



Northumberland
County Council

Transition from analogue to digital landlines

John Cooper

Strategic Programmes Manager – Digital and IT

www.northumberland.gov.uk

Background

- Analogue networks have been in operation for decades
 - Unreliable
 - Energy hungry
 - Limited functionality
 - Therefore reaching the end of their serviceable life
- New digital phone lines will use broadband network for calls
 - Clearer and better-quality phone calls
 - New features such as anonymous caller rejection, better scam / spam call filtering and use of three-way calling.

Who is Who?

This is a national initiative led by the telecommunications industry.

- Equipment in telephone exchanges being upgraded is typically owned by Openreach
- Equipment in people's properties is typically owned by communication providers (e.g. BT, Sky, TalkTalk, Vodafone, etc)
- Residents and businesses are customers of communication providers, communication providers are customers of Openreach.
- Residents and businesses will therefore be contacted by their communication provider not by Openreach

How will the switchover happen?

- Only impacts people with a landline telephone
- For majority of users switchover is straightforward
 - Plug telephone into socket in broadband router rather than directly into wall socket
 - No requirement for engineer visits, if new router is needed can be posted out
- Vulnerable and landline dependent individuals
 - Across the UK around 2 million people are more dependent on their landline
 - These may need additional support as part of the switch over
- Focus to date *should be* on those that are already to switch
 - i.e. those who use their landline very little, or not at all, and who already have a broadband connection

Vulnerable and landline dependent individuals

- These could include:
 - People living in an area with no mobile phone signal
 - Vulnerable people with additional needs
 - Users of healthcare pendants or alarms
 - Elderly people
 - Landline only users (with no broadband service)
- Those in the above categories should not be being switched at present
 - However we have been made aware of numerous examples in Northumberland where this is happening

Not just voice calls

- Existing analogue lines are used for more than just voice calls, for example:
 - Telehealth – pendant alarms, monitoring etc
 - Security or fire alarm monitoring
 - Lift alarms
 - Oil tank level monitoring
- Those who use telephone lines with any of the above services are encouraged to speak directly to their supplier

What if there is a power cut?

- A corded phone using an analogue phone line will work in the event of a power cut
 - The small amount of power required is supplied along the copper line (assuming there is power at the telephone exchange)
- Digital landlines require additional equipment in the user's property. This equipment requires a power supply to work
 - Therefore in the event of a power cut the line will not be able to be used for calls, including emergency calls
- Work is underway in the telecoms industry to try and mitigate the risks associated with this
 - Additional resilience within the network, for example back up power at relay sites or mobile phone masts
 - Battery back up for individual properties ensuring equipment will work for a period following a power cut

Domestic back up products

- Some examples of equipment that will be available include:
 - Battery back up units – will be able to supply power to telephony equipment
 - Hybrid phones with built in batteries – some will also be able to switch to a mobile network to make calls
- Some communication providers have committed to providing this equipment free of charge to certain more vulnerable or landline dependent users.
 - However again we have seen examples in Northumberland of those within those categories being charged for such equipment



Northumberland County Council's Role

Northumberland County Council is not directly involved in this industry led programme.

The council has taken the decision to raise awareness with Northumberland's residents, businesses and community groups and signpost those with concerns to the relevant organisation for support. (NB not all local authorities are doing this).

The council does not have access to switchover plans and timescales by individual communications providers, so do not know when individuals will be switched across.

We are engaging with some communication providers (notably BT as the largest provider)

What is the Council doing?

Awareness raising activities include:

- Flyer summarising switchover to be distributed to all via council tax bills (March / April)
- Attendance at County Council and Parish Council meetings as requested to support those in direct contact with individuals (ongoing)
- Engagement with stakeholders with a role in community resilience – pilot event held in Glendale in partnership with Glendale Gateway Trust (March)
- Working with BT to support regional roadshow campaign (May / June)
- Potential to supplement these roadshows in communities not covered by BT events (summer)

How to support those with concerns?

Concerns need to be raised directly with suppliers

- Supplier of landline and/or supplier of equipment (e.g. telecare equipment)

Individuals identified for switchover will be notified at least 28 days before switchover occurs

At any point in that timeframe they can contact their supplier with concerns.

For example:

- To identify complex individual needs
- To add a third party to assist them in the switchover
- Request a battery back up or hybrid phone
- Request an engineer visit
- Request adapters or new handset
- Ask for switchover to be delayed
(NB cannot be delayed beyond December 2025)