



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology  
100 Parliament Street  
London SW1A 2BQ

19<sup>th</sup> February 2025

*Dear Secretary of State,*

I am writing to express my deep continuing concern about the impact on my rural constituents of the planned switch-off of copper land line (PSTN) telephony and the shift to Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP).

I remain concerned that not enough is being done to protect consumers, for whom one hour of calls (using a back-up battery) is not enough to get through power cuts in rural areas like East Hampshire. Here, power cuts in the rural parts are quite common: not infrequently they last hours, sometimes several days.

The issue of power cuts is compounded by the fact that in these same areas, the mobile phone signal is often poor and sometimes non-existent.

While I understand that the switchover is an industry-led initiative, there is a clear imperative for government, as people may be left unable to contact emergency services in a power cut.

There are particularly significant concerns for elderly and vulnerable people, and I appreciate that some work has been done around extra support. But I must stress that this is not just about people who are on a 'vulnerable users' register – anyone can be vulnerable at some time. There are also issues around medical devices and intruder and fire alarm systems that use landline connectivity.

The resuming of the full switchover fast approaches; in the meantime I have also heard from residents who did not realise that changing their 'phone contract could mean making the switch sooner.



Overall there are two main issues:

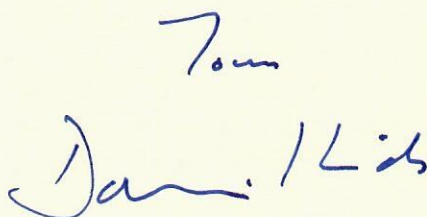
1. **Inadequate backup power supplies** – The Ofcom-mandated minimum battery life for backup phones is not nearly sufficient in rural areas that experience extended power cuts.
2. **Low public awareness** – Many people remain unaware of the PSTN switch-off and lack clarity on their alternatives, particularly if they do not have or want broadband. The methods used by 'phone and broadband companies to inform customers—such as social media, websites and roadshows—do not reach some of those most at risk. The problem also extends to a lack of preparedness among some businesses, unaware of the implications for systems such as payment terminals and fire and security alarms.

These concerns raise three areas where action is needed:

1. **The minimum back-up battery life** mandated needs to be increased to better reflect the realities of rural communities. There should be a requirement for all operators for at least several hours talk-time.
2. **The back-up battery should be at providers' cost for customers in postcodes that experience regular power outages.** It is inadequate for extended battery back-up to be made available without charge only to customers on a vulnerable register.
3. **Awareness needs to be heightened** urgently. Ofcom could play a much more proactive role, with organisations such as Citizens' Advice engaged to help reach those most at risk.

If this transition is not managed effectively there is a real risk that many people could be left without a vital lifeline. I urge you to take action to ensure that this does not happen.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds'.

Damian Hinds  
Member of Parliament for East Hampshire