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BT has announced its intention to complete its transition of the UK's telephone infrastructure from analogue to IP Voice by 2025, a move that will affect all of us to some degree. So what does the digital switchover mean for housing providers? Adrian Scaife, UK Product Marketing Manager at Tunstall Healthcare tells us more.

The UK's move to a digital telecommunications network will be a step change in the possibilities offered by technology in group living developments. Housing providers have some pressing decisions to make about their current and future strategies to make the most of the digital journey.

All group living environments require ongoing upgrades and maintenance to their communication and alarm systems to ensure their reliability in life critical situations. These upgrades also offer a real opportunity to deliver new and innovative services that make a real difference for residents.

The opportunities

The good news is that going digital has a range of significant benefits:

- Functionality

Internet Protocol (IP) systems allow multiple alarm calls to be managed simultaneously on a digital connection, residents are able to call each other and use the video door entry system all at the same time, improving the user experience and increasing safety for residents.

- Speed

IP alarm transmission is much faster than analogue, providing additional reassurance for users.

- More insight

Using intelligent platforms, information on activities of daily living such as movement around the home, use of electrical appliances and taking medication can be monitored and intelligently analysed to raise alerts in the event of changes in behaviour. This preventative approach can in turn indicate a need for a change in support or just require an early intervention. This data may also be used to inform care planning and enable families to take a more active role in caring for a family member.

- Future ready

We're continuously developing our digital portfolio, including our Communicall Vi IP platform, in response to feedback from users and the latest advances in technology. Our future-proof platform supports providers in getting the maximum value from their investment, and delivering peace of mind to their residents.

- Value-added services

Digital platforms enable the provision of a range of additional services beyond alarm handling – empowering residents and improving their experience. Examples include WiFi/internet access, supporting social inclusion, health and wellbeing apps, and improved provider contacts.

The challenges

- Timescales

BT expects to have changed all their UK phone lines from analogue signalling to IP Voice by 2025. New ISDN lines will no longer be available for sale after 2020, and BT also proposes to cease selling analogue phone lines in 2023. In the lifecycle of scheme upgrades and new build developments, this essentially means that housing providers need to make decisions now about their digital strategy and approach.

- Legacy

Many group living environments in the UK have alarm equipment that may be 10, 20 or even 30 years old. Some of these systems will not operate on the new digital infrastructure and will need to be adapted or replaced. Tunstall will work with housing providers to help them audit their schemes to establish their current equipment portfolio, to ensure their residents remain protected, and identify opportunities for improved user experience and efficiency savings.

- Strategy

Housing providers need to be confident that their systems and suppliers will deliver resilient, flexible support today and have the capability to continue and develop products and services to meet challenges in the future. Technology is now becoming central to the capability of providers to ensure effective and efficient service delivery. Business structures and services need to be developed with the ability to take advantage of both the available and future technology, rather than simply including technology in existing approaches. By fully realising the potential of digital systems, providers can position themselves to be able to unlock significant

opportunity.

Technology providers are working with BT to establish the full impact of the digital switchover on community alarm systems and telecare devices. In the meantime there are still steps that housing providers can take to begin to prepare for the digital future, such as reviewing their existing assets and finding out more about the benefits of IP to themselves and the people they support.

Tunstall has a range of resources to help housing providers plan for the IP revolution. To find out more, talk to your account manager, email marketing@tunstall.com or visit uk.tunstall.com/digital-journey, where you can also sign up to receive our digital updates.