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Divisions Affected - All

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY & CORPORATE SERVICES
23 April 2024

PSTN Withdrawal

Report by Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **Authorise the procurement and delivery of digital telecare products to replace analogue devices installed in vulnerable citizens homes and provided by the Council under their Social Care programme.**

b) **Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Adult Social Care to award contracts following the conclusion of a procurement exercise.**

c) **Authorise the procurement and delivery of replacement circuits and hardware used in traffic management systems.**

d) **Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Environment and Place to award contracts following the conclusion of procurement exercises for new data connectivity solutions and hardware.**

e) **Authorise the extension of Voice over IP telephone systems to all Council offices, replacing traditional landline numbers.**

f) **Authorise the recruitment of temporary staff to backfill and/or assist with the delivery of these programmes of work set out in this paper.**

Executive Summary

1. In November 2017, the telecoms industry announced its intention to retire analogue telephone networks such as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) by the end of 2025. The industry will upgrade landline services to new digital technology using an internet connection, such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), Digital Voice or All-IP telephony.
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/uk-transition-from-analogue-to-digital-landlines

2. The migration to digital is an industry led initiative. Ofcom is working together with the telecoms industry to ensure all sectors of the economy are protected

and prepared. This includes regularly engaging with telecoms providers, tracking preparedness across all affected sectors, and working closely with Ofcom. However there is little national government level communications and publicity on the impacts of this change to citizens, and hence why local government is leading on ensuring these impacts are mitigated. OCC is working with other councils to share good practice and reduce costs, within a changing environment.

3. The nature of this change means it will take a number of years to complete. It is industry led, and decisions to retire the PSTN lie with the companies. This means that the switch to phone calls over broadband will be undertaken by different companies, at different times, and in different locations depending on their plans.

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0032/137966/future-fixed-telephone-services.pdf

4. The Council can make residents aware of the changes and emphasise that they should help those who may not understand, but it is not the Council's responsibility to ensure that everyone across the county is updated. That falls to the providers themselves. For that reason, there will not be a county wide support campaign run by Oxfordshire County Council on this subject. Instead, the central marketing team will be sending communications to targeted audiences. Trading Standards will be monitoring for scams which will inform any additional communications.

5. The council is impacted by these changes to the underlying infrastructure in Adult Social Care, Traffic Management and offices using traditional telephone lines serving Libraries, Childrens homes, SENS units in schools, Museums, Waste sites, and smaller corporate offices. There are 145 Council Offices. There are 78 Sites using analogue telephone services.

6. A capital budget was agreed at Full Council in February 2024 under Prioritisation Category 1 (Statutory, H&S and School Placements), hence need for this key decision.

7. Recent announcements in the press indicate that an extension of the December 2025 deadline may be possible. These have not been corroborated by the Communications providers or OFCOM. This paper sets out the preferred approach, however, if these reports are true – the Council's approach will be amended appropriately.

Exempt Information

8. There is exempt information relating to this report where disclosure would distort the proper process of open competition and would prejudice the position of the authority in the process of the transaction and the Council's standing generally in relation to such transactions in future, to the detriment of the Council's ability properly to discharge its fiduciary and other duties as a public authority.

Adult Social Care – Telecare Replacement

9. In Adult Social Care approximately 1900 vulnerable citizens who have had analogue telecare products installed more than two years ago will be impacted. This represents about 30% of people who use telecare products supplied by the Council. These products use the householder's landline to send an alarm to the receiving centre to generate the appropriate action to provide emergency assistance to the vulnerable person. If the household landline is upgraded to a digital service then these telecare products will fail to generate the alarms putting the vulnerable person at risk. If the household fails to change their telephone service then the telecare products will fail when Openreach withdraw their services in December 2025. These changes to the householder's telephone services are outside the control of the Council, however the Council does have a duty of care to advise vulnerable people of the options and impacts.

10. At the Strategic Capital Board in August 2023 a proposal was considered - Whether to fund the replacement of analogue phone-line-based equipment that is unable to work on the new Internet-based or Internet Telephony-based, or GPRS (mobile network) services. The board noted that the legal liability for the replacement of the telecare products rests with OCC and therefore supported the proposal, noting that this is a Category 1 priority for implementation.

11. New telecare products will use SIM technologies so will work independently from the household infrastructure for connectivity, however, it will require a power supply. In the event of a power failure, a battery backup is built into the hardware and lasts a minimum of seven days.

12. To ensure our vulnerable customers are informed, we should wherever possible make sure they understand what is changing or provide them with the information they need to explain it to those they trust – family or friends.

13. To deliver the messages about the PSTN Withdrawal to the wider community, the Council has sent out communications to all wider stakeholders, charities, district and city councils, town and parish clerks, community newsletters and published an article in the Your Oxfordshire newsletter. These will be refreshed regularly.

14. Contracts are required for the procurement of the telecare hardware and for the delivery and installation of the telecare hardware in affected addresses. These one-off costs will be covered by the Capital Budget.

Traffic Management – Connectivity and Hardware Replacement

15. Traffic Signals are specified and installed by contractors and property developers. When the planned building works are complete, they are handed over to the County Council for management and maintenance. The Council have no say in the specification of the traffic signals to be installed. There are three suppliers of traffic signals.

16. Traffic management systems rely on connectivity for data transfer and hardware installed in the street furniture to allow staff to remotely check and adjust performance, timings and to manage faults. Any change from analogue technologies delivering data over the copper telephone lines requires a corresponding change to the hardware installed in the traffic signals for remote management. Upgraded equipment must be fully compatible with the installation originally implemented.

17. Many of the connectivity lines used for data transfer have been in place for more than 15 years and use analogue data transfer technologies. There are between 338 and 380 telephone lines that will become obsolete. The current provider has not provided an upgrade roadmap, all of which will stop working when PSTN services are withdrawn.

18. The requirements definition for replacing this estate of traffic management services need to be completed, with priority and connectivity options agreed for each location. In some instances, fibre broadband may be required whereas SIM cards can be used in other locations.

19. This will result in two tenders. Firstly, a procurement exercise will be followed for the purchase of a managed support service for a 3- or 5-year term for broadband connectivity. This will be funded by revenue budgets held within the Traffic Management Service. To note – where SIM cards are needed, these will be purchased through an existing contract and costs covered by existing revenue budgets.

20. Secondly, a procurement exercise will be followed for the purchase of the appropriate hardware, whereby the supplier will deliver, install, and test replacement hardware utilising existing street furniture and infrastructure. Old hardware will be recovered by the supplier for repair, recycling, and reuse. These costs will be covered by the capital budget.

Voice Solutions for OCC Offices

21. Sites in scope of the change are Libraries, Childrens Homes, Community Support Centres, Fleet Services Depots, Family Solutions Services sites, Museums, outlying Registrars sites and SENS units in schools. These sites are staffed by OCC employees and by volunteers.

22. For these sites, the recommended option is to use Teams telephones and provide each site with new contact numbers. Teams telephony utilises Voice over IP (VoIP) technologies. This approach is already part of the ITID strategy so is extending and accelerating the changeover instead of delivering something new. This will simplify the voice estate by standardisation to a single voice solution for all sites.

23. There will be an impact on residents and people who use these sites because the phone number will change. Communication of the change of contact details will be needed. Changes to contact details for sites are being planned with the Customer Service Centre. The new contact details will be published on the public website and staff will share contact details with customers. If new call queues are required, this programme will implement those changes.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

24. In Adult Social Care – these changes support the Strategic Plan to Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.

25. For the Traffic Management – these changes support the Strategic Plan to Invest in an inclusive, integrated, and sustainable transport network.

26. The telephony estate changes support the IT Strategy for adoption of Cloud First principles, harmonisation and rationalisation of applications and cost reduction.

Financial Implications

27. A capital budget has been approved by Full Council in February 2024. This information can be found in Annex 1.

28. The risk of not meeting the deadline date of December 2025 and adoption of the solutions in the areas identified poses a significant risk to OCC which could result in risk to business continuity as well as potential claims against OCC, for e.g. failure of traffic lighting system and claims against OCC from a personal and vehicle incident related scenario, the risk to loss of life as a worse case due to failure of inoperable emergency response kit as identified in Adults Social Care for vulnerable citizens.

29. The budget costings do not include any financial contingency plans; however, this exercise is vital for business continuity as well as compliance and to mitigate OCC against the risks as set out above.

30. There is a risk that costs exceed the approved budget as costings have been calculated based on soft market testing. The intention is to work within the agreed budget set to deliver the expected activity identified.

Comments checked by:

Prem Salhan, Interim Strategic Finance Business Partner, (prem.salhan@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Legal and Procurement Implications

31. The procurement strategy for the disparate components of this programme of works will be a mixture of change control from existing contracts, call offs from existing frameworks on which the suppliers involved in the programme are present and new procurements. The selection of route to market will be determined by best fit, best value, least risk, and ease/timely delivery.

Adult Social Care

32. The existing contracts with Telecare providers do not make the supplier responsible for replacing hardware that will become obsolete by the withdrawal of PSTN services.

33. Subject to the scope and value of the work required it may be possible to deliver this through a variation to existing contracts. This will be considered by the Director of Adults Social Care in consultation with the Contract and Procurement Hub. Any modification must be compliant with Regulation 72 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

34. Should there be a decision to proceed with an open market procurement of services to deliver and install replacement telecare products will need to be undertaken in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

35. The Council has a statutory power to provide such products under the Care Act 2014, the Children's and Families Act 2014, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Health and Social Care Act 2022 for children and adults.

36. Legal Services will prepare the necessary contract documentation.

Traffic Management

37. Sites where SIM cards are required to provide data connectivity to the internet will be served by SIM cards supplied under the council's existing contact with O2 and data demand considerations may apply.

38. In order to comply with Public Contracts Regulations, the procurement of a managed broadband service will be undertaken by way of an open competition

or a mini-competition under a framework agreement established by Crown Commercial Services.

39. It is intended that, in order to comply with the Public Contracts Regulations, the procurement of traffic management hardware will be undertaken by way of an open competition. Options for purchasing are limited because the hardware in the traffic signal control units must be fully compatible for each site. This may mean that exemptions/exceptions may apply as a single supplier situation may occur.

40. These services are in relation to the Council's duties in relation to highways under the Road Traffic Act 1988 and its role as highway authority under the Highways Act 1980 and as traffic authority under the Traffic Management Act 2004

41. Legal Services will prepare the necessary contract documentation.

    Comments checked by: Jonathan Pool, Solicitor (contracts), (jonathan.pool@oxfordshire.gov.uk) and Martin Hall, ICT Category Manager Procurement and Contract Management Hub (martin.hall@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Staff Implications

42. In Adult Social Care provision has been made to recruit an additional project manager to co-ordinate and lead the delivery of this project. This post will be managed and supported by existing roles within the Adult Social Care.

43. In Traffic Management provision has been made to fund an additional project co-ordinator to manage and lead on the ordering of circuits, scheduling and controlling resources for rollout of the hardware, managing issues, scheduling, and accounting, reporting and managing payments This post will be managed by existing roles within Traffic Management Team.

44. In ITID services provision has been made to recruit a network technician to implement and deliver the changes resulting from the withdrawal of PSTN services and a project co-ordinator to provide support from the overall programme. These posts will be managed by existing roles within the ITID Service.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

45. Telecare products are designed to support vulnerable people (typically frail older adults and people living with a mental, learning or physical disability) to live safely at home. They provide support to people who are at risk of isolation within the community and who would otherwise be at risk of restricted liberty should they need to move into a supported living or residential setting. They support people with sensory impairment and people with chronic and difficult to manage long-term health conditions where there is a risk e.g. of falls. The risk arising from a move away from PSTN is that an already vulnerable and isolated

group of people could face further discrimination through their digital exclusion. The fact that residents are using telecare products is in itself, a potential indicator of exclusion owing to protected criteria. The installers of new kit will be recruited and appointed with regard to their ability to meet the needs of people who may be vulnerable, may have difficulties in communicating and/or may not have English at their first language.

Sustainability Implications

46. Replacement of kit is unavoidable so decommissioning of obsolete products will depend upon the components that they are built from. All will be disposed of in accordance with Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) regulations.

Risk Management

47. The risks to life and well-being by failures of Telecare products to generate an alert for a vulnerable person are real. It is essential that the council makes every effort to replace any analogue telecare products with a modern, resilient solution will reduce these risks.

48. The risk of being unable to manage the traffic systems effectively may result in traffic disruption , more faults on the road network which could lead to traffic disruption. It would also require a great deal more resources to monitor and manage faults on site or by way of public fault reports, instead of remotely.

49. A full risk and issue log is being maintained and managed by the project board.

Report by Lorna Baxter
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Annex: Appendix 1 – Budgets for each impacted service

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