

04 September 2024

Dear Portfolio Leads for Adult Social Care,

PSTN (Digital) Switchover Update

I am writing to you to update you about the urgency of responding to the PSTN (Digital) Switchover, and ensuring that as local authorities we are doing everything we can to safeguard our most vulnerable residents.

As you may be aware, the PSTN is the dedicated legacy telephony network that connects calls via physical, copper phone lines. It was due to be decommissioned in the UK, by December 2025, at which point all landline telephone services would switch to a fully digital network.

In March, a joint letter was sent from several City Region Mayors, (led by GM) to the Secretaries of State for Department of Science, Innovation and Technology, Housing, Communities and Levelling Up, and Health and Social Care. Amongst other issues, this expressed concern about the need for Action and Communications Plans and addressing the risk to vulnerable people receiving telecare. This letter together with other lobbying led to Openreach pushing back the switchover deadline from December 2025 to January 2027.

The PSTN Switchover remains an industry lead, establishing data sharing agreements with communication providers is essential to safeguard residents and I am keen to highlight the issue of data sharing. **The signing of data sharing agreements (DSA)** with local authorities is critical if the communication providers are to be able to identify vulnerable customers and ensure their telecare and other devices operate once switched to digital.

A universal DSA template was created by the Local Government Association earlier this year. Setting up DSAs with Communication Providers should now be a more simplistic process which will enable the identification of residents who need additional support with the transition. It is important that as local authorities we ensure we have done all we can to

protect vulnerable residents. **I would therefore urge local authorities to sign these agreements with communication providers as soon as possible.**

In addition, I can report that there has been some important progress made. The establishment of the Telecare Action Board (TAB), by BT has been invaluable in bringing together the right people around the table. GMCA has continued to lobby industry and government on the fundamental issues that remain which includes:

- **Costs to Local Authorities** to implement the switchover continue to be of high concern. Concerns that Local Authorities are making buying decisions that are not future proofed including Non-Compatible Devices and Closed Digital Platforms.
- The development of a **National Action Plan** with a risk register focused on telecare but also taking full account of wider impacts on facilities management across the UK and businesses.
- The need for an agreed **UK communications plan** reflecting the need to target a range of key audiences that is government branded to provide legitimacy.
- The development of an agreed **“On the day” process** for telecare across industry which brings together the learning from the pilots being undertaken by BT and VMO2.

I will continue to keep you updated on developments on the switchover. Any queries, especially around Data Sharing Agreements, please get in contact with the GMDigital team who are coordinating the Greater Manchester engagement on this issue with both industry and government.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Nick Peel
DIGITAL PORTFOLIO LEAD FOR GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY
LEADER, BOLTON COUNCIL

cc. Digital Portfolio Leads
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