

Telecoms industry agrees to new cost-of-living plan following government summit led by Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries

- Customers who can no longer afford their bills will be offered help to stay connected
- Digital Secretary urges anyone struggling to speak to their provider following No 10 summit co-chaired by cost-of-living tsar David Buttress

The UK's biggest broadband and mobile operators have agreed to a raft of new commitments to further help customers with the rising cost of living following a government-led summit at No 10 Downing Street.

These include measures such as allowing customers struggling with bills to move to cheaper packages without charge or penalty, or agreeing manageable payment plans, and options to improve existing low cost offers and increasing promotion of existing deals.

The measures, put forward by the government in consultation with the industry, will ensure people struggling with bills due to the economic aftermath of the pandemic and war in Ukraine can continue to make calls, send texts and get online.

Bosses representing the vast majority of the UK telecoms market – including BT Group, Openreach, Virgin Media O2, Vodafone, Three, TalkTalk and Sky – signed up to the pledges at an event chaired by Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries and Cost of Living Business Tsar David Buttress today.

The commitments, which take effect immediately, are:

- All providers commit to supporting their customers who may be struggling with the cost-of-living and to treat them with compassion, understanding and as individuals.
- All providers commit to supporting customers struggling with their bills and to offer ways to keep them connected, such as allowing them to move to cheaper packages without charge or penalty, or agreeing manageable payment plans.
- All operators commit to continue to protect the connectivity of their customers known to be vulnerable as a priority.
- Providers – supported by Government – commit to take steps to raise

awareness of low cost products to those claiming Universal Credit.

- Mobile providers commit to considering more ways to help their customers, including exploring tariffs, options to improve existing low cost offers, and increasing promotion of existing deals.

The government has already taken action to help those on benefits access cheaper deals by negotiating social tariffs for those on Universal Credit which are now available across 99 per cent of the UK, but this latest intervention means anyone struggling to pay their broadband or mobile bill as a result of global price rises can expect support from their provider if they ask for it.

Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

Families across the country face increased anxiety about keeping up with bills, so today I agreed with broadband and mobile industry bosses what more can be done to support people during this difficult time.

I'm pleased to report the industry is listening and has signed up to new commitments offering customers struggling with the cost of living help to stay connected. Those who need support should contact their supplier to see what is available.

Commenting on the meeting, Chief Executive at Mobile UK, Hamish MacLeod, said:

Mobile operators welcome the commitments agreed upon today with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport, which build on offers already in place to help the most vulnerable. We welcomed the chance to discuss with the Government not only how to raise awareness of such schemes but also to set out the further steps being taken to support those struggling with their bills.

Andrew Glover, Chair of the Internet Service Providers' Association, said:

The telecoms sector knows that people are facing real challenges with the cost-of-living crisis. Our members are determined to do what they can to help their customers through this period and, together with government, we will work to raise greater awareness of the support available.

These commitments, along with the social tariffs that are available from many members, will hopefully help people in need at this challenging time. We encourage customers who are struggling with their bills to reach out to their broadband provider to get help.

The Digital Secretary has been calling on all providers yet to offer social tariffs – discounted broadband and mobile deals for people on Universal Credit and other benefits – to step up and support their customers. She has called on broadband providers that do offer social tariffs to do more to raise awareness of them, after Ofcom data showed less than two per cent of eligible people are taking up these discounted offers.

In a letter sent in April to the bosses of BT Group, Virgin Media O2, Hyperoptic, KCom, G.Network and Community Fibre, she asked for an outline of their plans to promote social tariffs and for estimates of take-up over the coming twelve months. These companies all offer social tariff products to low-income households, with some providers offering deals from as low as £10 per month. Vodafone – via its Voxi brand – recently launched the first mobile social tariff.

Social tariff offers are available to eligible people in 99 per cent of the country and could represent a saving of more than 50 per cent (around £180 per year) against the average cost of broadband.

Landline and broadband social tariffs have been offered by BT, Virgin Media O2 and KCom for several years, but since 2021 there has been a threefold rise in companies voluntarily offering their own social tariffs – with Sky, Now Broadband, County Broadband and others coming forward – after the government stepped in to negotiate the low-cost deals.

Meeting attendees:

- Nadine Dorries, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and sport
- David Buttress, Cost of Living Business Tsar
- Sabine Chalmers, BT Group – Director of Regulatory Affairs and Company Secretary
- Marc Allera, Chief Executive, BT Consumer
- Jeff Dodds, Virgin Media O2 – Chief Operating Officer
- Stephen Van Rooyen, Sky – Chief Executive Officer
- Tristia Harrison, TalkTalk – Chief Executive Officer
- Dana Tobak, Hyperoptic – Chief Executive Officer
- Graeme Oxby, CommunityFibre – Chief Executive

- David Sangster, G.Network – Chief Executive Officer
- Clive Selley, Openreach – Chief Executive Officer
- Ahmed Essam, Vodafone UK, Chief Executive
- Tony Keeling, Shell Energy – Chief Executive Officer
- Greg Mesch, CityFibre – Chief Executive Officer
- Gareth Williams, Gigaclear – Chief Executive Officer
- Malcolm Corbett, Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA) – Chief Executive Officer
- Tim Shaw, Kcom – Chief Executive
- Andrew Glovers, Internet Service Providers Association, Chair
- Lindsey Fussell, Ofcom – Group Director
- Elaine Carey, Three – Chief Commercial Officer
- Hamish MacLeod, Mobile UK – Chief Executive