

17 January 2024

Dear telecare associations,

[Awareness of 3G network switch-offs](#)

The Local Government Association recently published results of a survey about awareness of the upcoming 3G switch-off.¹ Based on the findings we are concerned about a continued and significant lack of awareness of the potential impact on the delivery of services, particularly telecare, when 3G and then 2G is switched off.

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.

This letter is to reiterate the importance of ensuring that telecare and other service providers are prepared for the changes and working together with organisations that use their services to identify customers who require a device upgrade. We have therefore prepared the following information to help raise awareness with your members 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 its 3G services in 2025.

¹ [Local Government Association: 2G/3G switch-off impact survey](#)

Providers of telecare are responsible for ensuring the continuity of service

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

We expect providers of these services to take the necessary steps to ensure they are clear on how they could be impacted. We also strongly recommend working with organisations such as local authorities to identify customers who could be affected by the switch-off and minimise any associated risks.

If 2G coverage is available, 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 and service providers 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, it will need to be upgraded as a priority.

3G not spot 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.²

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 members of your association at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew

Dr Matthew Thomas
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