



BASILDON DISTRICT COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SERVICES

THE BASILDON CENTRE, ST MARTIN'S SQUARE
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Universal Service Obligation Consultation
Alan Pridmore
OFCOM
Riverside House
2a Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

DATE: 18 February 2005
PLEASE ASK Abbas Mirza
FOR:
EMAIL: abbas.mirza@basildon.gov.uk
YOUR
REF:
MY REF: AM/JM

Dear Sir

RESPONSE TO UNIVERSAL SERVICE OBLIGATION CONSULTATION

Further to your request for comments on the USO review, Basildon District Council welcomes the opportunity to comment.

We feel the review has come at the right time, as a significant percentage of residents within the District would benefit from a review of phone service provision through the USO review.

Low Cost Schemes

We feel that assessing income, especially those on low incomes and state benefits, is a good starting point to assess need for low cost schemes. However, we do feel that three points need to be taken into consideration when the scheme is finally put forward.

- The £10,400 income threshold may exclude certain households who fall just above the £10,400 income ceiling.
- Certain households who may well be below the £10,400 however they may not be able to claim benefits due to financial/personal circumstances.
- Many of our residents within the District, especially those in our Priority Action Areas, still do not use the direct debit system to pay Council Rent and Council Tax. They often use cash or cheques to settle these bills at the Council's payment offices. The proposal for reducing the cost and linking into the ability to pay by direct debit may seem to reduce the cost for some on low incomes however it may exclude many customers who fail to pay by direct debit or do not use the direct debit system.



Public Call Boxes

We agree with OFCOM's statement that public call boxes are very important to disadvantaged communities, however we also believe there needs to be a balance between the needs and costs of telecom providers and the local community.

Many phone boxes are removed from areas, which suffer from high indices of multiple deprivation. Many residents in these areas rely on public call boxes and often they provide a lifeline and a key aspect of communication to friends and families. Therefore removing a pay phone from local areas could have a detrimental affect on the community's most vulnerable people.

The Council has various consultation mechanisms in place, which allow local issues such as planning to be discussed with the local community. A neighbourhood based system of local meetings allows issues such as quality of services in a local area to be discussed with service providers and the local community.

The consultation mechanisms would allow BT to gauge local opinion and views on any proposed changes in the area.

Services for Customers with Disabilities

We welcome the proposed changes to improve services for customers with disabilities. Those with a disability often suffer a double disadvantage of being isolated by a disability and having poor or inadequate phone communication service.

Phone companies should make all technologies available to those with sensory or physical disabilities. The wide scale availability of the Internet and broadband within the UK will allow those with disabilities to use services such as 'Video Relay' and 'Typetalk'. We encourage the telecom providers to explore the "roll out" of these services to help those with disabilities to play an active as possible life within the community.

As with consultation we agree that organisations such as RNID and RNIB be consulted nationally on the proposed changes. We would ask that local groups within Basildon representing the interests of the disabled should be part of any local discussions into service provision for those with disabilities.

If you wish to access the Councils consultation mechanism or wish to be put in contact with local groups, representing the interests of disabled people please do not hesitate in contacting me.

Yours faithfully

Community Regeneration Officer

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