

Reference: 01526123

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23 November 2022

Dear J Evans,

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning the future of fixed telephone services. Your request was received on 2 November 2022 and we have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Your request & our response

The Broad Questions

"How much capital cost will such people incur after December 2025 in order to maintain access to telephony?" and "How much recurrent cost will they incur after December 2025 in order to maintain access to telephony?"

We do not hold this information.

The Specific Questions

I am confident that Ofcom, being attuned to the needs of such minorities will, as part of its due diligence have constructed a budget structure for these additional costs that their public will face and without which they could not have estimated the overall costs. I can tell you that there is a document on the Ofcom website entitled "THE FUTURE OF FIXED TELEPHONE SERVICES" which I have read and it alludes to some of these issues but neglects to account for many and provides evaluation for none.

These are the putative costs that I seek:

(i) The capital cost of a telephone-only router which my constituency member of parliament has told me will be available for people without computers and routers. At present 4.7 million people in UK do not have routers.

We do not hold this information.

As mentioned, in future, landline calls will be delivered over digital technology, called Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), which will require a broadband service.

In your question, by telephone-only router, you may be referring to landline-only services delivered over broadband services, where a router will be provided so that the landline can function over the broadband.

In this scenario, we understand that the landline provider will supply a suitable broadband connection specifically to support the VoIP service. We believe that consumers should not pay extra for the landline service delivered over VoIP if they do not take up a broadband service.

If a customer wishes to take a broadband service that allows them to do more than make VoIP calls (for example send emails, stream films and television programmes), the router is almost always included at no additional cost as part of the contract. This may, however, vary between different communications providers and the contract agreed by the customer.

You may also be referring to another solution for landline-only customers that does not require a fixed broadband connection. We understand that communications providers are still developing solutions for landline only customers and these may vary depending on the needs and circumstances of the customer. We anticipate that when these products are available from providers, their specifications and any costs will be made available to customers.

Customers are not required to own a computer or tablet in order to make or receive VoIP calls, they can be made using a standard cordless or corded telephone.

(ii) The likely power consumption of the telephone-only router given that it must be left on for 8766 hours pa in order to receive incoming calls and hence the cost at the present electrical energy unit rates (a current router is rated at 10 W so 88 kWhr per annum or £30 additional cost).

We do not hold this information.

(iii) The likely annual rental for the telephone-only router.

We do not hold this information.

If you are referring to landline-only services delivered over broadband services, where a router will be provided so that the landline can function over the broadband, see our response to Q (i) above.

In addition, for landline-only customers, in March 2021 we secured a voluntary commitment from BT to the following protections for their voice only customers until 2026:

- BT will continue to apply an inflation-linked control (CPI + 0%) on the basket of line rental and call charges for voice-only products.
- The commitments will apply to all BT branded voice-only products and services taken by its retail customers, regardless of the technology used to deliver the service - such as 'voice over internet protocol' (VoIP) – as a result of PSTN switch-off.
- The commitments will also apply to any new products or services introduced throughout the five-year commitment period that are offered on a voice-only basis.

A copy of the full document is included with this letter.

(iv) The cost of VoIP telephone extension adaptors which must be purchased to establish an extension in multiple rooms for people with mobility issues, typically four extensions.

We do not hold this information.

We understand that customers who wish to use their VoIP phone in a different location from their router may need an adaptor. Cordless phones will generally only need one adaptor, but corded phones will need one adaptor per phone. Adaptors are available from various retailers (including communications providers). Some communications providers may provide one free adaptor to eligible customers, customers would need to check their eligibility with their provider.

(v) The cost of installing four VoIP telephone extension adaptors.

We do not hold this information.

(vi) The cost of buying a mobile phone and the typical contract costs of running it. In a power outage caused for example by extreme weather events, people without mobile phones will not be able to summon the emergency services after 1 hour (the router will have a battery back-up for 1 hour). Everyone will therefore need to buy a mobile phone. There are 2.7 million in the UK who do not have mobile phones.

We do not hold this information.

The costs of owning and running a mobile handset vary enormously depending on the type of handset, the contract agreed and subsequent usage. Further information may for instance be found using an Ofcom-accredited comparison site.¹ We have included a copy of the relevant pages from our website.

Ofcom requires communications providers to supply a free resilience solution (such as a battery back-up unit) that lasts for at least one hour to customers who are dependent on their landline to call emergency services in a power cut (for example customers who do not own a mobile phone or have no mobile reception at their property). A copy of our Guidance to communications providers on Protecting access to emergency organisations when there is a power cut at the customer's premises is also included with this letter.

If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk or to Ofcom's address shown on page 1, quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Zach Westbrook

If you are unhappy with the response you have received in relation to your request for information and/or consider that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

¹ There are nine Ofcom-accredited comparison sites, six of which compare different mobile products: billmonitor, broadbandchoices, CompareDial, HandsetExpert, mobilephones and MoneySuperMarket.

Timing

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter**. There is no statutory deadline for responding to internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Further information about this, and the internal review process can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office [here](#). Alternatively, the Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF