

Upgrading landlines to digital technology – what you need to know

The technology that we use to make landline phone calls is due to be upgraded over the next few years but what does this mean for you as a landline customer?

Traditionally, landline phone calls have been delivered over the old ‘copper’ telephone network known as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). However, the equipment used in the PSTN was developed and installed in the 1980’s and is becoming harder and increasingly more expensive to maintain. BT has therefore taken the decision to retire the PSTN by the end of December 2025.

Telecoms providers have been investing heavily in new systems and infrastructure networks such as full fibre, which means that in the future, landline calls can be delivered via digital technology called Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), which uses a broadband connection.

Your landline provider will contact you well in advance of when the process to start migrating your old landline to your new telephone service will apply to you and your property.

Once a home service is moved from PSTN to VoIP, the phone will generally work in the same way as it always has, but it will need to be plugged into a broadband router instead of into the phone socket on your wall. If you need any new equipment – e.g. a new router, your provider should sort this out for you.

This change from PSTN to VoIP will affect other devices that rely on a phone line – such as some fire and burglar alarm systems and telecare devices. It is therefore important that you mention those devices to your provider and check if they need to be replaced or reconfigured in order to continue working when they notify you that your service is to be migrated.

Once the PSTN is switched off, if you wish to continue having a landline phone, but don’t already have broadband or don’t use a broadband service, you will generally still need to have a suitable connection. Ofcom expects that providers will have a range of options for people in this situation.

However, as VoIP services will operate successfully on broadband connections of less than 1Mbps, customers should not be forced to take out a high-speed broadband package if they do not want to.

One issue with VoIP that has raised concerns with residents is what happens during a power cut at your property? A phone connected to a broadband router wouldn’t work as it gets its power from the property’s mains electricity supply. So what if you needed to call the emergency services?

If you rely on your landline – for example, you don’t have a mobile phone, are unable to use a mobile phone or you don’t have a mobile signal inside your home – your ISP must make sure that you are able to contact the emergency services in the event of a power cut. This could be in the form of battery back-up so that your landline will continue to work for the minimum of at least 1 hour.

However, since the end of 2018, Ofcom’s [published guidance](#) states an expectation to ‘recommend only providing battery back-up or other protection facilities to vulnerable consumers.’ If you would still quite like the option of a back-up solution but aren’t in a vulnerable group, ISP Review’s [Solutions for Battery Back-up of Fibre Broadband and VoIP](#) article provides you with some options.

If you have any further queries or concerns about the migration to VoIP technology, we suggest you contact your landline or broadband provider in the first instance. More information is also available at the [Future of Voice website](#).