

17 January 2024

Dear local government organisations,

Awareness of 3G network switch-offs

We are aware of the Local Government Association's (LGA) recently published results of a survey about awareness of the upcoming 3G switch-off. Based on the findings we are concerned about a continued and significant lack of awareness of the potential impact on the delivery of services when 3G and then 2G is switched off. We therefore want to reiterate the importance of ensuring that councils are prepared for the changes.

Ensuring continuity of service, particularly in the case of telecare services, is of paramount importance. This has been highlighted by recent [serious incidents](#) that have resulted from the upgrade of landlines to a digital network and affirms the priority that must be placed on protecting vulnerable people.

Although the decision, timings and process for switching off 3G, and subsequently 2G, is being led by the mobile network operators (MNOs), we have set out [our expectations of mobile providers](#). We want to make sure that consumers are treated fairly and can continue to access the services they need. We have therefore prepared the following information to help raise awareness to help ensure any disruption is minimal.

3G switch-off timings

All MNOs have committed to switching off their 3G networks by the end of next year, and some have already started this process. In addition, all MNOs have committed to switching off their 2G networks by 2033 at the latest.

The MNOs are developing their own switch-off timetables for these legacy technologies and last year saw the initial stages of 3G retirement ahead of national 3G switch-off:

- Vodafone became the first network to switch off some of its 3G services, with a number of trials carried out during 2023. It expects to complete its switch-off in early 2024.
- BT/EE piloted its 3G switch-off in Warrington in July 2023 and is planning to switch off its national 3G network in early 2024, starting in January with the aim to complete in early 2024.
- Three expects to complete its switch-off, starting in April 2024, by the end of 2024.
- Virgin Media O2 plans to switch off 3G services in 2025.

The switch-off will not just affect mobile handsets

As well as mobile phones, there are [many IoT and other devices](#) that use mobile networks to connect. These include but are not limited to telecare devices, security alarms and parking meters, and Ofcom has been engaging with trade associations across various sectors about the switch-offs.

To be clear, providers of services that rely on 2G or 3G networks are responsible for ensuring the continuity of service after these networks are switched off.

Local authorities should contact the provider of these services to check how they could be impacted. We also strongly recommend taking any necessary steps to identify customers who could be affected by the switch-off and minimise any associated risks.

2G coverage continues to be widely available, so most 3G devices will still be able to use 2G for voice calls and limited data services until the 2G networks are switched off in a few years' time. If a device uses 2G, or will use 2G after 3G is switched off, then authorities will need to develop a migration plan with the 2G switch-off timings in mind.

If a device has a SIM that can only work on a 3G network, or in the few cases where 2G is not available, it will need to be upgraded as a priority.

3G not spot data and coverage data

As providers switch off their 3G networks, we estimate that – as well as existing 'not spots' – a few more properties might lose access to a reliable, indoor, 3G-only mobile service from any network provider.

For telecare, this loss of 3G coverage might affect around 1-2% of a small number of devices that rely on 3G-only roaming SIMs supplied by a provider outside the UK.¹

To help providers of services (especially telecare) identify any customers that could lose 3G connection, we have published a [list of affected postcodes](#). The data does not apply to 3G devices that can also connect through 2G or 4G networks.

In addition, coverage data by MNO and technology (including 2G/3G) at a particular postcode can be found using Ofcom's [mobile coverage checker](#), which is based on information provided by the MNOs.

We would be grateful if you could share this letter with all LGA members at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew

Dr Matthew Thomas
Project Director, 2G/3G switch-off

¹ Most SIMs are provided by a mobile network operator (like Vodafone, Three, VMO2 or EE), or by a virtual operator or reseller. However, some of these devices rely on 'roaming SIMs' (usually non-UK SIMs brought into the UK), which roam between the available mobile networks to provide data connectivity. Service providers often choose these types of SIMs so they have access to all the operators' networks, maximising the chance of getting good coverage and reliable connectivity for their service.