9 July 2014

Tim Yeo MP
Chair, Energy and Climate Change Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Tim,

Telephone resilience during power cuts

Thank you for your letter of 12 June, received 17 June, from the Committee in relation to resilience requirements for telecoms providers. The Committee asked:

- Whether there are any resilience requirements placed on manufacturers of telephony equipment and, if so, what those requirements are; and
- What warnings are placed on the packaging of corded and cordless phones that explain whether or not they will work in the event of a power cut.

The regulatory framework for telecoms deals with networks and services. It does not cover telephones or other customer equipment. Ofcom therefore does not have the powers to place any resilience requirements on the manufacturers of telephony equipment or require warnings on the packaging of corded and cordless phones that explain whether or not they will work in the event of a power cut.

However, telecoms providers are required by legislation to take appropriate measures to maintain the availability of their public communication networks and services (although again this does not include telephones themselves). Equipment is one of a number of factors which can affect the overall reliability of a network but it is also important to note that the way in which the equipment is used within a network will often have a larger impact on resilience than the equipment itself. Relevant factors include the levels of redundancy, protection of sites, provision of back-up power, provision of alternative routes, and the overall network or service design.

In practice, the fixed telephone network is very resilient to power failure. Local telephone exchanges usually have a combination of battery and generator back-up. This maintains service at the exchange in the event of mains power failure and supplies power to the customer’s telephone. As the Department of Energy and Climate Change has noted, we have provided advice to consumers on the steps they can take to ensure they have a working phone during a power cut, such as keeping a spare corded plug-in phone for use in emergencies. In addition under European legislation\(^1\), we require providers to take all necessary measures to maintain uninterrupted access to the Emergency Services.

While responding to these questions on telephony resilience, it seems opportune to provide you with some comments on the recent submission from the Department for Energy and Climate Change on the same topic. I enclose some small clarificatory comments on their paragraphs about telephony resilience, which I hope the Committee will find helpful.

If the Committee has any further questions about this, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ed Richards