

To Local Councils, Shropshire

The following email is sent on behalf of Shropshire Council

Dear Colleague

I am contacting to advise you that BT have written to Shropshire Council to say that they intend to carry out a large scale consultation about the potential removal of the service to approximately 135 of the payphones in the Shropshire area, and that notices are being posted in the kiosks involved over the next couple of weeks.

BT have advised that notices are being posted now in the kiosks that are affected by the decision of BT to seek removal of the operational telephony and kiosks.

The formal consultation letter is imminent, and we will be notified via a further letter, setting out the exact location of the payphones that we have been advised are on their list.

It will be our intention as Local Planning Authority to ensure that our local communities have every opportunity to consider the options for payphones within their areas. We would very much wish to ensure that we have a good communications exercise running for this purpose, to brief and assist the local communities, the parish and town councils as representatives of their communities, and our Shropshire Council councillors as community leaders.

Could we possibly please therefore suggest that it may be timely for this to be an agenda item on town and parish council committee meeting agendas for September, with a view to having an early discussion about any local kiosks and any views as to their removal or retention, ahead of BT's formal letter. We have asked colleagues in the VCSA likewise to consider any known to them, as we are particularly keen to ensure that social and community needs continue to be served via retention of these payphones, regardless of what BT may consider to be low actual usage.

Shropshire Council will need to make decisions in each case, in our role as the LPA, as to whether we consent to removal of the telephony and kiosk, consent to removal of the telephony but retention of the kiosk itself, where the local community wish to adopt it, or object to the removal of the service and kiosk, based upon the views of the local community and any other factors that we would wish to see taken into account.

The stated starting position of Shropshire Council, as a predominantly rural county with a dispersed population, is to object to the removal of telephony at kiosks unless local feedback suggests otherwise, due to concerns over things like emergency access, physical access where the next nearest payphone may be some distance away for those with mobility problems, and concerns over consistency and quality of mobile phone coverage.

This is a two part consultation exercise, whereby we will make an initial decision on the matter, publish this for further comments and then make a final decision within a statutory 90 day timeframe. A previous such consultation took place over the winter of 2015/2016, when we worked through community enablement team officers and town and parish councils, and our contacts within the Historic Environment Team and Planning Teams. It will be our intention to use a similar approach, whereby we will seek to draw upon the varied expertise of officers across the Council as well as upon Members' own local knowledge and the assistance of the wider community.

There will be press releases and communications about this matter via the Shropshire Council website, with the involvement of Councillor Gwilym Butler as the portfolio holder. For any queries, please contact either myself Mrs Lois Dale or Mr Joe Crook at Shropshire Council. Please would you also note that I am away for the last two weeks in August.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Contacts

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