

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Audit Committee – 26 September 2024

**Report Title**

Update on the Public Service Telephone Network

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Judith Badger, Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services

**Report Author(s)**

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**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

This report is to highlight the work being undertaken by the Council to ensure that all Council services are not negatively impacted by the national shutdown of the Public Service Telephone Network.

**Recommendations**

The Audit Committee is asked to: -

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. Note the work being undertaken to ensure that all residents and Council services are not negatively impacted by the changes.

**List of Appendices Included**

None

**Background Papers**

None

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

No

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **Public Service Telephone Network**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 This report is to provide reassurance that the Council is taking all necessary steps to ensure that the Council and the residents of the Borough are not negatively impacted by the withdrawal of the Public Service Telephone Network (PSTN).
- 1.2 Openreach first announced in 2017 that the PSTN would be shutdown nationally on 31st December 2024.
- 1.3 The PSTN is used to make 'standard' telephone calls on a landline or for other services that use this technology such as lift alarms, house alarms, some traffic lights and cameras.
- 1.4 The Council's main telephone system does not use PSTN technology so is not impacted.
- 1.5 The government have now announced that the date for the service to cease has been delayed until 31<sup>st</sup> January 2027.
- 1.6 The Council has setup a project group to identify all areas and functions of the Council that use PSTN. This group has since set in place several projects to install replacement systems and technologies to ensure that all services are fully functioning before the closure of the PSTN system.

### **2. Key Issues**

#### **2.1 Planning**

2.1.1 The majority of work is now completed to identify systems that use PSTN. These include:

- Telephones at several smaller Council premises.
- Lift alarms.
- Some traffic lights although most do not use PSTN.
- Some Close Circuit Television cameras (CCTV) although most do not use PSTN.
- Alarms for Rothercare users.

2.1.2 All suppliers of any system using PSTN have been contacted to ensure they have appropriate, timely plans in place to complete any work that falls under their responsibility to ensure the Council remains fully functional.

#### **2.2 Implementation**

2.2.1 Rothercare is the main area of focus for the Council due to the considerable number of residents impacted by the changes and the vulnerability of these residents. An Adult Care team is managing this project to ensure that all alarm boxes within residential properties are replaced with new boxes which will use a combination of sim cards and internet connections (where available). A number of these boxes have already been replaced with work

continuing at pace. All new users of Rothercare service are automatically setup using the new technology.

- 2.2.2 Data Sharing Agreements are being put in place with all telecoms providers to assist with identifying vulnerable residents, particularly Rothercare users, to ensure they are not transitioned to new systems before a proper assessment of their needs has been undertaken. In conjunction with the RMBC Information Governance Team, agreements have been signed off by Legal Services and been sent to Vodafone, BT and Virgin Media.
- 2.2.3 Housing Services have been reviewing their managed properties to identify PSTN lines and have been requested to provide an update on this to the project team as soon as possible. This includes lift alarms, burglar and fire alarms, CCTV and door entry systems.
- 2.2.4 Work is ongoing with the service owners of all RMBC PSTN lines – lift alarms, CCTV, traffic signalling, fire and burglar alarms, traditional phone lines. The majority have been identified, with more than 200 lines already cancelled or transitioned to new services. Digital Services are working with Directorates to ascertain if the remaining 180 PSTN lines should be replaced by a 4G SIM, the Main Council phone system, or a new corporate line into an RMBC building. Meetings are taking place with services to agree the best replacement method in each situation.
- 2.2.5 Asset Management met with all the main suppliers and maintenance contractors in respect of fire and security alarms, in February 2024. Unfortunately, they were unable to confirm the plans they had in place in preparation for PSTN closedown. A list of lift and alarm PSTN connections against each building has been prepared and is subject to regular review with Asset Management colleagues, who will ensure a plan is agreed with each contractor.
- 2.2.6 School kitchens are to be provided with a standard mobile phone as a replacement for current PSTN landlines. Work has been undertaken with the service to identify all kitchens where this will be needed. Orders are being placed and the service will undertake testing of signal availability in each school before the PSTN line is finally ceased.
- 2.2.7 Contact has been made with the Education Service. A communication plan is being devised to include messages to schools, especially maintained schools; to advise they undertake their own impact assessment and develop action plans.

- 2.2.8 A meeting has been held with Emergency Planning where agreement was reached that PSTN lines that relate to their service can be ceased once their current stock of mobile phones has been refreshed. An order has been placed for the devices and associated SIMs.
- 2.2.9 Updated billing has been received from BT and Vodafone and further analysis will take place to identify CCTV and Traffic systems PSTN lines. A plan for replacement will be agreed with services.
- 2.2.10 A full programme of activities has been drawn together, which is being used to provide visibility and measure progress.
- 2.2.11 A programme Communication plan is being developed with the Corporate Communications Team to include messages for residents, schools, community groups and Members.
- 2.2.12 A landing page on the Council website has gone live. The information is located within the 'Community and Living' section. [Rotherham Analogue to Digital Telephone Switchover: Information for Residents – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- 2.2.13 Initial discussions have begun with Organisational Development to develop internal staff communications. All RMBC staff will be notified of the PSTN closedown so that family and friends can be made aware. This assists with advising the residents of the borough.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 The Council continues to work to a completion date for all work of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 in line with the original switch off date. This will allow for confidence that all new systems are fully functional, a considerable time before the official switch off date of 31<sup>st</sup> January 2027.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 None

### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 None

**6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)**

6.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report. Where the procurement of third party organisations is required to support the switch, the procurement team are working with services to ensure compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

**7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)**

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report, except to reiterate that the council has a duty to comply with Data Protection legislation.

**8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

8.1 There are no direct implications for HR arising from this report.

**9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

9.1 There are no direct implications for children and young people or vulnerable adults arising from this report.

**10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

10.1 There are no direct equalities or human rights implications arising from this report.

**11. Implications for Partners**

11.1 There are no direct implications for partners arising from this report.

**12. Risks and Mitigation**

12.1 Risks and mitigation will be managed by council's risk processes.

**13. Accountable Officer(s)**

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