Telephones

Most people now have a telephone, either in their home or a mobile telephone. The number of suppliers and the different services they provide can make it difficult to know what is the best option for you. In this section we have given information about how to find the most suitable supplier for your needs and also details of some of the services that you may find useful.

Landlines and mobile phones

Finding the best provider

The following price comparison websites can help you to find the cheapest supplier for your needs. You will be asked to provide details of the type of calls that you make and the average duration and frequency in order for your telephone needs to be assessed. If you prefer to speak to someone, you can contact them using the details given at the top of this page.

- **uSwitch**
- **Simply Switch**

If you are in receipt of certain benefits for example, Pension Credit, Income Support, Universal Credit or Jobseeker's Allowance, you may be eligible for a more affordable telephone service. For example BT have introduced **BT Basic** .

If cost is not your main priority, you may wish to choose a provider who has the best results for service provision. You can do this by contacting **Ofcom**. Ofcom provides details of service provision, reported faults, complaints and billing accuracy for all of the main home telephone service providers.

Telephone packages for people with a low income

Social tariffs are available to help people who are struggling to pay for their mobile, telephone or broadband connections to stay connected digitally.

Ofcom has a list of the social tariffs available. Some options are only available to people who receive certain benefits.

Digital switchover or 'landline switch off'

The UK's telephone network is changing. It is being upgraded and improved over the next 3 years. Telephone providers are moving customers from old analogue landlines to a new digital landline service. This means that in the future, landline calls will be delivered over digital technology, called Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). You might also see this referred to as 'digital phone' or 'digital voice'.

Services that use the old landline system such as, home phones and healthcare devices will be switched over to the new digital system.

For most people this change will be straightforward. Your telephone provider should contact you before the switchover to discuss what you need to make sure your telephone service isn't affected. Tell them if you need extra help with the installation, for example if you have a disability. If you need any new equipment to make your main telephone work, for example, a new router, new telephone handset or if you need a new broadband service installed, your provider can arrange this.

To keep your landline you will need an internet connection. Please note that in during a power cut this phone line will not work. If you have a mobile phone this can still be used. Tell your telephone provider if you have no other means of calling the emergency services. They can offer a solution to allow calls to be made to emergency services. For example, a new telephone handset with a battery and sim card could still be used during a power cut.

People who use telecare devices that are connected to a phone line, such as a fall monitor, lifeline, or personal alarm. When you speak to your telephone provider tell them about the telecare service that you use. They can give you more advice about how the switch could affect you.

Ostara provides telecare in Newcastle. For new customers, they now only new install digital base units. For existing customers, they will contac you to swap your old analogue equipment and replace it with new digital equipment. The new digital units have a 72-hour battery back-up and a 4G roaming sim. This means your phone can still be used if there is a power cut or problems with the landline, so you can get help in an emergency. This process is being managed by Newcastle City Council. It is planned that by March 2025 the telecare service will be fully digital. This is well in advance of the switch off date.

The Housing Plus schemes (Sheltered and Assisted Living) are being upgraded to ensure they can operate when the landline networks are switched off.

If you have other devices connected to your telephone landline, such as alarm systems, you might need to upgrade your device to make sure it is compatible. You can contact the equipment supplier or device manufacturer to find out if it will still work when you switch to the new digital phone line.

Read more about moving landline phones to digital technology: what you need to know from Ofcom

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Stopping unwanted calls

Sometimes we can receive telephone calls which are unwanted. This is not only annoying and time wasting, but can be worrying or frightening if they are frequent or persistent. However, there

are ways to stop or cut down on the amount of unwanted calls that you receive.

Marketing Calls

In 1999 it became unlawful for companies to make direct marketing calls to individuals who have indicated that they do not wish to receive such calls.

The **Telephone Preference Service (TPS)** can help to ensure that your telephone and mobile number is no longer available to organisations who may contact you with offers and information that you don't wish to receive.

You can register with them on their website, contact the **Telephone Preference Service (TPS)** for more information. It can take up to 28 days for the registration to take effect.

Before you register, it is important to consider that this will stop you from receiving information from companies that you may be interested in.

Silent Calls

Silent calls often occur when marketing companies try to contact you. They use an automated calling system which calls large number of people at the same time. If you are not the first person to answer the call, you will only hear silence at the other end as the operator is busy with another person.

You can also stop these calls by registering with the **Telephone Preference Service (TPS).** See the above section for further details.

Malicious or abusive calls

If you receive a malicious or abusive call, contact your service provider immediately. All telephone companies have different procedures for dealing with such calls and will advise you on the appropriate action to take.

This may involve changing your telephone number or tracing future calls. In some circumstances it may be advisable to involve the police.

Priority fault repair for disabled people (Landlines Only)

Your phone company must provide you with a priority fault repair service if you have a disability. This means if your telephone connection stops working they will repair it quickly. There are specific eligibility criteria for this service, you may also be eligible if you have a chronic illness or are housebound. You will need to register for this service, so contact your supplier as they all have different eligibility criteria. BT have produced a handy guide on BT's Priority Fault Repair Service.

Protected Services Scheme

Some telephone providers, such as BT, offer a Protected Services Scheme. This means that if you were unable to pay your bill on time for example you had an unexpected stay in hospital your telephone line will not be cut off.

You can nominate a relative or friend who the Telephone Provider can contact if your bill is not paid. They can then work together to make sure your phone line isn't disconnected. For more information on this service contact your Telephone Provider or visit **BTs website** for more details on their service.

Free 195 Directory Enquiries

If you're not able to read or hold a telephone directory due to illness or disability, you can apply for free 195 Directory Enquiries. This service is available to BT customers. For more details please visit **BT's website.**

Complaining about your Service Provider

If you have a complaint about your service provider, whether it is about the quality of your telephone service or about the standard of their customer services, you should contact their complaints department in the first instance.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your initial complaint, you can contact **Ofcom** the independent regulator for all UK communications industries. You can contact their complaints department via the **OfCom website.**

Other Useful Information

- **Mobile phones article** on Information Now may be of interest

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Useful Organisations

Telephone Preference Service (TPS)

Email: tps@dma.org.uk

Website: www.tpsonline.org.uk

Telephone: 0345 0700 707

Address: DMA House, W1W 8SS

Ofcom

Website: www.ofcom.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 3333 or 020 7981 3040

Address: Riverside House, SE1 9HA

uSwitch

Email: CustomerServices@uswitch.com

Website: www.uswitch.com

Telephone: 0800 6888 557

Address: The Cooperage , SE1 2LH

Simply Switch

Email: customerservice@simplyswitch.com

Website: www.simplyswitch.com

Telephone: 0800 0111 395

Address: Jessop House, CR0 1XX

Telecomshelpline.com

Website: http://www.telecomshelpline.com

Telephone: 0800 276 1186

Citizens Advice

Website: www.adviceguide.org.uk

Telephone: 0808 223 1133

Address: Citizens Advice, EC1A 4HD

Gocompare.com

Email: help@gocompare.com

Website: http://www.gocompare.com

Address: Gocompare.com Limited, NP10 8UH

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