Report

To the Chair and Members of the

Cabinet

Date: 01/12/2021

PROPOSALS FOR DIGITAL SWITCHOVER OF THE HOME ALARM SERVICE

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Cllr Andrea Robinson	**all**	**Yes**/No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Current telephone systems across the UK work by connecting households to a telephone exchange via a copper line connection. This analogue telephone system has been around for decades and is being retired exchange by exchange with all analogue lines for telephone and broadband being retired by 2025 at the latest. These lines are being replaced with digital lines to each premises and these replacement lines will handle all calls and broadband going forwards. This programme of the digital switchover is being coordinated by OpenReach and is called the PSTN Digital Switchover (Public Switched Telephone Network).

2. The notification of each area of the Doncaster Borough being switched over is called a 'stop sell date' and OpenReach are releasing these dates across the country. Different parts of the Borough have different 'stop sell dates and will therefore begin switching over at different times.

3. The Council currently provides a universal Home Alarms service (the HEART service) for the citizens of Doncaster. This supplies telecare equipment to people who benefit from this support to enable them to stay safely in their own home and provides equipment that will summon help for them in an emergency. This equipment currently plugs in to existing analogue phone lines to summon the help that people need. It places a call, via the analogue telephone network, to the Alarm Receiving Centre at the Council where any call for help are triaged and appropriate help or a responder is sent to assist the client.

4. It is the service's opinion that the safest course of action is to ensure that all people who use this service are protected from telecare equipment failure and are futureproofed against the consequences of the digital switchover, by replacing all existing telecare equipment with more modern digital compatible technology.

5. There are currently around 4100 analogue telecare lifelines in use in the Home Alarms Service. It is proposed to replace all of these units with a digital compatible version over a 12 to 14 month rollout period at a total cost of £656,388, thereby replacing the analogue devices for most service users BEFORE they are exposed to the risk identified in the risks and assumptions

section 25-27. There is a need to recruit to backfill existing installation staff in the service in order to undertake the roll out of the new equipment across the community. Based on estimated agency rates for the resource required for this roll out, there is a cost of £150,301.

6.   The proposed 12-14 month project plan prioritises the exchange of these analogue lifelines on the following basis:

    a. The replacement of any failed equipment as soon as it is known

    b. The replacement of any equipment in advance (where we are made aware of a migration date by a service user)

    c. The proactive replacement of all existing analogue equipment prioritising those users living in a telephone exchange that has been placed on a stop sell notice first, with the most vulnerable/high risk service users being prioritised within those exchanges.

7.   As well as the upgrading of the telecare in use throughout the borough, this project also seeks funding to upgrade the current alarm receiving software in use in the Alarm Receiving Centre. Currently, the service is only capable of handling analogue calls and requires upgrading to the latest version and some minor hardware alterations in order to be able to handle digitally made calls. Until this upgrade is completed these smart devices are working in SIM card (mobile phone mode) until the receiving software is upgraded. The cost of this upgrade is included within this decision.

8.   This report seeks permission to build on a recently submitted ODR1 to secure funds of up to £0.96m to upgrade/ replace all telecare lifelines across the entire Borough of Doncaster on all telephone exchanges over the next 12-14 months to minimise any risk exposures for individuals using digital telephone methods and in the majority of cases avoid the risks altogether by proactively upgrading our infrastructure before most users are exposed to the risks. This amount should provide an amount of potential flex due to the fluid changing nature of the programme outside of DMBC control.

EXEMPT REPORT

9.   N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

10.   It is recommended that approval is made on the key decision to secure funds for a potential 12 month roll out of new home alarm equipment which is compatible and offers a future proof solution for the HEART service and residents of Doncaster.

11.   Cabinet is asked to agree the recommendations to access funds of up to £0.96 million to procure and award a contract to a provider to replace home alarm equipment across the borough and purchase the supporting software, and to employ temporary staffing in order to safely install the new equipment whilst maintaining existing service.

12.   Cabinet is asked to note that the current charges to residents for the equipment and services may be the subject of a future review to reflect the increased cost of the equipment. Any change to the charges will be subject to the appropriate internal Council approvals.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

13. The current home alarm equipment relies on analogue connectivity and alternative provision needs to be in place to mitigate any risks to people with the Home Alarm Service.

14. Home alarms keep people safe and independent at home for as long as possible. Without exchanging the home alarm equipment in the community to be digitally compatible, there is risk that the service would be unable to protect people and keep them safe, and this may reduce the impact and focus of the service on early intervention and prevention.

BACKGROUND

15. Telephone exchanges are usually buildings that contain telephone switching equipment that connects individual people's telephones to others in the country via the telephone copper wire network. The area covered by these exchanges is essentially an 'exchange area'. Stop Sell dates are threshold dates (set by OpenReach) for a telephone exchange that signifies that no new analogue telephone products are available and changes to existing analogue products are prohibited. These dates essentially form the start of the migration of customers in that exchange area towards digital products. Exchanges are being migrated to digital services as and when they reach key threshold levels for that area based (amongst other things) on the percentage of premises that are served by an exchange that have FTTP (Fibre to the Premises) availability (i.e. copper lines are no longer needed).

16. Telephone customers (regardless of their provider e.g. BT, Virgin Media etc.) are all affected with some users even being migrated to digital services BEFORE the stop sell date is reached. All existing analogue telephone line users will be migrated to digital services before 2025 with some Doncaster telephone exchanges having already stopped selling or allowing changes to analogue telephone contracts.

17. 5 of 18 telephone exchanges that serve the citizens of Doncaster already have notified stop sell dates, with both the Doncaster Central and Doncaster North telephone exchanges already having reached and passed their stop sell date (October 2021).

18. Unfortunately, as the Council has no control over the rollout programme of the various telephone service providers or over the migration programme moving existing Doncaster citizens from an analogue to digital environment, some users in Doncaster are already exposed to the issues outlined in paragraph 6/7. 95 service users are currently exposed to potentially failing or incompatible equipment and are currently (as at 15th October 2021) using single network mobile phone back up solutions. If there have been equipment issues, the service have provided temporary equipment as an interim measure ahead of the smart hub solution. However, it is not possible to tell how many Home Alarm Service users have already migrated to digital lines and are therefore exposed to risk as it requires the service user to notify us of any changes to the telephony set up. The service has worked closely with the current equipment supplier to ensure the necessary stock levels will be available to roll out smart hubs in the community to keep residents safe and well.

19. The HEART Service has explored a range of options and solutions and recommend a new smart hub alarm which works on both analogue and digital lines from the current provider. There are 4100-4200 home alarms which require replacement.

20. An Officer Decision Record (ODR1) was used to secure £208,697 in funding to replace 924 telecare lifelines with smart hub digital-ready devices on 95 identified failed units and all telecare lifelines in the Doncaster North and Doncaster Central telephone exchanges to future proof them and prevent exposure to the risks identified. These covered the following areas (although there is overlap on the exchanges meaning that not all properties in these areas are affected)-
    a. Balby Bridge
    b. Belle Vue
    c. Bennetthorpe
    d. Bentley (partial coverage only)
    e. Clay Lane
    f. Cusworth
    g. Doncaster Centre
    h. Hexthorpe
    i. Hyde Park
    j. Intake
    k. Lakeside
    l. Marr
    m. Rossington (partial coverage only)
    n. Scawsby
    o. Scawthorpe
    p. Sprotbrough
    q. Sunnfields
    r. Wheatley

21. This project also proposes the investigation and refitting / replacement of 2 hardwired Council telecare systems (schemes) to ensure that they are digitally compatible (this is likely to mean the removal of one, switching it to Smart Hub Devices, and the upgrade of the other to alternative equipment). Hard-wired schemes are built-in pull cords that enable service users to request assistance. Please note, both of these schemes are still under review at the time of this report. The overall cost for the scheme equipment upgrades are covered in the capital one bid referenced in the paper. Additionally, the bid also covers an estimate of £17,250 for hard-wiring upgrade.

22. A funding bid (capital one bid) was submitted for assessment and signed off by the Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing and Assistant Director of Customers, Digital & ICT, and Corporate Resources in mid-September 2021. There are 5 telephone exchanges that serve the Doncaster borough (of a total of 18) that have confirmed stop sell dates signalling the start of customer migrations from analogue to digital services. These are notified by OpenReach. The council will get the SIM card (which is built into the Smart Hub Device) free for the first year, but pay for year two up front as part of the initial project cost. There will be an ongoing additional annual cost of £45.00 per SIM card from year three onwards. Whilst there is no impact upon the current charging, there may be further consideration of reviewing this in the future.

23. The submitted ODR1 referenced throughout this document, recommends a direct award to the current home alarm equipment supplier on a two-year contract in line with the current framework. This is a suitable procurement route for this equipment. To meet the demand of the replacement of the home alarms across

the community in 2021-2022, there is not enough time to currently explore a full procurement process to the open market under open competition, nor is this necessary under the framework.

24.   As part of this project, the software receiving and handling the calls received from our telecare equipment may be upgraded. Consideration is being given to cloud based services rather than on premise physical installation of the hardware on Doncaster Council's servers and pc hardware. Consideration is required for the software and hosting solutions (PNC) that sits behind the home alarm equipment. The cost for a fully hosted software solution (called SAAS) with the current equipment provider equates to £129,985.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REASON FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

25.   **Do nothing** - If the council do nothing, this risks people with service being left with poor functioning or incompatible equipment, and reduced safety. This could result in a negative impact to life and limb for Doncaster residents reliant on the current provision.   This option is not recommended.

26.   **Find an alternative piece of equipment**   An exploration of other equipment took place. If the service went with a different equipment provider to the current one; all sensors for equipment would need to be changed and the costs would rise significantly to those forecasted. There are no alternatives available to continue to use telephone lines in an analogue way. This option is not recommended.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

27.   The following table summarises the key outcomes in the Doncaster Growing Together Programme and Corporate Plan 2017-18. Implications on each one should be included in each box. Full details are available by following these links: Corporate Plan and Doncaster Growing Together.

	Outcomes	Implications
	Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future; • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment	The current home alarm equipment relies on analogue connectivity and alternative provision needs to be in place to mitigate any risks to people with service.
	Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time; • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities	The Smart Hub Technology supports residents to keep safe and well at home by removing the risks of the current equipment not working.

	through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage	
	Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling; • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work	The Smart Hub is suitable for many cohorts of people with a service and removes the risks of the current equipment not working.
	Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents; • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes	The Smart Hub Technology offers the ability to ensure the service will continue to keep people safe when the current landline technology is no longer available to purchase.
	Connected Council: • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance	Implementing the Smart Hub Technology will support the HEART Service implement newer home alarm technology which uses WIFI/SIM cards and enables its installation in most places in the borough.

RISKS & ASSUMPTIONS

28.   As the customers' lines change from analogue to digital some machines may fail and services to customers that ensure their safety will be affected. In addition, where a machine fails when connected to the Wi-Fi router, there is no way for the machine to communicate this to the Home Alarms Service for action. It is entirely reliant on the vulnerable service user to raise this problem with the service. This is problematic given people who have disabilities, are elderly or have vulnerabilities due to e.g. existing health conditions and illnesses form many of the client base for the service. There is no clear risk mitigation to this other than the replacement and future proofing of the telecare equipment as described. There is a clear risk to life if this budget is not secured as equipment will fail.

29.   The risk for each service user has been assessed by the Home Alarms Service who monitor and install home alarms in the community. The work set out in the report is being commissioned to reduce this risk and proactively install new alarms which future proof the service.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [PA & 03/11/2021]

30.   The Care Act 2014 obligates the Council to meet the eligible needs for care and support of its population in accommodation in a care home or by providing care and support to those individuals in their home or in the community

31.   Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives the Council the power to purchase goods and services. The report author has advised that the new contract for the equipment will awarded using a framework agreement. Framework Agreements are compliant with Public Contracts Regulations 2015 provided the Council continues throughout the life of the call-off agreement to comply with the terms of the call-off and framework, the framework guidance and the Regulations. The procurement of the supporting software will be a separate procurement which must also comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

32.   The Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules must be adhered to. Following contract signature, the project manager should be completely familiar with the contractual terms in order to protect the interests of the Council and enforce any terms as and when necessary.

33.   The report author refers to future possible changes in charging the residents for the equipment. Sections 14 and 17 of the Care Act 2014 and the supporting Statutory Guidance provide a legal framework for charging for adult social care and support. Where a local authority decides to charge, it must follow the Care and Support (Charging and Assessment of Resources) Regulations 2014.The future changes to the charges should be subject to the appropriate advice and internal approvals.

34.   The decision maker must be aware of their obligations under the public sector equality duty (PSED) in s149 of the Equality Act 2010. It requires public authorities when exercising their functions to have due regard to the need to : eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimization; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between people who share relevant protected characteristics and those who do not.

35. The relevant protected characteristics under the Equality Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The duty also covers marriage and civil partnerships, but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination.

36. The decision maker must ensure that they have seen the due regard statement. The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour, and with an open mind and is not a question of ticking boxes. It is for the decision-maker to decide how much weight should be given to the various factors informing the decision, including how much weight should be given to the PSED itself. The duty is a continuing one and there should be a record/audit trail of how due regard has been shown. It is not sufficient for due regard to be a "rear-guard action" following a concluded decision The decision maker must also pay regard to any countervailing factors and decide the weight to be given to these, which it is proper and reasonable to consider; budgetary pressures, economics and practical factors will often be important.

37. S112 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows a local authority to appoint such officers as are necessary for the proper discharge of its functions, on such reasonable terms and conditions as it thinks fit. Salary grade should be determined by job evaluation.

38. It is advisable to set up a temporary contract for a fixed term. In order for liability in relation to unfair dismissal, to be limited there must be a legitimate reason for a fixed term contract and the employee must be made aware of this reason and of the anticipated length of the contract at the commencement of the contract. After the 4th year of renewal the employee may be entitled to the position on a permanent basis.

39. When recruiting to these posts consideration should be given to establishing them as temporary contracts for a fixed term and appropriate advice sought from HR and Legal. If the length of the contract exceeds 1 year upon termination the employees may be entitled to be placed on the redeployment register and after 2 years may be entitled to a redundancy payment.

40. The Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 confirm that employees should not be treated less favourably on the ground they are fixed term unless this is objectively justified. Less favourable treatment means, but is not limited to pay and terms and conditions.

41. There are no legal restrictions on the use of Agency workers for a local authority. There is a legal obligation to consider best value and therefore it is recommended that there be regular reviews of the decision to use agency staff to ensure this obligation is being met. There should be a contract that sets out the terms of assignment in place prior to the renewal of the role. Reed were appointed as the Council's supplier of temporary staff following a procurement process which was compliant with both EU Procurement Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules. In addition care must be taken to ensure the Agency Worker Regulations and the Council's Policies relating to Agency workers and Recruitment in general are adhered to. Care should also be taken to manage the risk of an implied employment contract, as a minimum there should be regular assessment of the nature of work that agency workers are engaged to do; focus on using agency workers for specific projects or cover for fixed periods. Incorporate a review of

requirements for agency workers into a regular review of staffing levels and needs.

42.   The Council should also note that should the worker become a permanent employee in the future, the time spent as an agency worker may count towards continuous service in order for employment rights to be conferred in terms of qualifying service to be able to bring an unfair dismissal.

43.   An agency worker may also be deemed to be a DMBC employee for the purposes of vicarious liability depending on the amount of day-to-day control DMBC has of their work.

44.   It is important that sight is not lost of the Council's recruitment, retention, and vacancy management policies, which should be followed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [PW / 03/11/21]

45.   As outlined in the body of the report, the estimated capital cost of the project is summarised below:

	2021/2022 cost (£)	2022/2023 cost (£)	Total cost (£)
Equipment (Smarthubs & Simcards)	142,800	513,588	656,388
Hardwiring upgrade		17,250	17,250
External software upgrade		129,985	129,985
Staffing backfill	34,505	115,796	150,301
Total cost	**177,305**	**776,619**	**953,924**

46.   These are estimated costs and include a 15% contingency to reflect the uncertainties around the changing nature of the switchover and its associated complexities. The overall project is expected to take 12 -14 months to complete and the split between 2021/22 and 2022/23 above is an estimate based on forecast installation activity.

47.   An ODR has been completed to approve initial funding of £208,697 to enable the project to commence pending full approval of the project via this report.

48.   It is proposed to fund the capital cost of this decision in this year from corporate borrowing or from Adults Social Care Transformation funding if this is not fully subscribed. Once approved the project will then form part of the capital programme for 2022/23.

49.   There are also additional revenue costs relating to the annual simcard renewals required. The cost is £45 per simcard per year, but the first 2 years' cost is £45 and is included in the initial capital costs above. There are therefore estimated additional revenue costs of £212,745 included in the MTFS budget proposals, £79,380 from 2023/24 and a further £132,795 from 2024/25. This may subsequently reduce, depending on any review of the existing charging policy around the Home Alarm Service. This is not expected until full rollout of the new equipment to all service users has taken place.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS [AT 03/11/2021]

50.   Where staff are needed to backfill existing staff to undertake this work normally recruitment processes should apply in the first instance. Where it is necessary to use an agency supplier the Council has a contract to supply agency workers through a managed service provider (Reed) and therefore agency workers should be engaged via this process.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [PW 28/10/21]

51.   As outlined in the body of the report, the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) is reaching end of life and will be shut down by Openreach at the end of 2025. The PSTN supports a number of Openreach products which communication providers (CPs) purchase at regulated pricing and sell to businesses and consumers, wrapped up in their own line rental, broadband and call package deal. These include: Wholesale Line Rental (WLR) and Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN).

52.   By 31/12/25, all lines that rely on copper from the telephone exchanges to the street cabinets will be disconnected by Openreach from the exchange equipment. This will remove power from the line and ability to make voice calls. All communication providers must migrate their customers who use WLR services to replacement digital products before the end of December 2025. Once migrated, voice calls will take place over VoIP (Voice Over IP) through a router that will be provided to customers by the communication providers. Any equipment (e.g. telephone handsets and telecare equipment) that is currently connected to the telephone wall sockets will need to connect to a router (via an Analogue Telephone Adapter) that will be supplied by the communication provider.

53.   Communication providers must provide a battery back-up unit for vulnerable customers that will give a minimum of one hour of power for the router, in accordance with OFCOM guidance. However, in the event of a power outage lasting more than 1 hour or in the event of an internet outage (of any duration), these customers would be unable to use the equipment to call for help.

54.   Digital & ICT are working closely with colleagues in AHWB, Strategic Procurement and our existing 3rd party provider to fully assess the impact of the PSTN Switch Off on the Home Alarm Service and ensure the most cost effective, safe and future proofed replacement technology is procured and implemented.

55.   Tunstall's replacement IP home alarm unit, the Lifeline Smart Hub, gives a future proof option, as it can operate on an analogue basis, with digital operation activated once the IP network is in place. The Lifeline Smart Hub provides 24 hour battery backup in the event of a power outage and can switch to mobile sim technology in the event of an internet outage, mitigating the risks of a vulnerable customer being unable to place a help call via the equipment.   The next iteration of the Lifeline Smart Hub's will also provide additional features and enhanced functionality such as Bluetooth connectivity to smart devices, which should be evaluated, and the procurement of Smart Hubs phased to ensure we are able to utilize the latest features where advantageous.

56.   Options are also being explored to reduce complexity and ensure no single point of failure with the PNC solution used within the Council's Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) to provide business critical monitoring and call handling. The Software as a Service (SaaS) option has been evaluated and will provide improved system resilience whilst removing any dependencies on on-premise infrastructure.

57. Full technology implications relating to the PSTN switch off have been included in a recent report to the Technology Governance Board (TGB).

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [RS 3/11/2021]

58. The universal home alarms service provide a lifeline for many local people, allowing them to continue to live independently. In order to continue to provide this service it is essential that analogue devices are switched to digital compatible devices.

59. Decision makers will want to ensure that people with the greatest needs are prioritised and that there's no disruption to services.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

60. The Home Alarms Service client group is made up largely of elderly and vulnerable service users with many people having physical disabilities, mental impairments or other vulnerabilities who require assistance to be able to live safely in their own homes. The Home Alarm Service supports these individuals to live safely and independently by providing equipment tailored to their needs that enables them to summon help, or for the equipment to summon help, should an emergency or fall be detected.

61. The digital switch over presents a unique challenge for the service in that the majority of the Home Alarms Service users are not technologically savvy but are relying heavily on the technology placed in their homes to help them. Should it fail they are left without assistance which presents a risk to life.

62. Future proofing the equipment so that it is capable of handling both analogue calls over the mobile networks and digital calls over the internet without the service user having to install any equipment or understand the setup of it, helps to mitigate the risks and prevent these risk exposures. Without this project, the most vulnerable individuals in the Doncaster area would be at high risk.

63. A due regard statement has been prepared.

CONSULTATION

64. Consultation has taken place internally within the service, and in other areas such as: legal, finance, IT, communications and with other colleagues, as well as with a designated procurement lead for the project. External communications have taken place with other local authorities to share knowledge on preparedness for the digital switchover.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

65. None

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

PSTN – The Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN)

Schemes – Hard-wired alarms fixed into the fabrics of homes/buildings, these have a pull cord

ATA socket – Analogue Telephone Adapter

Ethernet – A computer connection

Lifeline – An analogue (home alarm) that makes the call for help should it be needed.

Smart Hub 'Lifeline' – A new device which works both through analogue and digital lines (home alarm); that makes the call for help should it be needed

FTTP- Fibre to the Premises

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