

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 22 January 2024

Report Title

Digitalisation of the Rothercare Service

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

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

Nationally the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) will close in December 2025. By then, every phone line in the United Kingdom will have moved to a fully digital network that uses Internet Protocol (IP) across a fibre-based service, seeing the traditional analogue PSTN lines decommissioned and replaced by a fully digital infrastructure. This is substantially impacting Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC's) such as Rothercare.

The PSTN infrastructure change will impact on both service delivery and cost and is a key driver to design a new business delivery model for Rothercare. A 90-day public consultation took place between 5 August 2023 and 13 November 2023 to further understand resident views on digitalisation of the service.

Whilst the move from analogue to digital will have a significant impact on Rothercare, it does support the Council's approach for the future delivery of care and support to be focussed on personalised outcomes and proactive and preventative services which are enabled by digital intervention and technology.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

1. Notes the outcome of the 90-day consultation exercise.
2. Notes the requirements of the national closure of the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) and the impact on Rothercare.
3. Approves £1.7M capital investment funding to enable the purchase and installation of the new digital units, subject to approval of the Budget at Cabinet and Council in February 2024.
4. Approves the procurement of an external provider to complete the installations for the digital switchover to enable Rothercare to maintain its current standards of service level and quality throughout the transition process.
5. Agrees to receive a further report in the summer of 2024 detailing a new strategic approach to assistive technology and the business delivery model for a digitalised Rothercare service.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Consultation outcome
- Appendix 2 Part A - Equality analysis screening
- Appendix 3 Part B - Equality analysis form
- Appendix 4 Carbon impact assessment form

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

Rothercare Review and New Service Model

1. Background

- 1.1.1** Rothercare provides an alarm service, connected to a 24-hour call centre that creates a route to rapid assistance in an emergency. The service is available to all adult residents of Rotherham, regardless of tenure type, age, or level of disability or frailty. The service operates a 24-hour specialist call centre and mobile responder unit which provides lifeline support to some of Rotherham's most vulnerable and isolated residents.
- 1.1.2** The service also provides and distributes low level assistive technology equipment including fall detectors, clocks and medication dispensers, that have been identified to support or maintain independence.
- 1.1.3** The service is well respected within the borough with a positive reputation for delivery and responsiveness, giving piece of mind to vulnerable residents and supporting people to maintain their independence.
- 1.1.4** The current charge for the Rothercare service is £3.29 per week.

Demand

- 1.1.5** The service currently supports 6,911 customers in 5,646 properties. This equates to 2,845 private properties and 2,801 local authority properties.
- 1.1.6** In 2022 Rothercare handled 325,275 calls which is an average of 27,106 per month. 98% of these calls were answered within 60 seconds and 99% answered within 180 seconds.
- 1.1.7** The service completed an average of 614 home visits each month in response to calls which needed the emergency assistance of a team member.
- 1.1.8** The service took an average of 132 new customer referrals for Rothercare each month and 162 new customer referrals for assistive technology equipment.
- 1.1.9** The increase in assistive technology provision over the years has increased the number of connections and calls to Rothercare. This has resulted in increased service activity with greater levels of complexity and involvement leading to a delivery pressure across the current Rothercare service.

1.2 Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN)

- 1.2.1** Nationally, the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) will close in December 2025. By then, every phone line in the United Kingdom will have moved to a fully digital network that uses Internet Protocol (IP) across a fibre-based service, seeing the traditional analogue PSTN lines decommissioned and replaced by a fully digital infrastructure. This has substantially impacted upon Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC's) such as Rothercare. Rothercare have already issued 1,647 digital units, leaving a further 4,279 units to be deployed.

1.2.2 The PSTN infrastructure change will impact on both service delivery and cost and is the key driver to design a new business delivery model, based around customer choice and requirements. The model will consider the continual development of technology, resources and cost.

1.2.3 The Council has carried out a 90-day public consultation which will support the development of a new business model going forward taking into account people's thoughts and preferences, both in relation to service delivery and service charges.

1.3 Drivers for Change

1.3.1 Analogue to digital switch over

1.3.2 By December 2025, all analogue telephone services will be switched off as the UK's telecom infrastructure is upgraded to digital connectivity. The digital switchover affects any product or service that uses a traditional analogue landline such as cash machines, lift emergency phones, CCTV and security barriers. The biggest impact nationally is the digital care technology sector and the millions of people who rely on telecare across the UK.

1.3.3 Currently, telecare equipment utilised to deliver these telecare services contains analogue dial-up protocols to carry status and alarm signalling between the alarm devices in a person's own home to the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC). Rotherham's ARC is Rothercare.

1.3.4 The connectivity between the home and the ARC is provided by a person's home analogue telephone line or a mobile GSM radio embedded in the person's telecare alarm device. Ofcom and telecommunication providers advised that any systems relying on 'voice band data', such as telecare, will be affected by the digital switchover and a person's equipment must be updated for them to continue to receive their vital services.

1.3.5 This transition is now happening all across the UK and there are increasing reports from service providers of instability on analogue networks, along with growing numbers of cases where telecare clients are being migrated to a digital telephony service, placing their analogue telecare service at risk of operating unreliability.

1.3.6 To date, Rothercare have issued 1,647 digital units, work is required to replace a further 4,279 analogue boxes across Rotherham by December 2025. This is a national programme of work, and the Council are not able to influence this timeline. There is also a requirement to fund the installation of these devices.

1.3.7 The current Rothercare charge of £3.29 per week is insufficient to generate the income required to purchase and install the new technology, or fund the monthly rental costs of the sim cards which are a requirement to connect and operate the service.

1.3.8 Benefits of alarm response digital connectivity

1.3.9 Rotherham will have a compliant telecare service, delivered by December 2025, which enables:

1. Integration and Prevention

- Open data, shared platforms and predictive analytics which would enable greater service integration and power preventative approaches.
- Instant sharing of user information between services, powering partnership working.
- The ability to automatically predict indicators of a health risk and take preventative steps, lowering hospital admissions.

2. Citizen Experience

- Better quality services which are tailored to meet each citizen's specific needs.
- Faster connection speeds.
- Better call quality and reliability.

3. Greater Flexibility

- Calls can be routed, providing more options for remote working and options for service providers to support each other if one is experiencing a particular spike in calls.
- Call takers do not need to be located in the same building as the ARC equipment, enabling remote working.

4. Increased Resilience

- Real-time overview of device statuses increasing citizen safety.
- Fewer instances of failed calls.
- Live monitoring of devices, enabling quicker fault detection

1.3.10 Public Consultation

1.3.11 A 90-day public consultation took place between 5 August 2023 and 13 November 2023. The consultation was predominantly to support the Council's strategic approach and service delivery in relation to the digitalisation of the Rothercare service. The Council was able to gather views regarding the service and how it should be developed for the future, responding to the national digital agenda.

1.3.12 The approach included:

- **Online consultation questionnaire**

An online consultation ran for the full duration and could be found on the Council website. The access details were widely publicised. Paper

versions were also made available. Library and Neighbourhood Hubs provided help to complete online forms and displayed information about the consultation.

- **A series of drop-in sessions** were attended across the borough by customers of Rothercare, family carers and members of the public.
- **Home visits** – home visits were offered to customers who were housebound and were unable to complete the consultation on line.
- **Engagement activity** - Individual letters were sent to all current Rothercare customers regarding the 90-day consultation and means of engaging in the process.
- Social media channels
- Poster and banner campaign

1.3.13 Public Participation

- Online surveys completed: 71.
- Paper surveys completed: 28.
- Attendees at public drop-in sessions: 21.
- People receiving home visits: 1.

Total number of participants: 121

Consultation outcome (full outcome report can be found at Appendix 1).

1.3.14 What would people like from the Rothercare service in the future?

- Many respondents who are residing in designated Council properties would prefer to have individual choice of whether they require a service from Rothercare rather than the current mandatory charge being applicable to their property irrespective of whether or not they use the service.
- Most respondents who are required to have a landline solely to enable the use of Rothercare are unhappy with this and would welcome a digital/Wi-Fi offer.

1.3.15 Would people like RMBC to continue providing the Rothercare?

- At 88%, people responded overwhelming that they would like the Council to continue providing the service.
- Almost 25% of respondents said that they would not know what to do in an emergency if Rothercare was not available.

1.3.16 What is the most important principle of the service?

- During the consultation respondents were asked what they felt was the most important principle of the service. Support to enable people to live independently in their own homes was considered the most important, followed by customer choice around both having the service and the level and type of support received.

1.3.17 The main benefits of the Rothercare Service

Respondents were asked what they considered were the main benefits of the service.

40% of respondents considered that the main benefit is the reassurance that someone will be there to help in the event of an emergency. Other benefits included:

- Someone being able to help if people are ill or have a fall or injury.
- Peace of mind for carers, family and friends.
- People feeling safe in their own homes.

Respondents commented that they would like a new service to provide virtual support via a video link, provide specific carer support and offer daily welfare calls.

1.3.18 Value for money

The majority of respondents said that the Rothercare service provides value for money, with only 16% disagreeing with this. Respondents informed that:

- Rothercare provides an excellent service which is worth every penny.
- Some respondents would happily pay more for the service.
- The service provide excellent value for money.
- There is no other similar service at a fraction of the cost.

1.3.19 How much would people be willing to pay for the service?

- Most respondents were generally satisfied with the current cost of the service with the majority not opposed to a reasonable increase in cost.
- A number of respondents would happily be willing to pay more for the service.
- Some respondents commented that they would pay whatever is necessary to maintain the service.
- Respondents who pay the Rothercare mandatory charge and don't want the service were very unhappy that they have to pay for the service and are of the opinion this should be choice based and people should not have to pay for services they do not require.
- Some respondents do not think anyone should be charged for the Rothercare service.

1.3.20 Willingness to pay more as a contribution towards installation of digital switchover

48% of respondents are of the opinion that there should be no extra charge specifically due to digital switchover. Only a third of respondents would willingly pay more for digitalisation.

1.3.21 How much would people be willing to pay for a one off installation cost?

Responses to this question were very divided. Many respondents are of the opinion that the Council should fund installation costs, however others were not opposed to paying, and 50% of the cost was suggested by some respondents.

1.3.22 Charging for Rothercare in the future

Respondents were clear that the service should be choice based and only people who require a service should have to pay for it.

1.3.23 Overall consultation opinion

The golden thread throughout responses was that Rothercare provides an excellent service which is respected and valued, giving peace of mind and reassurance to support people to live independently in their own homes across the borough. People also commented that the service provides excellent value for money. The full comments can be accessed at Appendix 1.

2. Key Issues and Challenges

2.1 Delivery of analogue to digital transformation

2.1.1 Preparing for the digital switchover is very resource intensive and a strategic approach is required to achieve full transition due to resourcing capacity and funding capabilities.

2.1.2 The December 2025 deadline, which is not negotiable, poses significant delivery impacts for Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC's) such as Rothercare.

2.1.3 It should be noted that the digital units deployed to date have occurred in the main for new Rothercare customers and people requiring replacement units. In addition to installation, the removal of thousands of obsolete analogue units has significant implications and a high level of assurance is required that once disposed, these devices will be decommissioned in compliance with national Waste, Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) regulations.

2.2 Funding of the digital solution

2.2.1 The analogue to digital switchover requires the removal and replacement of all analogue buttons and boxes, and an ongoing monthly sim card rental fee to ensure digital connectivity.

2.2.2 The financial impact of this project, leaves Rotherham with an additional £1.7M funding requirement for the purchase and installation of the equipment. There is also a reoccurring annual revenue pressure of £381,000 relating to sim card rentals which cannot be met by the service in the long term as the current Rothercare charge of £3.29 per week is insufficient to generate the income needed to fund the ongoing costs associated with the digital switchover.

3. Options and Recommended Approach

Options available to Cabinet are as follows:

3.1 Option 1 – maintain the current ‘as is’ position.

3.1.2 Service delivery to continue as per the current offer. This would result in non-compliance of the national transition from analogue to digital systems and as such the Rothercare service would be unable to operate from December 2025. Therefore, this option is not recommended.

3.2 Option 2: That Cabinet:

3.2.1 Notes the outcome of the 90-day consultation exercise.

3.2.2 Notes the requirements of the national closure of the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) and the impact on Rothercare.

3.2.3 Approves £1.7M capital investment funding to enable the purchase and installation of the new digital units. This is essential equipment required to enable Rothercare to achieve full analogue to digital transition. Alongside this, wider funding options will continue to be explored which may reduce the total capital investment required. This will need to be incorporated into the Budget report to Cabinet and Council in February 2024.

3.2.4 Approves the procurement of an external provider to complete the installations for the digital switchover to enable Rothercare to maintain its current standards of service level and quality throughout the transition process. A significant programme of work is required to replace the remaining 4,279 analogue boxes across Rotherham by the national deadline of December 2025.

3.2.5 The Rothercare service does not have the level of expertise, resource or capacity to complete this work. It is therefore proposed that an external provider is contracted to undertake the digital switchover. All responsibility would lay with the provider around the installation. This proposal would not impact on Rothercare operational delivery but would ensure compliance with

the transition to digital. This is reflective of the approach being adopted by other local authorities.

3.2.6 Agrees to receive a further report in the summer of 2024 detailing a new strategic approach to assistive technology and the business delivery model for a digitalised Rothercare service.

3.2.7 Following installation of the digital equipment, a rental cost of £4.88 per month is applicable for each Rothercare unit relating to the sim cards (£58.56 per year). This equates to an additional reoccurring full year revenue budget pressure for Rothercare of £381,000 which cannot be met through the existing funding model. It is therefore essential to develop a new strategic approach to assistive technology and the associated delivery model for a 'digitalised Rothercare service'.

3.2.8 This option will enable full compliance with the national analogue to digital transition and for the customers of Rothercare to benefit from alarm response digital connectivity. This is the recommended option.

4. Consultation

4.1 Consultation took place between 5th August 2023 and 13th November 2023.

4.2 The full consultation outcome report can be viewed at Appendix 1 including demographic and geographical analysis.

4.3 Partners and elected members were engaged throughout the consultation activity.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The digital transformation of Rothercare will be completed by December 2025 in accordance with national timeframes.

5.2 A proposed new strategic approach to assistive technology and business delivery model will be proposed and presented to cabinet during the summer of 2024.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 To upgrade all the analogue equipment to make it compliant with the new digital regulation will have an initial outlay of £1.7m. This includes the cost of the digital boxes at circa £260 each and the management of the project. When this is complete then any new clients will also need a digital box when they join the service. This will need to be funded. Approval of the £1.7m expenditure and associated funding will need to be incorporated into the Budget report to Cabinet and Council in February.

6.2 Each box will also have a revenue cost of £4.88 per month for the sim card. Once all customers have moved across this is estimated at £381,000 per

annum. This will need to be funded either through increased prices or reduced costs.

6.3 There are several procurement projects arising from the changes to the Rothercare service as highlighted within the body of this report as follows:

- The procurement of resources (£73,000) required to complete a review and input into the digital switchover 2025 operational plan and review the choice of equipment and sim cards to ensure that they are compatible and meet current and future security requirements.
- The procurement of the equipment required to undertake the Digital Switchover by 2025 (£1.3M).
- The procurement of a national partner to deliver Analogue to Digital turnkey service (£300,000).

6.4 The procurement of each component above will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules and Public Contract Regulations (as amended), or the subsequent Procurement Act 2023 (the Act) which will come into force in October 2024.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 The Care Act 2014 ("CA 2014") creates a general duty for the Council to promote the individual wellbeing of adults with care and support needs and carers. s1 of the CA 2014, requires the Council to have regard to the importance of preventing or delaying the development of needs for care and support.

7.2 Under s2 CA 2014, the Council must provide or arrange for the provision of services, facilities or resources, or take other steps, which it considers will contribute towards preventing or delaying the development by adults in its area of needs for care and support; reduce the needs for care and support of adults in the borough and reduce the needs for support of carers in the borough.

7.3 The Care and Support Statutory Guidance ("the Statutory Guidance") sets out that the care and support system must work to actively promote well-being and independence and does not wait to respond when people are in crisis by early interventions which prevents need or delays deterioration wherever possible.

7.4 Under s18 of the CA 2014 the Council has a duty to meet needs for care and support having determined that a person has needs which meet the eligibility criteria and a duty under s20 of the CA 2014 to meet a carer's needs for support. The eligibility criteria is set out within the Care and Support (Eligibility Criteria) Regulations 2015.

7.5 Personalisation is central to ensuring people receive the right support that helps them live independently and connected to their communities. The

Statutory Guidance recognises that concept of meeting need is different and personal to individuals and that modern care and support can be provided in many ways, including the use of technology. Paragraph 10.12 of the Statutory Guidance states: *'Where the local authority provides or arranges for care and support, the type of support may itself take many forms. These may include more traditional 'service' options, such as care homes or homecare, but may also include other types of support such as assistive technology in the home or equipment/adaptations and approaches to meeting needs should be inclusive of less intensive or service-focused options'*.

7.6 The Council has a market shaping duty under s5 CA 2014 to promote an efficient and effective market for care and support services for people in the borough including a variety of service providers and services and a variety of high-quality services.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

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

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 There are no specific implications for children and young people arising from the contents of this report. The service is delivered to people over the age of 18 years.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The proposals in this report support the Council to comply with legal obligations encompassed in the:

- Human Rights Act (1998), to treat everyone equally with fairness dignity and respect with a focus on those who are disadvantaged as a result of disability and Page 12 of 13.
- Equality Act (2010) to legally protect people from discrimination in the wider society.

The Equality Analysis provides further detail (appendices 4 and 5)

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 A Carbon Impact Assessment form has been completed and can be reviewed in Appendix 4.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 New strategic approaches to assistive technology delivery models will ensure alignment with the wider strategic plans for Rotherham including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Rotherham Health and Care Plan. This approach ensures opportunities to align and harness existing strategic approaches through a system-wide partnership response.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 *Switch Over to Digital*

Without additional investment is a substantial risk that the transformation cannot be achieved and Rotherham will not be in the position to operate a service which is critical to support the vulnerable residents across the borough. £1.7M of capital funding has been requested for delivery of this project which is a national requirement.

13.2 *Timeframe*

Transformation activity must be completed within the national timeframe otherwise this is a substantial risk to the operation of the Rothercare service from December 2025.

A request for capital funding to deliver the project has already been submitted to support delivery within this timeframe.

13.3 *Revenue Impact*

Following installation, a rental cost of £4.88 per month is applicable to each sim card. This equates to an additional annual revenue budget pressure of £381,000.

This budget pressure is currently on an increasing sliding scale as the number of digital installations increase, until completion of the full transition, at which point pressures will equate to full year cost. Pro rata this equates to: £100K for 2023/24, £200k for 2024/25, and £285K for 2025/26.

As such, a further report will be brought back to Cabinet in the Summer which outlines a new business model for Rothercare to ensure sustainability of the service over the longer term.

14. Accountable Officers

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health
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Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	08/01/24
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	03/01/24
Head of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	03/01/24

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