**Corporate Services, Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee**

**29 January 2024**

Report of the Director of Customer & Communities

## Digital Switch Over 2025 Information Report

## Summary

1.   This information report provides Scrutiny Committee members with the current position and the next steps within the digital switch over programme of work.  This is a result of the full Council motion from the meeting of 23 November 2023, where Council resolved:

     o   To ask the Corporate Services, Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee to include as an agenda item at a meeting of that committee or another scrutiny committee in the next three months, consideration of York's level of preparedness for this change. Participants in the discussion could include local authority, telecoms, NHS, care, voluntary sector and other partners as appropriate.

     o   To ask the relevant Executive Members to ensure that all front-line staff working with groups who may be particularly affected by this change are suitably briefed in order to be able to direct residents and their families/carers to sources of information and support.

## Recommendation

2.   To bring further updates to this committee in the lead up to the end of 2025 switch over deadline.
     Reason: To keep the committee updated.

## Background

3.   The UK's Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) analogue telecommunications network telephone network is being phased out of service.

4.  And the Telecommunications industry service providers will be moving their customers over from their existing analogue connections to digital technology-based platform providing a future proof, more reliable and dependable broadband services (see Annex A).

5.  The switch over process will be undertaken on an exchange-by-exchange basis, and the current expectation is that this UK wide work programme will be completed by the end 2025.

6.  This means services that rely on the old landline system such as landline phones, healthcare devices such as telecare, alarms and intercom systems and some traffic signals will need to be switched over.

7.  The continuing significant private sector and central government investment in the City's digital connectivity landscape is helping to enable and support the increasing number of people who have already made the move off analogue services or will be making the switch when upgrading their broadband service.

8.  However, the switchover has implications for the telecare and Technology Enabled Care (TEC) sector, and the 2 million people who rely on those services in the UK and is a key focus in terms of the Housing and Be Independent services that the Council provides, and the scale of the changes required.

9.  In addition to identifying all the Council services currently dependent on analogue systems for informative purposes, it is crucial to develop a prioritised action plan. This plan should include engagement and communication with the customers benefitting from these services. The Council must collaborate with partners, service providers and the telecommunications industry to heighten awareness of the impending transition. Additionally, efforts should focus on offering guidance, and support to city residents during the switch over process. (see Annex B,C).

**Consultation**

10. As part of the work to establish this required work programme, we have started to work with several Council teams including but not restricted to Adults Social Care, Housing, Transport and Property/FM Services to help identify the services and the associated customers that will be impacted by the switch over, and also any external providers who are part of their end-to-end service provision.

11. Transport and Car Park services are ready for the switchover as they have been actively upgrading their kit over the years to align with modern transportation infrastructure across the UK, their systems have Wi-Fi/Sim capabilities and no longer rely on analogue based services.

12. Therefore, the current focus of the upgrade work is around Adults Social Care, Housing and Property/Facility Management services.

13. Over the last year, Be Independent have been upgrading their customers telecare equipment in preparation for the digital switchover with Tunstall, the work is ongoing with the goal to be completed by the end of 2024. Property Services and Adults Social Care are currently reviewing their existing kit at the independent living sites to see what analogue kit remains vs digital and are reviewing the total cost/time to upgrade the sites.

14. Housing is currently focused on conducting audits, their suppliers are being contacted to gain awareness of their approach to the switchover to ensure business continuity and minimise disruption to service delivery, as well as pulling quotes together to have a more accurate picture of the cost of equipment to be upgraded.

15. We are also engaging with North (the Council's network managed service provider) and telecommunications industry providers to help complete the information gathering exercise to help inform our evolving understanding of current reliance upon any analogue based connectivity services.

16. The switchover may raise concerns about access and inclusion, as certain populations may face challenges adapting to new technologies. Efforts to ensure access, affordability, and information about the switch over are important for a smooth transition. City of York Council will ensure there is a comms strategy in place targeted at York residents who use telecare technology either as a Be Independent customer or via another provider and that the strategy includes media formats and solutions to support those with additional needs.

## Current Next Steps

17. Work with Directorate Management Teams to secure identified service or directorate leads on this programme of work, so they can undertake an audit of their existing services to help establish a service-by-service action plan to plan and complete the switch over plan before the end of 2025 and inform the funding implications.

18. As part of this work, the council's services can review their existing planned work programmes for 24/25 to explore any opportunities to include any of the identified replacement or upgrade work that is required for the switchover to help minimise any disruption to the customer or service.

19. Monthly project meetings will be established with the directorate/service area leads to monitor and track progress of this council wide work programme to help ensure service continuity as we head towards the end of 2025 deadline.

20. Work with colleagues, partners and other organisations utilizing to establish a consistent communication and awareness campaign of the switch over in general with residents of the city and those residents who are receiving services from the council that will be directly impacted by the switch over.

## Council Plan

21. The City of York Council's Council Plan (2023-2027) include the following core commitments which are particularly relevant for this report and the digital switch off work programme.

## Health – Health and Wellbeing

22. We will improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities, taking a Health in all policies approach, with good education, jobs, travel, housing, better access to health and social care services and environmental sustainability. We will achieve outcomes by targeting areas of deprivation, aiming to level opportunity across the city.

## Environmental Impact

23. The disposal of electronic devices may have environmental implications. Efforts to address e-waste and promote sustainability are crucial within City of York Council.

## Implications

24. In the absence of a consolidated budget allocation from corporate funds for the Digital Switchover program, and also of any current financial support from Central Government for the nationwide implementation, it is imperative to acknowledge the fiscal constraints faced by the City of York

Council, as outlined in the communication during the Committee meeting on Monday, 22nd January.

25. In light of the financial circumstances, it is incumbent upon each service area to address the upgrade within their existing budgetary allocations following a series of audits and quotations provided by suppliers.

- **Financial –** Contained within the report.
- **Human Resources (HR)** – None.
- **Equalities** –Contained within the report.
- **Legal** – None at this current stage.
- **Crime and Disorder - None**
- **Information Technology (IT) –** Contained within the report.
- **Property –** Contained within the report.
- **Transport/Highways –** Contained within the report.

## Risk Management

26. There are two known risks that have been identified during the initial investigation and early preparation.

**Risk 1  - Not receiving timely updates and or change notifications from the telecoms industry and/or service providers, that could result in service outage.**

**Mitigation -** We are in contact with BT and EE on a regular basis and are in the process of sharing with them lines that are connected to telecare users. This is to avoid any testing on the lines ahead of the switch off so they can be pre planned and communicated.

Any change in protocols will be communicated in advance so Be Independent and Enovation who manage out telecare lines can carry out the necessary changes.

**Risk 2  - The potential of supply chain provision bottlenecks due to the demands of this nationwide programme.**

**Mitigation -** New contracts have been agreed with the Council's main provider of telecare equipment, which will allow us to procure the new digital kit more effectively as required.

Audits are also being carried out across our Housing Estate to establish a position of the existing and future proofed equipment requiring no intervention for the digital switch over, and the equipment which will need replacing. We are also as part of the engagement work with our suppliers, looking to secure an understand of their plans and roadmap for the digital switchover.

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**Report Approved** ☑ **Date** 18 January 2024

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** None

**Wards Affected:** **All** ☑

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:**
None

## Annexes

Annex A: Local Government Association Digital Switchover Hub LGA have designed a toolkit for councils and partners to use to raise awareness of the digital switchover including information, FAQ's and a glossary explaining technical terms.

Annex B: [Are landlines being phased out? Changes to landline telephones | Age UK](#) Age UK campaign to support vulnerable and elderly.

Annex C: [BT Newsroom](#) Information about BT's roll out plan across the country and includes information on how they have been testing the roll out.

**List of Abbreviations Used in this Report**

None