

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON 24 JUNE 2008

SUBJECT: BT PUBLIC PAYPHONE REMOVALS

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT / URGENCY

- 1.1 To gain the committee's approval for the Council's response to BT's consultation on the proposed removal of 26 public payphones from Moray.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section D (1) of the Council's Administrative Scheme to exercise the statutory function of the Council as planning authority under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Acts, the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1973 and other relevant legislation.
- 1.3 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, on the Chairman certifying that in his opinion it requires to be considered on the grounds of urgency in order to give early consideration. The reason for the urgency is that the Council's response to BT's consultation has to be sent to BT by 2nd July 2008.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **The committee is asked to approve that the written response, as attached to this report, be sent to BT stating that The Moray Council objects to the proposed removal of 26 public payphones from Moray.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 BT wrote to the Council in April explaining their proposals to remove 26 public payphones from Moray. BT's main reason for the removals is that they are "little used" because of the high percentage of mobile phone ownership.
- 3.2 BT are only obliged to consult on public payphone removals if there is not another payphone within 400 metres. BT state that in addition to the stated 26, there will be other payphones removed from Moray which are within 400 metres of an existing payphone (it is likely that these are located in Moray's towns).
- 3.3 A 2005 OFCOM review concluded that it is the responsibility of local authorities to initiate their own consultation process on any BT payphone removals. The consultation period for Moray will end on 2nd July 2008.
- 3.4 Letters were sent to all the affected community councils and area forums asking them to send their comments and/or objections to the Council by 20th June. To date 5 letters of objections have been received. One letter each from

Kingston, Drybridge, Orton, Cabrach and Knockando. These letters will be forwarded to BT and a summary of the letters will be included in the Council's response to BT.

- 3.5 BT have provided the Council with annual usage figures for each of the payphones proposed for removal. The Council's written response to BT will point out that five of the payphones have been used more than one hundred times in the last year, including the Mosstodloch Filling Station payphone which was used over one thousand times. (Members may note that four payphones had not been used at all in the last year: Relugas, Haugh of Glass, Lower Cabrach and Cabrach).
- 3.6 The Moray Council's written response will point out to BT that eleven of the payphones are in areas which have poor or no mobile phone reception. The response will state the Moray Council particularly opposes payphone removals where there is poor mobile phone reception. Those payphones are vital in emergency situations.
- 3.7 The Council's written response will also point out that the payphones are all in rural locations (with an average of 6km to the nearest alternative payphone). The Council will oppose these removals because it further isolates people in rural areas.
- 3.8 One of the payphones proposed for removal is in Rothiemay whose post office has been earmarked for being downgraded from a 21-hour weekly service to a 5-hour weekly service. This will be mentioned in the Council's response to BT as this is a double blow to the sustainability of the community of Rothiemay.
- 3.9 The Council's proposed written response to the BT consultation is attached as appendix I.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

(i) This report complies with the the Corporate Development Plan which states priorities of "providing easy access to services" and "listening, consulting and engaging with communities".

(ii) The report complies with the Moray Community Plan policy of "building stronger communities".

(b) Policy and Legal

A 2005 OFCOM review concluded that it is the responsibility of local authorities to initiate their own consultation process on any BT payphone removals.

(c) **Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)**

None. Work on the response to BT has been undertaken within existing staffing resources.

(d) **Consultations**

Consultations have been held with all affected Community Councils and Area Forums in Moray and their response is incorporated.

5. **CONCLUSION**

BT's selection process for removals has been overly based on 'number of times used' and income. It has not taken sufficient account of mobile reception, emergency usage, remoteness and other particular situations and for these reasons the Council opposes the removal of all 26 and supports the arguments put forward from its consultation with local communities.

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Background Papers: Correspondence and information are on file in Environmental Services, Planning & Development Section. This includes the Council's official response to the BT consultation.

Ref: AMACB/