helpful in addressing the concerns you raised, particularly in confirming and setting out in more detail the Ofcom guidance for telecoms providers.

With every good wish,

*J. Rees-Mogg*

Enc.



## Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture,  
Media and Sport  
4th Floor  
100 Parliament Street  
London SW1A 2BQ

E: [enquiries@dcms.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@dcms.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/dcms](http://www.gov.uk/dcms)

10 May 2022

Our Ref: MC2022/05613/dm

Dear Jacob,

Thank you for your correspondence of 7 April, on behalf of your constituent, Mr Philip Edwards, the Clerk of Hinton Blewett Parish Council, 4 Valley View, Clutton, Bristol, BS39 5SN about the upgrade of the UK's landline network.

Landlines are not being removed, but the way that they work in the UK is changing, with providers moving from the old Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to new Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology. This differs from copper retirement more generally, which is expected to occur after the PSTN migration. Fixed-line operators, including Openreach and Virgin Media O2, will replace legacy telephone services with VoIP technology, which carries voice calls over an internet connection. The upgrade will be delivered by the industry in a phased approach over the next few years with the network expected to be fully upgraded to VoIP services in 2025. The PSTN is a privately-owned telecoms network and the decision to upgrade it has been taken by the telecoms industry. The industry's decision to upgrade the PSTN is due to necessity, as the network is increasingly unreliable and prone to failure, with some telecoms companies finding it difficult to source certain spare parts required to maintain or repair connections.

As Mr Edwards mentions, unlike some PSTN landlines, voice services delivered over the internet require a broadband router in the home. To alleviate concerns that VoIP services, which rely on mains power, will not work in a power cut, Ofcom, the independent telecoms regulator, has issued guidance about how telecoms companies can fulfil their regulatory obligation to ensure that their VoIP customers have access to the emergency services in such circumstances. This guidance was produced following consultation with industry, Ofgem and the public. Ofcom's guidance: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-2/access-emergency-organisations-power-cut> 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. In addition, the 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, such as those without mobile phone coverage. Many providers offer the option of a battery back-up unit to provide additional reassurance for those concerned about power outages. These units can provide between four and five hours of resilience to power outages, protecting against all but the longest of outages, although the exact provision varies depending on the provider.



With regard to the potential lack of mobile reception in an emergency, 4G indoor coverage from at least one mobile network operator (MNO) is now available to over 99% premises in the UK. The Code of Practice for the Public Emergency Call Service requires that a call from any mobile phone is able to roam onto another mobile network free-of-charge to make an emergency call if it has no signal from its provider. I recognise that this does not help those currently in total not-spots, which are areas where there is no mobile coverage from any mobile operator. The government has agreed a £1 billion deal with the mobile industry, the Shared Rural Network, to boost 4G coverage in mobile areas so that by 2025, 95% of the UK landmass will have coverage from all four MNOs.

With regard to continued costs and vulnerable consumers, the department is working with Ofcom to ensure that vulnerable consumers are protected and supported throughout the migration process including those on low incomes. In order to function correctly, VoIP requires a minimum stable connection speed of just 0.5Mbps. For current landline-only customers on BT, it will be possible to order a VoIP landline without purchasing a general internet connection and most contracts will not change as a result. Additionally, a range of broadband social tariff packages are now available in the market to support those on low incomes or who receive specific benefits. BT recently launched a Home Essentials package which will provide fibre and voice services to those on Universal Credit starting at £15 per month. This goes down to as little as £10 per month for a calls-only package. Mr Edwards can contact his provider for further details about the impacts in his area and find more information online:

<https://www.bt.com/broadband/home-essentials>.

Ofcom has also issued guidance about the migration, which states that providers should take steps to identify at-risk customers and engage in effective communications to ensure that all eligible customers are protected throughout and provided with an adequate back-up solution where required. It is the responsibility of the provider to ensure that those at risk are provided with a solution and the government is working with Ofcom to ensure this is the case.

On 29 March BT announced it would pause its provider-led migration of customers until new technologies, such as longer-lasting battery back-up units and 4G-capable handsets become available. This announcement does not affect the 2025 date by which Openreach intends to close the PSTN, and other providers may continue with customer migrations during this period. More information is available by contacting BT directly or at: <https://newsroom.bt.com/were-pausing-our-digital-voice-plans-for-consumers-while-we-work-on-a-more-resilient-rollout/>.

Thank you for writing about the PSTN. I hope that my response is helpful and that Mr Edwards is reassured about the future of services in his area.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP  
**Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport**