

Area West Committee – 17th September 2008

7. **BT's Consultation on the Proposal to Remove Payphones in Area West**

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Purpose of the Report

For the Area Committee to consider the draft decision notice set out in Appendix A attached at page 7, published by SSDC, on the proposed removal of 15 payphones in Area West as part of BT's re-alignment of payphone provision to meet consumer demand.

Recommendations

- (1) Members are asked to approve or amend the draft decision to object to or support the proposed removal of a payphone as set out in Appendix A. (Please note that this will be the last opportunity for members, as a Committee, to comment on the removal of the payphones in Area West).
- (2) The final decision/response be delegated to the Head of Area Development (North) in consultation with the Chairman of Area West.

Background

Members will already be aware that BT (British Telecom) has proposed to remove a total of 77 payphones from locations across South Somerset.

This proposal was first received by SSDC in April, with an end date for response of early July. However, due to problems encountered with the consultation process, and as a result of representations made by the South Somerset District Council, parish councils and the local MPs, BT agreed to re-issue its proposal. The new 90 day consultation period runs until 12th October 2008.

Report

As part of BT's Universal Service Obligation BT is required to provide adequate coverage of public payphones and removing individual facilities is carried out under guidance issued by Ofcom. This activity is described by BT as 're-alignment of payphone provision'.

The Local Authority plays a crucial role in BT's re-alignment proposals, having the power to prevent a planned removal, based on criteria included within the guidance. BT has a right of appeal.

BT's rationale for their proposals is based on the declining use of payphones, largely due to mobile phone take-up. BT's own figures show that the number of calls made from BT payphones have halved in the last three years. 99% of UK homes now have a phone at home, and 85% have a mobile phone.

The process which the Local Authority must follow to make the decision to support or object to the planned removals includes the issue of a draft decision notice, arranging

suitable local consultation and the issuing of a final decision notice to BT and the Secretary of State.

This report forms part of this process, and a copy of the draft decision notice, published on 1st September is included within Appendix A.

The draft decision has been compiled by the Community Development Officer (East), from comments and representations already made by parish councils and residents (from the first, suspended consultation process), together with consideration of local mobile phone coverage, and annual usage figures supplied by BT.

Members should be aware that the draft decision has been submitted to parish councils and issued to the local media. It is also available on the SSDC website (www.southsomerset.gov.uk), or from the lead officer. Comments can be made up until the 3rd October.

The final decision will be compiled based on any further comments received, which relate to the relevant factors set by Ofcom. These include:

- Housing type
- Number of households
- Revenue / usage
- Emergency call facilities
- Mobile phone coverage

Further details on BT's obligations with regard to the removal of payphone services and the role of the Local Authority can be found at:

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/condocs/uso/uso_statement/removals.pdf

Members are asked to consider the proposed decision for each payphone, and endorse or amend the draft decision having regard to the factors listed above. Appendix A lists each payphone under review, together with annual call figures provided by BT. Due to the first round of consultation, which was suspended and restarted, and good media cover a number of responses have already been received. The comment 'local opposition' in Appendix A relates to the comments already received. Listed below are some examples of comments that have been received:

- The phone box would be used more if properly maintained in working order
- Young people use the payphone to contact friends in areas where their mobile phones don't work
- Accident blackspot – vital in an emergency
- Has value even to a small community for walkers, runners and riders passing by
- Many elderly residents don't have mobile phones

It is recommended that, at the end of the public consultation period (3rd October) the final decision on each telephone box, be delegated to the Head of Area Development (North) in consultation with each Area Chairman for their respective Area. The Head of Area Development will then submit SSDC's decision to BT by the due date of 12th October.

Financial Implications

None as a direct result of this report.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

2. Maintain above 75% the people satisfied with the way the council runs the district.
15. Increase to 65% the people who feel engaged in and can influence the decisions that affect their communities.

Other Implications

None.

Background Papers: *Area West Committee - June 2008 - report on BT; Consultation Proposals from BT.*
