TalkTalk's response to COVID-19 and advice for your constituents

We recognise that COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is creating uncertainty for many of us in our daily lives and that staying connected – whether by phone or by internet – is especially important to people during this period. At TalkTalk, we want to reassure you that we are working together with the Government and industry partners to ensure our telecoms networks continue to run efficiently and effectively

We would also like to take this opportunity to provide you with our simple and practical tips that will assist your constituents in getting the most they can from their broadband as many switch to working from home.

Network Continuity

Broadband network performance is dependent on capacity and we are aware of some concerns in the media that the increased level of people working from home could see broadband networks struggling - for example leading to downtime or buffering. We have standard procedures and practices to monitor network capacity and ensure that we are able to meet demand, and these are especially applicable to the current situation.

We have a number of pro-active measures to ensure our customers continue to receive the best service possible, including:

- Optimising our network continually for everyone, regardless of connection type or where the customer lives.
- Offering all our internet packages with **unlimited data**, so that our customers are able to access as much data as they require.
- Monitoring the peaks in demand, in line with usual practice, and implementing robust internal measures to manage an uplift in demand and withstand increases in volume.

We are monitoring the situation closely and this week (starting Monday 23rd March) we have seen on average a 26% increase in our traffic compared to last Monday. However, increased traffic still remains lower than at normal peak times, which are evenings and weekends. We are in regular dialogue with Government, Ofcom and industry partners on this issue to ensure that we continue to be able to provide normal services.

In the medium term, as the Government look to ensure faster, more reliable broadband nationwide, it is imperative that investment spurs competition and full-fibre broadband extends to the hardest to reach areas of the UK.

Simple and practical advice for your constituents

Activities associated with working from home, like emails and video conferencing services are less bandwidth intensive than video streaming or other activities. With this in mind, we have outlined practical steps that your constituents can take in order to ensure reliable connectivity:

- Ideally, the router should be high up and unobstructed – don't have it on the floor or behind a piece of furniture.
- Make sure the router is plugged into your master phone socket. It's usually the biggest one in your house, often in your hallway or near the front door.
- The more devices you have connected the more bandwidth you use – it's like having all your taps turned on at once. Disconnect any devices you aren't using to free-up bandwidth e.g. if you are working on your laptop, disconnect your tablet device.
- The router's signal can suffer interference from other electronic devices. Keep your router away from microwaves or cordless phones and stay close to the router when connecting wirelessly.
- Germs can live on hand-held devices and your router, so clean them regularly – just remember to disconnect the power sources beforehand. You can use anti-bacterial surface cleaners to help keep them clean.

All consumers, regardless of whether they are TalkTalk customers or not, can find helpful tips and guidance from our working from home advice page for more details.

Supporting vulnerable customers
We recognise that many customers may be facing new financial challenges. We have introduced a range of measures to offer support such as payment holidays and extended terms. We encourage any customer who is concerned to get in touch with us to discuss their particular circumstances. **We will also not be introducing any price rises for the next three months.**

The majority of our customers have a calling boost and have unlimited calls within their package. In addition, all of our customers are able to make free calls between TalkTalk customers and all customers are able to contact 111 numbers for free. This includes customers who may have a historic debt with TalkTalk to ensure that everyone is able to access medical advice.

We have around 25,000 customers who remain on legacy voice only packages by choice. We recognise that without a broadband service they have no option to move to Wi-Fi calling or social media apps. **We have therefore capped their costs for April so that they can make calls confident that they won't incur significantly higher costs.**

We also recognise that vulnerable customers may be particularly anxious or at risk if they encounter service problems. **Therefore, we are creating a special priority line for vulnerable customers.** Calls from customers with recognised vulnerabilities on our system will be redirected to this UK-based specialist team between 9am and 12pm Monday to Friday. We are also working with Openreach on extending support for vulnerable people to those particularly affected by COVID-19, including those over the age of 70, with underlying health conditions and pregnant women.

If you would like to discuss these issues in more depth or have a particular concern, please get in touch with Bronagh McCloskey, Head of Public Affairs, on bronagh.mccloskey@talktalkplc.com .