BT Relay UK Service: Annual Report

October 2021

Headline summary

- Although the Relay UK service continues to perform effectively and to a high-quality standard, the Covid 19 pandemic and related societal changes within the UK over the last 12 months have had a significant impact on performance across the service and have affected our ability to meet some KPIs. Specific impacts include:
  - after the easing of lockdown measures during the summer of 2021, there has been a large and sustained increase in demand for 999 emergency services and in particular for the Ambulance service, that has necessitated Advisors prioritising those calls above non-emergency Relay calls. The increased time taken to connect emergency calls along with the higher 999 volumes, have had an adverse impact on Relay UK call answering targets, with slower answer times and more calls abandoned
  - high levels of Covid19 related sickness together with absences through self-isolation, both within BT and more broadly across the UK, has led to delays in answering and connecting Relay calls to businesses and services, with a resulting increase in call handling times
  - Social distancing and spacing requirements within our Call Centres had to be significantly extended in January 2021 and still remain in place as of October 2021. This has led to a higher percentage of (mainly longer duration) calls having to be automatically transferred to other Advisors and has led to the monthly handover target being missed

BT has responded to these challenges by taking some key actions to recover performance, including:
  - implementing an extensive recruitment and training programme since June 2021. This has helped us move towards meeting resourcing targets across all the services we support, although has been compromised by difficulties attracting and retaining suitably skilled people in what has become a far more discerning labour market
  - identifying and rolling out upskill training to the relay role for as many suitably qualified existing Advisors as possible
  - offering incentives and deploying overtime extensively to improve performance
  - putting in place support measures to ensure employee health and welfare is maintained at the highest levels possible to cope with the additional pressures during this period
  - making sure resources supporting standard relay calls are allocated and prioritised closely behind the answering of emergency voice and relay calls
- Whilst the unprecedented demands being placed on the emergency services has made meeting call answering targets exceptionally challenging over the last 3 months of this reporting period, all relay quality and typing speed KPIs have been comfortably achieved during this quarter

  BT has kept Ofcom updated on these recent performance challenges and outlined the measures being taken (as above) to get all KPIs back on track at the earliest opportunity

Other developments this year include:
- The Relay UK mobile app has had a series of updates over the last 12 months, improving both usability and stability as well as ensuring compatibility with the latest operating systems and devices
- A Windows desktop version of the app was piloted in early 2021 and fully launched in April. A Mac desktop version is currently being developed
- Higher priority emergency Relay and eSMS calls have seen a continuing increase in volumes over the year
- The percentage of calls made using the relay app versus traditional methods such as Textphones, has continued to increase and in September 2021 was over 73% of the total

Reported monthly Key Performance Indicators are presented in Annex 1

Ofcom's formal approval of BT's Relay UK (formerly NGT) Service is available at https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-2/text-relay-service/statement

In accordance with our requirement to comply with full accountability and transparency regarding the performance of the Relay UK service, details of the Approval Criteria and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are included below.

Approval Criteria and KPIs	
Ability of the relay service to meet the requirements of General Conditions C5.8 & 5.9	Further details of formal approval of BT's Relay UK Service can be found at https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-2/text-relay-service/statement BT confirms continued accessibility to Relay UK for textphone users, along with the confidentiality of caller communications, appropriate network resilience and priority access to the emergency services for relay calls within its network.[1]
• The relay service provider must provide a Relay UK service fulfilling the relevant requirements in General Conditions **C5.8 & 5.9**	
• The provider must ensure that in its Relay UK service calls to the emergency services are prioritised and provided by a resilient network and system	
• Conversations facilitated by the Relay Assistant should only be recorded, or parts of the conversation noted, where required for justifiable operational reasons e.g. an emergency call; cases of criminal activity, for quality measurement training	

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[1] Extracted from Ofcom's 6th March 2014 statement: Next Generation Text Relay - Approval of a text relay service

Approval Criteria and KPIs	
Guarantees regarding the operational effectiveness of the relay service	
• The provider must ensure there are sufficient funds, facilities and staff to provide the relay service and enable it to perform properly the administrative and technical work associated with the tasks for which it has been appointed	Details of BT's Relay UK performance is published on the <u>Relay UK website</u>. Financial information about BT is included in our <u>published Annual Report</u>[2]. We plan resourcing of the BT Relay UK service to ensure there are sufficient skilled staff to meet the PCA target and the other relevant KPIs. BT also ensures there is sufficient physical infrastructure to accommodate staff, technical systems and expansion should this become necessary.
• The provider must ensure that staff are appropriately and adequately trained especially in the communications needs of deaf, hearing impaired, speech impaired and deafblind textphone users	
• The provider must ensure that the systems have sufficient technical resilience and back up resources to provide an uninterrupted service to the same extent as the voice telephony networks to which it is interconnected	
• The provider must ensure that users receive call progress announcements in voice for hearing users and in text for hearing impaired users	
• The provider must ensure that adequate measures are in place to ensure that the relay service is inter-operable with other approved relay services (where applicable) such that end-users are able to use the service to communicate with users of other relay services	BT is currently the only approved provider of a relay service in the UK. BT has implemented the Relay UK service in accordance with UK telephone communications interoperability standards. Should Ofcom approve another relay service, interoperability with the BT Relay UK service exists where this is feasible, subject to the technically and interoperable capability of the new service.

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[2] https://www.bt.com/bt-plc/assets/documents/investors/financial-reporting-and-news/annual-reports/2020/2020-bt-annual-report.pdf

Approval Criteria and KPIs	
KPIs	***Conclusions on approval criterion 3*** *A2.17 BT has informed Ofcom that its proposed NGTR service will be capable of satisfying the KPIs set out in figure 2 on an ongoing basis (as it must). Having reviewed all of the information and undertakings provided, subject to consultation responses, we provisionally consider that this criterion is satisfied. We will work with BT as it develops the ways to monitor staff performance and will monitor BT to ensure the changes take place and are published. We will also monitor the performance of the service against the KPIs on an ongoing basis.[3]*
• The provider must ensure that it and the relay service it provides, are capable of satisfying on an ongoing basis the required KPIs, including that it is adequately staffed at all times	See table 1 at Annex 1 of this document for monthly performance metrics.

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[3] Extracted from Ofcom's 6th March 2014 statement: Next Generation Text Relay - Approval of a text relay service [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2014/ofcom-approves-bts-next-generation-text-relay-service]

Approval Criteria and KPIs

Accountability and transparency regarding the performance of the service	*Conclusions on approval criterion 4* *A2.23 BT has confirmed that it will meet each of the requirements under this criterion. On that basis, subject to consultation responses, we provisionally consider that the requirement of accountability and transparency regarding the performance of BT's proposed service is satisfied. Further, on the basis of the information and undertakings BT has provided to us, our provisional view is that the proposed NGTR service will be capable of meeting the approval criteria on an ongoing basis (as it must).[4]*
• The provider must publish and make available to Ofcom, every quarter, detailed and transparent reporting on its operation, based on the KPIs • The provider must publish an annual report covering compliance with these approval criteria and any related issues directed by Ofcom	Quarterly KPI reports for the latest four quarters along with the current Relay UK Annual Report are published on the Relay UK Website.
• The provider must have a complaints handling procedure in place – to be agreed by Ofcom – and ensure complaints are handled in a fair and timely manner	The BT Relay UK complaint handling procedure is published on the Relay UK website under the Complaints section[5]
• The provider must carry out customer satisfaction surveys at least every two years	The BT NGT (now Relay UK) service launched in October 2014. BT carried out customer satisfaction research during September 2016, September 2018 and September 2020.
• The provider must satisfy all elements of the criteria set by Ofcom for approval on an ongoing basis. Failure to satisfy all elements, once approval has been given, may result in the withdrawal of approval by Ofcom	Ofcom confirmed BT's compliance with General Conditions **C5.8 & 5.9 (previously** GC15.3[i] and 15.5[ii]) in March 2015.

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[4] Extracted from Ofcom's 6th March 2014 statement: Next Generation Text Relay - Approval of a text relay service [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2014/ofcom-approves-bts-next-generation-text-relay-service]
[5] https://www.relayuk.bt.com/help/complaints.html

ANNEX 1: **BT RELAY UK REPORTED KPIs**

Table 1 - Key Performance Indicators: October 2020 to September 2021													
Measure	**Target**	**Actual Achieved**											
		Oct-20	**Nov-20**	**Dec-20**	**Jan-21**	**Feb-21**	**Mar-21**	**Apr-21**	**May-21**	**Jun-21**	**Jul-21**	**Aug-21**	**Sep-21**
Standard relay calls answered within 15 seconds	90% on average	93.7%	92.9%	91.1%	92.0%	90.9%	90.4%	94.6%	92.6%	91.8%	68.5%	76.8%	77.2%
	85% per 15 minute interval[6]	91.2%	91.6%	89.9%	91.5%	88.6%	87.1%	92.8%	90.5%	87.7%	64.7%	73.7%	71.3%
Emergency relay calls answered within 5 seconds. This aligns with the voice 999 service measure	95%[7]	97.6%	98.0%	96.7%	98.1%	96.7%	96.2%	96.9%	97.0%	96.3%	92.0%	95.8%	94.9%
Customers surveyed expressing dissatisfaction with the relay service	<5% customers dissatisfied	The bi-annual Customer Satisfaction Survey was carried out in September 2020, with results available at https://www.relayuk.bt.com/communication-providers.html											
Standard relay calls abandoned[8]	<3% Standard Calls Abandoned	0.8%	1.0%	1.6%	1.2%	1.4%	1.9%	0.7%	1.2%	1.8%	10.3%	6.3%	6.2%
Emergency calls abandoned. This is in line with the voice 999 service measure	<2% Emergency Calls Abandoned	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Relay Assistants to be monitored at least quarterly for speed of transcription, accuracy and process conformance	94% of calls handled correctly	99.2%	95.6%	91.0%[9]	98.2%	98.3%	98.8%	94.3%	96.3%	96.2%	97.7%	96.9%	97.8%

[6] This KPI demonstrates consistency of performance across each 24 hour period and limits the opportunity of long periods of poor performance being masked with one period of really good performance

[7] Emergency relay calls are given priority over standard relay calls in the same way as voice emergency calls are prioritised over other voice calls

[8] "Abandoned" means that the call is ended by the caller before the relay assistant is brought in

[9] A reduced number of quality checks were completed in December due to ongoing Covid-19 related operational challenges and a higher error rate resulted in the target being missed for the month

Measure	Target	Actual Achieved											
		Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21
In conversation voice to text transcription speed for standard/emergency relay calls, per call[10]	>40 words per minute (wpm) (when the user is able to receive 40wpm or faster)	99.8%	99.8%	99.8%	99.8%	99.9%	99.8%	99.8%	99.7%	99.8%	99.9%	99.8%	99.8%
In conversation voice to text transcription speed for standard/emergency relay calls	Average of at least 60 wpm averaged across calls	69.1	68.5	69.0	68.9	69.5	68.7	69.2	67.7	67.3	67.2	67.7	68.0
Average voice to text transcription accuracy	At least 98%	100%	98.5%	95.8% [11]	100%	99.6%	99.6%	97.1%	97.7%	98.6%	99.1%	99.0%	98.4%
Complaints relating to the relay service	Less than one complaint per 1000 calls	0.13	0.21	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.11	0.12	0.08	0.13	0.12	0.20	0.14
Total calls to be subject to a Relay Assistant handover	No more than 2% of total calls[12]	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%	1.3%	2.8%	2.3%	2.3%	2.4%	2.4%	2.7%	2.8%	2.7%

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[10] Figures based on Relay Assistant sessions where the average WPM is 41 WPM or better, data not logged currently for individual calls.

All measures except for ">40 wpm" are averaged over a monthly period

[11] Transcription accuracy assessments were impacted in December by Covid-19 challenges, leading to a reduced sample size

[12] This measure records the % of calls transferred automatically between Advisors across the relay platform

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[i] C5.8 **Regulated Providers** must ensure that any **End-User** of the **Publicly Available Telephone Services** it provides who, because of his or her disabilities, needs to make or receive calls in which some or all of the call is made or received in text format, can access and use a **Relay Service** which has been approved by **Ofcom**.

[ii] C5.9 In providing access to **Relay Services** under **Condition** C5.8, **Regulated Providers** must comply with the following requirements:
(a) any charge for the conveyance of messages to which a **Relay Service** applies must not exceed the equivalent price as if that conveyance had been made directly between the caller and the called person without use of a **Relay Service**;
(b) in making the charges set out in **Condition** C5.9(a), **Regulated Providers** must apply a special tariff scheme designed to compensate **Subscribers** for the additional time taken by **End-Users** with disabilities to make telephone calls using a **Relay Service** where, because of their disabilities, those **End-Users** need to make calls using a **Relay Service**;
(c) **Regulated Providers** must ensure measures are taken to protect the confidentiality of communications between **End-Users** of the **Relay Service**;
(d) subject to **Condition** C3.11, **Regulated Providers** must ensure that the **Relay Service** is available for lawful use by **End-Users** at all times;
(e) **Regulated Providers** must ensure **End-Users** are not prevented from communicating with other **End-Users** of other approved **Relay Services**; and
(f) **Regulated Providers** must comply with any directions in respect of the **Relay Services** which **Ofcom** may make from time to time.