



Rachel Reeves MP
Chair, Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

30th March 2020

Dear Ms Reeves,

Keeping customers informed and connected during COVID-19

Millions of customers across the UK rely on Sky in their daily lives. They rely on our broadband in order to work from home or to access key Government services; on our talk and mobile services to keep in touch with the people they love most; and on our TV services to stay informed of the latest news, and for much-needed entertainment. These services, which are all recognised as Critical National Infrastructure, are hugely important to families during normal times. But in the difficult and challenging circumstances we face today, we believe that the work we do is more vital than ever.

The UK Government shares this view. That's why yesterday, along with the rest of industry, we've agreed an important set of commitments to support and protect vulnerable consumers and those who may become vulnerable due to circumstances arising from Covid-19. This includes promising to work with customers who might find it difficult to pay their bill to ensure they are treated fairly and supported appropriately. And a commitment to prioritise extremely vulnerable customers and those self-isolating for alternative methods of communication where critical repairs cannot be carried out in the home.

In order to deliver on these commitments, and to do what we can for the people who need us most, we are asking a portion of our frontline staff – some colleagues who work in our contact centres, and a number of our field engineers – to continue to come to work during this time. These are staff that all UK authorities have recognised as key workers – colleagues whose roles are essential in ensuring that our services can continue to function and that our vulnerable customers get the help they need. Their jobs are integral to delivering on the Government's requests.

This is not a decision we have taken lightly, because the health and safety of our staff and their families remains our top priority. That's why we have made a series of sweeping changes to our ways of working, that go beyond the public health guidelines, in order to make the working environment as safe as possible.

For our contact centres, we have materially reducing the number of people on site at any one time, operating at around 50% of usual levels and from today reducing this to 30% capacity. We have instigated rigorous social distancing practices of 2m and more, supported by one way systems, temperature checks and entry and exit spacing around the offices. We are only covering the critical business functions needed for our vulnerable customers at this time, standing down new sales, installations and marketing calls. And we are pushing hard to get more colleagues to be able to work from home, with the aim of reaching 50% home working by mid-April, despite the current scarcity of supply chain. We are moving at pace to change the operating model of the last 30 years to allow our staff to work from home in order to support our vulnerable customers. In the meantime we will keep our people safe by following or exceeding government guidelines until we reach that point.

For our field engineers, we have completely revamped our policy for customer visits. We had already significantly reduced the number of home visits we do every day, focusing on service and repairs to keep existing customers connected and informed. But from today we will no longer enter customers' homes. Where possible our Engineers will call customers first and see if they can fix issues over the phone. We'll also do some outside work, like fixing dishes and cabling outside properties and potentially sending cables into the home. We will continue to provide engineers with hand sanitiser, protective equipment and thermometers, as well as clear guidance on how to maintain social distancing – staying 2m apart with no direct contact – and how to keep PPE equipment clean.

The steps we have already taken have had a marked effect on our operations. Home engineer visits last week were reduced from a normal level of around 10,000 per day to around 3,000. And as we are only taking priority calls from vulnerable customers, we've seen visits to our website increase to a peak of 1.6m per day, almost four times the usual level. We are answering around 60% of the calls we usually do, at a time of significantly increased demand.

Despite this, we are still facing calls to close down our contact centres completely, or stand down all of our engineers. But we cannot abandon our vulnerable customers during this unprecedented time. So for as long as we can continue to keep our staff safe and protected, we will continue to operate the essential services that our customer base relies on.

The situation continues to develop at pace. We are in regular contact with all relevant UK authorities who are all aware of our approach. As Government guidance changes we want to make sure we are adapting as swiftly as possible to reflect those changes, and take all necessary steps to provide the safest working environment possible. But for now we believe we have struck the right balance – doing what we need to do in order to keep our vulnerable customers connected and informed, and our frontline staff safe and protected.

I hope the above gives you reassurance about Sky's approach. If you have any further concerns, then my team would be happy to discuss them.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SvR', is positioned above the printed name.

Stephen van Rooyen

Executive Vice President & CEO
UK and Europe
Sky