

Tech Essentials: Telecom Digital Switchover Getting Your Council Ready

October-2021

Webinar Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Introduction

This Frequently Asked Questions sheet has been produced based on three Local Government Association webinar sessions that took place in October 2021, with delegates from councils. The webinar contributors were Openreach, Virgin Media O2 (VMO2) and Norfolk County Council. Questions were submitted by delegates during the sessions and responses have been provided by Openreach, and/or Virgin Media O2. All information set out below is correct at time of publication.

Q) In terms resilience for rural locations - I come from a remote location with no mobile signal and variable power supply during winter - so no way of obtaining support / help or otherwise

A: Virgin Media) Cellular back up will only be relevant where there is sufficient mobile signal. For other areas another fixed back-up will need to be considered.

A: Openreach) Openreach are making fibre to the premises (FTTP) available to over 6.2m premises in rural areas. Where this doesn't happen, we expect single order generic ethernet access and fibre to the cabinet to be available in most areas.

Q) Is there a requirement for a fibre cable to be in a premise, or is it purely an exchange switchover whereby it will run across a copper last mile

A: Virgin Media) Internet Protocol Voice switch over is not dependent upon a change to Fibre to the Premise (so it can run over a Broadband line with last mile copper / coax as well as fibre).

A: Openreach) Both fibre to the premises, single order generic ethernet access and fibre to the cabinet will be available. Today 95% of the UK has access to fibre to the cabinet. In this instance the end customer won't need an engineering visit, only a router that will work on a very high bit rate digital subscriber line. If you have fibre to the cabinet today, you shouldn't need to even change your router. This however is something best checked with your Communication Provider.

Q) How does an Alarm Reach Centre get details of its customers to the Communication Provider?

A: Virgin Media) Alarm Reach Centre's only currently share their inbound numbers, rather than any customer details (which would give rise to personal data issues). A Communication Provider who has sought these numbers can then check if their own customers make outbound calls to these numbers.

A: Openreach) Openreach and the Tec Services Association (TSA) has been working in conjunction with the Office of the Telecommunications Adjudicator to ask Alarm Reach Centre's for a list of their dial in numbers. This can then be shared with Communications Providers to try and identify their customers who use Telecare devices. At present only 46 of the 176 Alarm Reach Centres are participating in this scheme.

Q) Taking into consideration environmental factors etc. How will this be monitored using the power supply from the PSTN connection?

A: Virgin Media) The list we are aware of is even longer and we're working with Ofcom and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport to ensure all impacted sectors are identified.

A: Openreach) The Public Switched Telephone Network line will lose power on the day that the end customer's Communications Provider migrates that customer to a fibre-based product. This will be sometime between now and the end of 2025 according to each Communication Providers migration plan. Some Communication Providers will offer "at risk" customers a Battery Back Up solution for the router and where necessary the optical network termination for fibre to the public, however some will rely on the customers own mobile phone service to meet the Office for Communications [guidance](#).

Q) Communication Providers (BT, Virgin etc.) should pick up the additional and associated costs of SIM technology (which ensures service continuity in the event of a power outage), rather than local authorities or the end telecare customer having to pay more for the same level of telecare service. In Lancashire we have over 15,000 telecare users who will all need a replacement digital hub, the SIM costs alone will be an extra £3/4m a year – ouch!

A: Virgin Media) That's an ask! In all seriousness, it's a case of seeing what the additional cost is (some existing units may continue to work with some Communication Providers etc), and then working out where that lies (supplier, service provider etc).

A: Openreach) The challenge is understood and Openreach appreciate that this may cause some changes, however Openreach have invested many millions of pounds setting up the fibre network, which will futureproof the United Kingdom's Telephony network and each Communications Provider, will have the chance to assist their own customers with this migration. It should be noted of course though, that what each individual or business plug into the service, may need replacement and this may mean additional cost.

Q) How can people in councils find out what the programme is for their local area and which suppliers they need to deal with in their patch?

A: Virgin Media) Roadmap: Each Communications Provider will move customers over on their own timetable. Virgin Media O2's plans involve advance notice being sent out to all Local Authorities of any change affecting a post code in a local area. This is in addition to direct communication to customers. We're looking at how we can make this more visible.

A: Openreach) It will be the end customers Communication Provider that make the migration take place. That means that in any given exchange area, customers may all be moving to fibre-based solutions, months or even years apart. Each Communication Provider will contact their customers when they are ready.

Q) What are the costs to Local Authorities?

A: Virgin Media) Very low, but for a non-Broadband customer Virgin Media O2 will provide a router (at no additional charge) to enable the telephony service.

A: Openreach) This will depend on the contract that each Council has for their own services with their own Communication Provider, but also for other suppliers of the Council for other services. e.g., switchboard, lift alarms, intruder alarms etc. If the Council runs Adult Social Care, then we strongly recommend that they contact their Alarm Receiver Centre and hardware suppliers, to ask how the move to fibre-based services will affect their estate of products.

Q) What are Openreach and Virgin doing to work with councils to protect people who are vulnerable?

A: Virgin Media) All Providers have a duty to ensure that vulnerable customers are identified and provided with a back-up line to allow at least voice 999 access. Although there is no prescribed "list" of vulnerable customers, Virgin Media O2 actively ask customers and have also used calling information where a customer appears to be making calls to Alarm Receiver Centres.

A: Openreach) Openreach are reaching out to Local Authorities through tailored presentations and providing information and guidance through web pages like this one <https://www.openreach.com/upgrading-the-UK-to-digital-phone-lines>

They are also working with industry to get best practise and have opened a test Lab for hardware suppliers to test their products in an All-IP environment. The work with vulnerable is also picked up with the Communications Providers, who will have this customer as their own.

Q) Who is supposed to be doing all this work - checking existing devices etc?

A: Virgin Media) The Test Labs offered by Virgin Media O2 and other providers are designed to offer free of charge testing for manufacturers and suppliers of services. This should increase information available to Local Authorities as to whether devices have been tested.

A: Openreach) Openreach now have a test lab running in London and hardware suppliers can come along and test their equipment in an All-IP environment and then feedback to their own customers on what products will continue working after their customer has moved to a Fibre based line.

Q) Do you (and Openreach, BT) hold a public listing of all those organisations and devices that have tested and their pass/fail status? can this be shared with councils?

A: Virgin Media) We don't and can't pass or fail third party equipment but do show who has tested (which I think BT do as well), so councils can contact those equipment manufacturers / suppliers to discuss compatibility. The list can be found [here](#).

A: Openreach) All Vendors who come to the Openreach Lab are assured of anonymity. Openreach do ask permission from these Vendors to add their business name to the Lab web site as those who have tested, however testing and results data belongs to the Vendor not Openreach.

Q) Is there an impact to Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line and Fibre to the Cabinet services which also make a use of copper services?

A: Virgin Media) The Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line and Fibre to the Cabinet based broadband services will not be affected by the change in voice technology itself, however, as these are Openreach supplied technologies, I'll defer to John for details of the separate initiative to move to fibre.

A: Openreach) Yes Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Lines will be affected. Fibre Broadband, Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) and Single Order Generic Ethernet Access and Fibre to the Premises uses very high bit digital subscriber line (VDSL) routers, so the Communications Provider will need to change any customers routers that are Asymmetric Digital Subscriber lines to VDSL on transition to All IP (next generation network) Fibre services. For FTTC they should already have a VDSL router.

Q) Is it still the case that you can't use extensions into other rooms?

A: Virgin Media) Speaking for Virgin Media O2, it may vary between different Communication Providers. The IP voice needs to go over the Broadband line into the home. Currently, extension sockets are only connected to the voice network and not the Broadband line, so the simplest way of migrating is to ask the customer to plug into the Hub (modem/router) - this would not allow extension sockets to be used. We can rewire the wall socket to enable extension sockets in certain cases.

A: Openreach) When a Communications Provider migrates their customer to All IP, the customer only gets Broadband from the master socket and nothing else. This means that power to the master socket and extension sockets stops. Everything then becomes router centric, with all voice and data going over IP.