SECTION A – MATTERS FOR DECISION

Consultation by British Telecommunications (BT) in respect of Intended Payphone Removals within Neath Port Talbot (Reference: P2016/0738)

Background

On the 19th of August, 2016 the Authority received a consultation letter from British Telecommunications plc (BT) regarding their intention to remove 53 of their least used public payphones from the County Borough.

BT identified the phone boxes at the locations in the following table and also indicated how many calls were made from each phone box in a 12 month period prior to the consultation.

Number	Address	Post Code	Calls
01269 822331	Pontardawe Road, Swansea	SA8 4TY	0
01269 823129	Neuadd Road Garnant, Ammanford	SA18 1UF	32
01269 823175	Water Street, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Ammanford	SA18 1HA	193
01269 823181	New Road, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Ammanford	SA18 1UN	0
01639 643073	Hillside, Neath	SA11 1TP	247
01639 643073	Church Road, Cadoxton	SA10 8AU	57
01639 643614	New Road, Aberdulais, Neath	SA10 8HP	3
01639 643655	Johns Terrace, Tonmawr	SA12 9UR	0
01639 643703	Tonna Uchaf, Tonna	SA11 3LX	30
01639 643713	Main Road, Cilfrew, Neath	SA10 8LP	0
01639 643750	Juntion of Main Road/Farmers Road Bryncoch, Neath	SA10 7TW	0
01639 643893	Penywern Road, Neath	SA10 7AN	13
01639 643907	Cimla Road, Neath	SA11 3UD	132
01639 643974	Junction of Heol Llwynon and Llygad Yr Haul, Neath	SA10 7SR	88
01639 644439	Adj Aberdulais Falls and Main Road, Aberdulais, Neath	SA10 8EY	0
01639 645452	Junction of Gnoll Park Road and Leonard Street, Neath	SA11 3HW	416
01639 700204	O/S 92 Dulais Road, Seven Sisters, Neath	SA10 9ES	82
01639 700253	Aberhenwaun Uchaf, Seven Sisters, Neath	SA10 9BS	215
01639 700311	Main Road, Dyffryn Cellwen, Neath	SA10 9LA	19

01639 700323	Mary Street, Seven Sisters, Neath	SA10 9BG	4
01639 700410	Hendre, Onllwyn, Neath	SA10 9HH	1
01639 710316	Lewis Terrace, Abergarwed, Neath	SA11 4DL	366
01639 710342	Bryn Golwg, Clyne, Neath	SA11 4EH	14
01639 720306	Heol Y Felin, Cwmgwrach, Neath	SA11 5TB	21
01639 830257	Ochr Y Waun Road, Cwmllynfell, Swansea	SA9 2GA	0
01639 830615	Rhiw Road, Rhiwfawr, Swansea	SA9 2RF	1
01639 830684	Bryn Road, Cwmllynfell, Swansea	SA9 2FJ	12
01639 842106	Junction Penywern Road - Adj Wernfawr Inn, Wern Road, Ystalyfera, Swansea	SA9 2LX	0
01639 842268	Near Graignewydd, Chemical Row, Godregraig, Swansea	SA9 2DH	8
01639 850216	Prossers Terrace, Cymmer, Port Talbot	SA13 3LE	0
01639 850259	Adj Post Office, Afan Road, Duffryn Rhondda, Port Talbot	SA13 3ES	136
01639 850262	Adj No 40 Heol Y Glyn, Cymmer, Port Talbot	SA13 3NA	0
01639 850385	Near Post Office, Heol Y Deryn, Glyncorrwg, Port Talbot	SA13 3DD	0
01639 850453	Adj Police Station, Brytwn Road, Cymmer, Port Talbot	SA13 3EW	0
01639 882115	Abbots Close, Margam, Port Talbot	SA13 2ND	0
01639 882440	Silver Avenue, Port Talbot	SA12 7RU	389
01639 885048	White Close, Port Talbot	SA12 7BD	84
01639 896222	Queen Street, Pontrhydyfen, Port Talbot	SA12 9TF	8
01639 896344	Opp 33 Ynys Y Gwas, Cwmavon, Port Talbot	SA12 9AB	12
01639 896809	OS 158 Heol Jwbilli, Penllyn, Cwmavon, Port Talbot	SA12 9AB	72
01792 464137	Elba Crescent, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea	SA1 8QQ	0
01792 812069	Heol Heddwch, Neath Abbey, Neath	SA10 7LF	6
01792 812090	Junction Peniel Green Road Skewen, Brich Grove Road, Swansea	SA7 9JR	0
01792 812264	St Johns Terrace, Neath Abbey, Neath	SA10 7NB	0
01792 812309	The Greenway, Llandarcy, Neath	SA10 6JB	0
01792 812482	School Rood, Jersey Marine, Neath	SA10 6JJ	7
01792 862269	Commercial Road, Rhydyfro, Swansea	SA8 4SL	27
01792 863014	Junction Gwyns Place and Alltwen Hil, Pontardawe, Swansea	SA8 3AB	0
01792 863156	Maes Y Coed Road, Cilmaengwyn, Swansea	SA8 4QP	0
01792 863165	Alltywerin, Pontardawe, Swansea	SA8 4NQ	8
01792 863199	Junction Grove Road and Brecon Road, Pontardawe, Swansea	SA8 4PA	0
	Edward Street, Alltwen, Swansea		

01792 863315	Junction Ashwood Drive and Cwmnantllwyd	SA8 3DT	0
	Road, Gellinudd, Swansea		

BT also provided an option for local communities to "adopt" a phone box where the phone infrastructure is removed but the kiosk is retained and thereafter maintained by the local community.

Publicity and Responses:

As they are statutorily required to do so, BT placed site notices at all 53 locations on the 9th and 10th of August 2016, advising anyone with a comment to make regarding the removal of the phone boxes to contact the planning department of the local authority within 42 days of the posting of the notice.

The Planning Authority (the "Relevant Public Body") is advised to "bring the contents of the payphone and written notice to the attention of such persons as it considers appropriate, asking for comments on the proposal to be made to the Relevant Public Body within a stipulated period". Accordingly, on 24th August 2016, all Local Councillors, Community Councils, and Local Authority Service Heads were consulted on BTs proposals and asked to reply with any comments.

Subsequent to the consultation the proposal was covered by local and television press.

The formal consultation period specified within the Council's notification to local community representatives / the public ends on 5th October 2016 (the day after Committee). Therefore, any representations received in time to be reported to Committee will be presented within an amendment sheet, with delegated authority also sought below (due to the timescales involved) for any necessary amendments to be made to the draft notification to reflect representations received by 5th October.

To date, the following representations have been received:-

- 1 Objection from the public relating to the payphone at Heol Y Felin, Cwmgwrach (01639) 720306. The objection can be summarised as follows:
 - The postcode provided by BT was inaccurate
 - That BT was removing payphones to force customers to use its mobile phone arm EE
 - Mobile signal in the area is insufficient

- The phone box serves the need of low income residents
- The phone box provides an alternative if a home phone is cut off by storm damage
- Public transport passengers can use the payphone to arrange lifts
- The payphone can be used in an emergency for breakdowns or accidents on the A465
- **Neath Town Council** Has objected to all three phone boxes proposed for removal in their area on the basis that they are used frequently.
- Resolven Community Council Has objected to the removal of (01639) 710316 at Lewis Terrace, Abergarwed, Neath as this payphone is quite frequently used, their area is frequented by cyclists and tourists and there has been a number of road accidents in the vicinity.
- Onllwyn Community Council Accepts the reduced need for phone boxes but seeks to retain (01639) 700253 at Aberhenwaun Uchaf, Seven Sisters as there is a need for at least one payphone accessible to the community and this is the most used in the most prominent position.
- Coedffranc Community Council Has objected to the removal of (01792) 812069 at Heol Heddwch, Neath Abbey and (01792) 812482 at School Road, Jersey Marine because of the need for emergency access for rural communities and poor mobile signal. There is agreement that (01792) 812309 at The Greenway, Llandarcy be disconnected, but the red phone box be retained as it contributes to the Llandarcy Conservation Area.
- Blaenhonddan Community Council Understands the reasons for reducing the number of public payphones but wishes to retain any that have been used in the last 12 months.

Material Considerations:

In deciding whether to consent or object to the proposal, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council must be satisfied that its decision is:

- Objectively justifiable in relation to the networks, services, facilities, apparatus or directories to which it relates;
- Not such as to discriminate unduly against particular persons or against a particular description of persons;
- Proportionate to what it is intended to achieve; and
- In relation to what it is intended to achieve, transparent.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council must also be satisfied that it acts in accordance with the six Community requirements set out in section 4 of the Communications Act 2003 ('the Act'). These are:

- To promote competition in the provision of electronic communications networks and services, associated services and facilities and the supply of directories;
- To contribute to the development of the European internal market;
- To promote the interests of all persons who are citizens of the European Union;
- Not to favour one form of, or means of, providing electronic communications networks or services i.e. to be technology neutral:
- To encourage network access and service interoperability for the purpose of securing competition in the electronic communication networks and services markets and the maximum benefit for customers of communications providers; and
- To encourage compliance with standards necessary for facilitating service interoperability and securing freedom of choice for the customers of communications providers.

Appraisal:

When assessing each phone box a number of factors have been taken into consideration including:

- Payphone usage
- Proximity of alternative phone boxes to the community
- Socio economic factors and housing types near the phone box

- Mobile phone coverage in the area
- The number of households served by a phone box
- The need to make emergency calls

BT claims that payphone usage has "declined by over 90 per cent in the last decade and the need to provide payphones for emergency situations is diminishing all the time, with at least 98 per cent of the UK having either 3G or 4G coverage".

Included in the schedule submitted by BT is the number of calls made from each phone box in a 12 month period prior to the consultation. Following a survey of a sample of phone boxes, however, it has become apparent that the usage figures are potentially misleading given that: -

- a number of phones were found to be inoperable
- in one case there was no phone in the kiosk at all
- At least one payphone which reported over 300 calls being made during the last 12 months is currently inoperable suggesting that where usage is shown, it may only have been working for part of the 12 month period.

In these cases it is considered that number of calls alone should not be taken as demonstration that there is no demand locally for a payphone, especially where there is no alternative payphone nearby.

The payphones surveyed were also generally found to be in a very poor condition with no apparent maintenance or cleaning for a number of years. Even when a payphone worked (judged in this case by having a dial tone), it was often not apparent at first glance due to vandalism or the general condition of the kiosk. Kiosks often had panels or doors missing, some had algal growth on the windows, two had shrubbery growing inside them and most had litter and/or dirt from decomposed plant matter within them. This lack of maintenance, cleaning and general poor condition of these payphones cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor to the decline of their usage either by deterring the public out of disgust or giving the impression that the phone is inoperable.

Notwithstanding the above, when assessing the removal of payphones Officers have taken into account the proximity of alternative payphones.

While accepting that usage has fallen and fewer payphones are required to meet demand, where a payphone is removed there should be an alternative payphone accessible to the community. This is especially important in the smaller, more isolated settlements with poor pedestrian links.

To allow such assessment, on request BT provided a list of 62 payphones within the local authority area which it currently intends to retain, against which Officers have compared their proposed payphone removal plan to ensure that where a community can currently access a payphone, they will still be able to do so.

Socio economic factors and indicators such as the housing mix of an area can show how likely a household is to have alternative means of communication. The more owner-occupied housing in the area the more likely it is that people living in that area would have access to mobile and fixed telephones. If there is predominantly private rented or social housing in the area, this may suggest people on a lower income without access to mobile and fixed telephones and support the view that a phone box should be retained. Neath Port Talbot has a higher than average proportion of social and privately rented housing and also has lower household income than the UK average and this has been taken into account.

It is also considered that those most affected by the removal of payphones are potentially the least able and likely to respond to the consultation. Those reliant on using public payphones are unlikely to have alternative means of communication such as a mobile or fixed home phone line and subsequently are also less likely to have internet access to be able to respond.

Mobile phone coverage has also been assessed in the areas where BT wishes to remove its payphones. OFCOM publishes phone coverage data for the phone networks and Neath Port Talbot has generally good phone coverage throughout its settlements for outdoor voice calls from several networks. Notable exceptions to this are the Afan Valley, where there is notably poor coverage from some providers, and Tonmawr where there is poor coverage from all providers. It is worth noting that in regard to emergency calls, mobile phones will use any available provider and are not limited to the phone owner's individual carrier.

In responding to BT's proposals this assessment has sought to ensure that only those payphones being removed are justified and proportionate to what BT is trying to achieve in reducing its network. It also seeks to ensure that no particular persons or community has been discriminated against by maintaining a payphone network that is accessible to all communities currently served.

Having regard to the above, following an assessment of each of the payphone sites our recommendations are outlined in the table below (with those payphones sought to be retained highlighted): -

Number	Address	Decision Agree/Adopt/ Object	Reason(s)
01269 822331	Pontardawe Road, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and does not serve a local community
01269 823129	Neuadd Road Garnant, Ammanford	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01269 823175	Water Street, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Ammanford	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01269 823181	New Road, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Ammanford	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 643066	Hillside, Neath	Object	Neath Town Council objection on basis that this phone is extensively used (247 calls). Objection considered reasonable based on community needs.
01639 643073	Church Road, Cadoxton	Object	Blaenhonnddan Community Council objects to the removal of payphones that have demonstrated use. Objection considered reasonable based on community needs, with a need to retain some payphones to the North of the River Neath in the Neath settlement area
01639 643614	New Road, Aberdulais, Neath	Object	Blaenhonnddan Community Council objects to the removal of payphones that have demonstrated use. This payphone serves the community of Ynysgerwen on the periphery of the Neath Settlement, where the other nearest payphones are also proposed to be removed Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.

01639 643655	Johns Terrace, Tonmawr	Object	This phone is currently inoperable (therefore zero calls is not surprising or considered indicative of lack of need). This phone serves a relatively isolated settlement with poor pedestrian links to nearby communities and without alternative payphone provision nearby. There is also very poor mobile coverage in this area. In addition to the objection, it is recommended that this phone should be repaired and retained.
01639 643703	Tonna Uchaf, Tonna	Agree	No objections received
01639 643713	Main Road, Cilfrew, Neath	Agree	There is currently no phone within this kiosk. No objection has been received. The loss of this payphone is acceptable subject to the retention of alternative payphone provision sought under this consultation response.
01639 643750	Junction of Main Road/Farmers Road Bryncoch, Neath	Agree	No objection has been received. The loss of this payphone is acceptable subject to the retention of alternative payphone provision sought under this consultation response.
01639 643893	Penywern Road, Neath	Object	Blaenhonnddan Community Council objects to the removal of payphones that have demonstrated use. It is proposed to remove other nearby payphones and it is considered that this payphone should be retained to ensure the community retains access to payphone provision.
01639 643907	Cimla Road, Neath	Object	Neath Town Council objection that this phone is extensively used. Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.

01639 643974	Junction of Heol Llwynon and Llygad Yr Haul, Neath	Object	Blaenhonnddan Community Council objects to the removal of payphones that have demonstrated use. It is proposed to remove other nearby payphones and it is considered that this payphone should be retained to ensure the community retains access to payphone provision.
01639 644439	Adj Aberdulais Falls and Main Road, Aberdulais, Neath	Agree	No objection has been received and the retention of alternative payphone provision is sought.
01639 645452	Junction of Gnoll Park Road and Leonard Street, Neath	Object	Neath Town Council objection that this phone is extensively used. Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01639 700204	O/S 92 Dulais Road, Seven Sisters, Neath	Agree	No objection has been received and the retention of alternative payphone provision is sought.
01639 700253	Aberhenwaun Uchaf, Seven Sisters, Neath	Object	Onllwyn Community Council objects to the removal of all payphones in its area and seeks to retain this, which is the most used payphone. This payphone also serves the adjacent community of Seven Sisters which would also be left without any payphones by BTs proposals.
01639 700311	Main Road, Dyffryn Cellwen, Neath	Agree	No objection has been received and the retention of alternative payphone provision is sought.
01639 700323	Mary Street, Seven Sisters, Neath	Agree	No objection has been received and the retention of alternative payphone provision is sought.
01639 700410	Hendre, Onllwyn, Neath	Agree	No objection has been received and the retention of alternative payphone provision is sought.

01639 710316	Lewis Terrace, Abergarwed, Neath	Object	This phone is currently inoperable but has shown relatively high usage recently for a small and isolated community. Resolven Community Council has objected due to the lack of alternative payphones in the area and the number of cyclists and tourists visiting the area. The area has also had a number of road accidents. Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01639 710342	Bryn Golwg, Clyne, Neath	Object	There is no alternative payphone provision in the settlement of Clyne Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01639 720306	Heol Y Felin, Cwmgwrach, Neath	Object	While there is alternative payphone provision in Glynneath, the communities of Cwmgwrach/Blaengwrach are separated from this by a busy dual carriageway. There has also been one objection from a member of the public who is primarily concerned with the lack of a payphone in an emergency. Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01639 830257	Ochr Y Waun Road, Cwmllynfell, Swansea	Agree	Inaccessible out of the way location. Retention of the alternative payphone provision is sought
01639 830615	Rhiw Road, Rhiwfawr, Swansea	Object	This phone serves the relatively isolated settlement of Rhiwfawr with poor pedestrian links to nearby communities. It's removal would leave it without alternative payphone provision nearby.

01639 830684	Bryn Road, Cwmllynfell, Swansea	Object	Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs. This payphone serves the isolated community of Cwmllynfell. This will be the only payphone in the area if the other payphone in Cwmllynfell is removed as proposed. Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01639 842106	Junction Penywern Road - Adj Wernfawr Inn, Wern Road, Ystalyfera, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 842268	Near Graignewydd, Chemical Row, Godregraig, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 850216	Prossers Terrace, Cymmer, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available in the nearby community of Cymmer
01639 850259	Adj Post Office, Afan Road, Duffryn Rhondda, Port Talbot	Object	This payphone serves the community of Dyffryn which is relatively isolated with poor pedestrian links to nearby communities. There is no alternative payphone provision in the settlement Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01639 850262	Adj No 40 Heol Y Glyn, Cymmer, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 850385	Near Post Office, Heol Y Deryn, Glyncorrwg, Port Talbot	Object	This phone is currently inoperable. This phone serves a relatively isolated settlement with poor pedestrian links to nearby communities and without alternative payphone provision nearby. Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs. In addition to the objection, it is recommended that this phone should be repaired and retained.

01639 850453	Adj Police Station, Brytwn Road, Cymmer, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 882115	Abbots Close, Margam, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 882440	Silver Avenue, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 885048	White Close, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 896222	Queen Street, Pontrhydyfen, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 896344	Opp 33 Ynys Y Gwas, Cwmavon, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01639 896809	OS 158 Heol Jwbilli, Penllyn, Cwmavon, Port Talbot	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 464137	Elba Crescent, Crymlyn Burrows, Swansea	Agree	No objections received.
01792 812069	Heol Heddwch, Neath Abbey, Neath	Object	Coedffranc Community Council has objected to the removal of this payphone in its neighbouring community council as they believe it is "required for emergency access for rural communities and there is poor mobile signal in the area" Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01792 812090	Junction Peniel Green Road Skewen, Brich Grove Road, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 812264	St Johns Terrace, Neath Abbey, Neath	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 812482	The Greenway, Llandarcy, Neath	Agree (Community Council may wish to adopt)	No objections received and alternative provision available. The phone box is in a conservation area and Coedffranc Community Council would however like to see the red phone box retained once the phone is removed.

01792 812482	School Road, Jersey Marine, Neath	Object	Coedffranc Community Council has objected to the removal of this payphone in its neighbouring community council as they believe it is "required for emergency access for rural communities and there is poor mobile signal in the area". There is no accessible alternative payphone provision in the area. Objection therefore considered reasonable based on community needs.
01792 862269	Commercial Road, Rhydyfro, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 863014	Junction Gwyns Place and Alltwen Hil, Pontardawe, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 863156	Maes Y Coed Road, Cilmaengwyn, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 863165	Alltywerin, Pontardawe, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 863199	Junction Grove Road and Brecon Road, Pontardawe, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 863292	Edward Street, Alltwen, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available
01792 863315	Junction Ashwood Drive and Cwmnantllwyd Road, Gellinudd, Swansea	Agree	No objections received and alternative provision available

Summary

The above assessment recommends that the Council object to the loss of 18 out of the proposed 53 payphone removals (thus agreeing to removal of 35). In this regard, it is also emphasised that the Authority has considered and acted in accordance with the six Community requirements as set out in section 4 of the Communications Act 2003 and referred to above.

In reaching the conclusions above, it is noted that there is a 'local veto' by the Council as a 'relevant public body' where it objects to removal of such a payphone, provided such written objection (in the form of a 'Final

Notification') is submitted to the service provider within the consultation period.

Subject to final notification of these objections (see process below), this would leave the NPT administrative area with 80 payphones (62 to be retained by BT plus 18 sought to be retained following this consultation)

Formal Process / Next Steps

Subject to Members' ratification of the recommendations within this report, having considered the responses to the consultation, the 'Relevant Public Body' must publish its draft decision in the form of a notification ('the First Notification') and send a copy to the Secretary of State.

There is then a further consultation period of one month before a final decision can be issued, with re-consultation undertaken with Councillors, Community Councils and Heads of Service on the draft decision.

Having considered the responses to the First Notification, if any, the Relevant Public Body must then publish its decision in the form of a notification ('the Final Notification'), setting out the Local Authority's decision.

Conclusions

As identified earlier in the report, the formal consultation period specified within the Council's own notification to local community representatives / the public ends on 5th October 2016 (the day after Committee). Accordingly, while any additional representations received before Committee will be reported on the amendment sheet, delegated authority is sought to allow Officers to make any necessary changes to the 'First Notification' to reflect additional submissions received by 5th October 2016.

In order to meet the tight statutory deadlines, delegated authority is also sought to allow Officers to consider the responses to the 'First Notification', if any, and make any necessary changes to the First Notification and subsequently publish the Council's decision in the form of 'the Final Notification'.

Recommendation:

That Members resolve: -

- 1. That, provided no additional representations are received by 5th October 2016 (which have not been referred to Committee), that the council publish and consult upon its draft decision ('the First Notification') as detailed within this report;
- 2. That, in the event additional representations are received by 5th October 2016 (which have not been referred to Committee), that delegated authority is granted to the Head of Planning and Public Protection to make any necessary amendments to the draft decision ('the First Notification') as detailed within this report and to publish and consult upon 'the First Notification';
- 3. That delegated authority is granted to the Head of Planning and Public Protection to consider the responses to the 'First Notification', if any, and make any necessary changes to the First Notification, and subsequently publish the Council's decision in the form of 'the Final Notification'.