

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

With regard to the requirement to consult on the removal of any payphones, it is absolutely essential that the information provided to local council's is meaningful, comprehensible, manageable and usable by local authorities. The initial consultation exercise in 2004, BT provide maps that : -

- were simply the wrong scale to allow the location of payphones in rural areas to be identifiable.
- Packaged in telephone order, which bore no sense to local communities or geography, and thereby were difficult to unravel.
- Provided no information on the proposals on adjacent phones as to whether they too were being removed or retained.
- There were also a number of inaccuracies, but these have since been corrected.

Local communities are not totally unsympathetic to the case that BT presented for the removal of certain phones, it just that their initial consultation did not make it easy for the customer to fully understand local circumstances. When discussing a removal programme, it is also important to know what is being retained.

Highland Council and BT, undertook a much improved second round consultation, which could provide a model approach for future consultation, however it is important that the significant costs associated with the process are not passed onto to local councils entirely. BT for example needs to post notices on each payphone, which can be an expensive exercise. These notices too should be more informative of local circumstances, ie where the nearest retained phone will be.

Happy to provide more information on the above should this be of interest.

With regard to information on the lack of mobile phone coverage, how accurate is this information to be. We in Highland have many hill tops that have mobile coverage, but glens and straths, headlands and bays, that don't. The Council would request that Ofcom seek much better information on local mobile phone signals and makes this information available via the web on scalable maps to the public at large. In addition that Ofcom recognise areas / communities with poor signals, where a retained payphone system remains important.

Finally, the council is happy to consider the introduction of cashless payphones. How does this sit with the dabate on Public Call Boxes?

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