

Reference: 01796731

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

4 April 2024

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about the criteria to have redundant BT public call boxes removed.

We received this request on 21 March 2024 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act").

Your request

Please provide any information, guidance, internal reports, or case studies relating to how local communities and/or local planning authorities can request and/or compel BT to remove phone boxes from locations where it is felt by the council and/or local people they are no longer needed.

Specifically, in the context of

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/596/schedule/2/part/16/made>

... Conditions/A.2/2/(b)

which states that "...development is permitted subject to the condition that any apparatus or structure provided in accordance with that permission is removed from the land...as soon as reasonably practicable after it is no longer required for electronic communications purposes..." please provide any relevant interpretation or definition of the phrase 'no longer required'. Please also confirm that in terms of the Ofcom rules for retaining boxes it is the case that the secondary criteria (e.g. 52 calls per year, etc) only apply in cases where the box in question is the only one remaining in a 400m walking distance radius, that is, if there are many boxes within that radius all can be removed regardless of the secondary conditions being met.

Our response

Under the [telephony universal service obligation \(USO\)](#), BT is required to provide public call boxes to meet the reasonable needs of end users. Following a review in 2021-22, we updated our rules on telephony USO to allow BT to remove public call boxes that are no longer needed while at the same time protecting those boxes on which people still rely. Under [these rules](#), BT cannot remove a public call box (i.e. the telephony equipment) if it is the last remaining in an area (i.e. more than 400 metres' walking distance from the next public call box) and it meets one or more of these criteria:

- it is in a place without coverage from all four mobile network providers;
- it is located in an area with a high frequency of accidents or suicides;
- it has made 52 or more calls over the past 12 months; or
- there is other evidence that the box is reasonably needed at the site – for example if it is likely to be relied upon in the event of a local emergency, such as flooding, or if it is used to call helplines.

If a public call box that is the last at a site does not meet any of these four criteria, BT can consult with the relevant local authority on removing it. BT must take account of any views and evidence received from this consultation before deciding whether to remove the box.

Public call boxes that are not the last at a site can be removed by BT without consultation.

You may like to contact BT to ask if the public call box in question meets any of the criteria for retention. There is information about BT's adopt-a-kiosk scheme (which is not regulated by Ofcom) here: <https://business.bt.com/public-sector/street-hubs/adopt-a-kiosk-scheme/> and you can contact BT using the email address payphones@bt.com.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress.

Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).