

Council – 28 September 2022

Public Questions:

1. From Mr Andrew Barchi to Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Communities

B.T. is in the process of digitalising its residential tel nos. The effect of this can be to cut off ones lifeline call system without warning. This has already happened to many 1000's of people. Your lifeline reputation is very good but one emergency call not answered could destroy that. Will you, as Folkestone and Hythe District Council, ask BT to give you its forward program so that you and your customers can be warned & central control can be prepared? BT will no doubt be very reluctant to do that but you must insist. One death, and your lifeline has saved many, would abolish your reputation. There are solutions but they are often individual to each BT customer. How will Folkestone and Hythe district council ensure that this issue is seriously addressed?

ANSWER:

Thank you for your question.

A letter was sent in March to all lifeline clients to inform them of these telephone line changes.

The lifeline equipment that is being installed is compliant with digital phones lines, however because the units will be plugged into the router rather than the traditional land line the router will rely on an electricity supply and therefore if there is a power cut then the lifeline unit may fail.

Telephone providers such as BT, Virgin, Sky, etc should be recognising lifeline customers as vulnerable clients and supplying them with a battery backup for their router in the instance that there is a power cut, however this has still not been rolled out by the telephone providers.

We have advised and continue to advise all lifeline customers that if their phone provider switches them to digital their lifeline may not work in the event of a power cut but the telephone provider should provide them with a back-up battery as they are a vulnerable client.

As Lifeline365 is a member of the Telecare Services Association, we attend their meetings with the telephone providers for updates on their progress on the switchover and each meeting the same questions are asked regarding the battery back-ups that are needed for our customers/clients. We will continue to keep abreast of the situation and ensure our clients are notified if there are any changes in the switchover process which may affect their telecare equipment.

New Global System for Mobiles (GSM) lifeline units have been released and are being trialled at the moment. These will work on a mobile sim card rather than the digital/analogue phone line and will continue to work if there is a power cut.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

BBC South East today has twice raised this issue on the news pointing to the many thousands that have accidentally been cut off and the seriousness of their situation. Has the Cabinet Member had discussions with BT about this issue, and what was BT's response?

ANSWER:

I have answered that question, but I will check with the team and if there is a further response, it will be sent to you.