

PE2199/B: Facilitate access to emergency telephone services for remote communities

Scottish Government written submission, 1 December 2025

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

Telecommunications policy remains Reserved to the UK Government and is regulated by Ofcom. In practice this means that the Scottish Government is unable to directly intervene or instruct providers such as BT in cases like this.

The best resource to refer to is Ofcom's [consumer-facing webpage on the PSTN switch-off](#).

There is also further information at a network level in Ofcom's [Connected Nations 2025 UK report](#).

What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

A new draft National Islands Plan is to be laid before the Scottish Parliament before the Christmas Recess. A statutory document under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the Plan recognises that island infrastructure and connectivity can be vulnerable, with disruption heightening issues concerning equity of access for island communities and requiring rapid responses in often challenging conditions. While reflecting on the robust resilience arrangements already in place across Scotland, the Plan recognises that more can be done to strengthen them further and make them even more cognisant of island communities' circumstances. To this end, the draft Plan includes a commitment to working with local authorities and other key stakeholders to capture and apply learning from disruption affecting island communities, helping to strengthen preparedness and response planning, including in relation to digital infrastructure and food resilience.

It should be noted that the switch-off of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) in the UK is industry-led, with oversight from the UK Government's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), reflecting that telecoms legislation is reserved to UK government.

The Scottish Government has utilised available levers and invested heavily in recent years to improve connectivity in communities across Scotland. Over the last decade, Scottish public sector-led digital infrastructure programmes have enabled over one million faster broadband connections. Through the over £600 million Reaching 100% (R100) programme we have accelerated access to future-proofed full fibre broadband to some of the most challenging terrain in Europe, and will continue to do so in the coming years.

Around 80% of premises to be connected through the R100 contracts are in rural areas, reflecting our view that investment should be focussed where it is needed

most – rural Scotland. The vast majority of R100 contract build is full-fibre and Gigabit-capable – over 30 times faster than our original superfast commitment. We currently expect the contracts to connect around 113,000 premises and complete in 2028. The R100 North contract has delivered 16 new fibre subsea cables, further bolstering connectivity across 15 Scottish islands.

The Scottish Government is also playing a lead role in the delivery of Project Gigabit in Scotland. The first Project Gigabit contract in Scotland was awarded by the Scottish Government in January 2025 to Scottish alternative network provider GoFibre, with 13,000 premises expected to be connected in the Borders and East Lothian using £26 million of UK Government funding. A further procurement covering over 63,000 eligible premises in the North East of Scotland was awarded to GoFibre in July 2025, with £105M of UKG funding. There is a live procurement covering Orkney and Shetland currently underway, with a further regional procurement in Fife, Perth and Kinross expected to launch before the end of this year.

The Scottish Government also recognises the important part that mobile connectivity plays in keeping communities connected – through our award-winning Scotland 4G Infill programme, we have invested £28.75 million to deliver future-proofed, 4G mobile infrastructure and services at 55 mobile “notspots” in rural and island areas. Furthermore, the UK Government’s Shared Rural Network programme is expected to increase geographic coverage of 4G to over 91% by 2027.

Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee’s attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

The relevant areas of competence have already taken a number of steps to ensure emergency back-up systems are in place. On the 18 December 2023, a number of Communications providers, including BT, Virgin Media O2, Sky and Vodafone signed a Public Switched Telephone Network charter which sets out steps that the industry will take to protect vulnerable consumers through the transition. Further information regarding the Charter can be found here: [Public Switched Telephone Network charter - GOV.UK](#).

Ofcom, the independent telecoms regulator, has issued [guidance on how telecoms companies can fulfil their regulatory obligation](#) to ensure that their Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) customers have access to the emergency services in such circumstances. This guidance states that providers should have at least one solution available that enables access to emergency organisations for a minimum of one hour in the event of a power outage in the premises. The solution should be suitable for the needs of the customer and should be offered free of charge to those who are vulnerable and are dependent on their landline telephone.

Critical National Infrastructure Team

Civil Contingencies Division