Member briefing: The Digital Switchover 2025

July 2023

Purpose

This briefing document sets out key details about plans for the digital switchover, sources of support and activity being undertaken to support organisations with the process.

The digital switchover

By the end of 2025, the UK's telephone service will complete the transition from analogue to digital system. Landline calls will instead be delivered over digital technology, using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) in place of the traditional public switched telephone network (PTSN).

Ending the wholesale provision of analogue lines this year, BT will fully retire its PSTN system by December 2025, so providers using BT's network must follow the same timescale. Companies with their own networks (i.e. Virgin Media) are following the same timeline. The process has already begun with many telecom exchanges already having become fully digital.

As telecare largely relies on analogue telephone lines, this shift will have major implications for the housing and care sector. According to a TEC Cymru report, there are an estimated 77,000 telecare service users in Wales, which are provided by Local Authorities, Housing Associations and charities to users. Housing Associations will have to initiate projects to upgrade their systems in order to support those who rely on telecare.

Sources of funding

A range of grants are available from the Welsh and UK governments for individuals and organisations who will need to improve their broadband connection. These include:

- Access Broadband Cymru, which provides grants from £400 to £800 for individuals, businesses, and 3rd sector organisations;

- The Local Broadband Fund, with £10 million available from the Welsh government to support local authorities deliver broadband projects locally;
- The UK-wide Universal Service Obligation (USO) enables people to request an improved connection from BT where they cannot access decent broadband and won't be connected by another scheme within 12 months.

Sources of advice and support

Ofcom hopes to encourage investment and competition in fibre broadband networks and ensure vulnerable customers are protected from harm. They have published a [document](#) explaining what changes are taking place, the roles and responsibilities of different organisations, and their expectations of telecoms providers as they make these changes. They have also published [documents](#) on treating vulnerable customers fairly.

Although the switch is being led by industry with support from Ofcom and the UK government, the **Welsh government** is helping to facilitate conversations between these organisations and the public and private bodies in Wales, as well as trying to understand how prepared the public sector is for the switch. The Welsh government has appointed [Farrpoint](#) to undertake a review into the preparedness of the public sector, third sector and private bodies. [Aims of the review include:](#) setting out an appropriate definition of readiness in the context of the switch, providing an assessment of the risks to services and service users, and clearly setting out recommendations to address any gaps in readiness. CHC will request more information from the Welsh government on this review and opportunities for Housing Associations to be involved.

Telecare Services Association (TSA), the representative body for technology enabled care services, has also published information on the implications for the TEC sector. A range of documents, including commissioner/buyer guidance, interoperability of digital TEC systems, and data and cyber security research for TEC can be accessed [here](#). Info for stakeholders on transitioning Social Alarm Systems to digital is available [here](#).

The **TSA** are also collaborating with Housing LIN on the TAPPI (Technology for our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) project to develop a benchmark for design of technology within new housing stock. TAPPI will be co-produced with service users, tested out and evaluated across four localities and different housing settings in the UK, with the results due by 2024. More information can be found [here](#).

Appello and **Housing LIN** have published a briefing paper, ['Digital Telecare: How Ready are we for the Digital Switch'](#) on the continuity of telecare over a digital service. Findings include:

- An estimated 18,750 specialist housing developments for older/vulnerable communities could still be without digital telecare and warden call services by 2025;
- Only an estimated 25% (6,250) of housing developments will adopt digital services by 2025;
- The immediate risk is that around 18,000 developments will have live safety equipment that is not fit for purpose by 2025.

The major concern is that a large number of housing providers will be looking to upgrade their telecare service at once within a short period of time, creating supply chain and industry capacity issues. The key takeaway from the paper is that housing providers will be in a stronger position if they act swiftly in sourcing a digital telecare solution, as this will allow more time to work around any challenges before the 2025 deadline.

Housing LIN also has a range of existing [documentation and guidance on Technology enabled Care and Housing (TeCH)](#) available on their website.

Everon's white paper on the switchover, 'The Digital Reality', was published in January 2023. This paper notes that BT underestimated how disruptive the switch may be to some customers, so the transition has been paused for those who do not want to make the change just yet. This gives BT the opportunity to organise better back-up options for the customers that need it. However, this should not be seen as an opportunity for stakeholders to pause any migration planning and action. The paper also provides examples of digital care options such as smart sensors placed around the home that can help build a picture of customer user's day-to-day activity, allowing providers to take proactive measures when shifts in behaviour occur.

The **Welsh government** published a [digital strategy](#) in 2021 which aims to use digital, data and technology to improve the lives of people in Wales. It is guided by a set of [digital service standards for Wales](#).

Welsh government and Senedd response

The Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee published the [‘Digital Connectivity - Broadband’](#) report in August 2022. Findings include:

- The telecommunications policy and its funding should be a matter for the UK government, as it is not sustainable for the Welsh government to redirect funding to plug the gaps that are created by the UK government
- There are potentially significant issues for the most vulnerable in our society, particularly those living in a remote, or rural area with limited internet access
- It is prudent to pause the migration until these issues have been resolved
- Welcomes the suggestion of making full-fibre connectivity a requirement in all new-build housing developments

The Welsh government [responded](#) in September 2022 and accepted all recommendations.

CHC support for members

CHC hosted a Spotlight session with **TEC Cymru** [on the opportunities for housing associations to improve and streamline their telecare services ahead of 2025](#). This spotlight session is still available to view online. The Spotlight sets out issues for HA to consider, which include investing in digital solutions, actively planning with service users, financial monitoring with local authorities, and considering consistency in approach which will maximise the potential benefits once

complete. The talk also explores the opportunities for housing providers to use technology, including sensors that monitor movements.

We are actively exploring future Spotlights to connect our members with experts on these matters.

We are seeking a conversation with the Welsh government to better understand the recently commissioned review into preparedness for the digital switchover, and how Housing Associations are able to take part.

For further information, please contact:

Emily Jones, Policy & External Affairs Assistant: Emily-Jones@chcymru.org.uk