

A2D – Frequently Asked Questions

Q1 Following the release of the Telecommunication Charter (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-switched-telephone-network-charter/public-switched-telephone-network-charter>), have the timescales of the switchover been pushed back?

At present, there is no indication that the switchover timescales will be delayed. TSA are engaging weekly with communication providers, Openreach & OFCOM, if any timescales changes are announced we will share details with TSA members immediately. We urge all organisations to keep moving ahead rapidly with your migration plans, the telecommunications charter should not be seen as a pause/delay to upgrade programmes.

Q2 Is it recommended to have dual connectivity for Dispersed alarm units (DAU's)?

TSA's recommendation is to have dual connectivity to provide a higher level of resilience to devices in the event of a power cut, or sim failure that impacts the device making a call through to monitoring platform. TSA also recommends services have the ability to connect via SIM and Ethernet/broadband within their stock of DAU's (this could mean having some DAU's that connect via SIM only and others that connect via Ethernet and SIM together in order to mitigate circumstances where there is a weak or no mobile signal, or where there isn't broadband in the home).

Q3 What happens post 2025? If the technology installed isn't fully digitally enabled by the end of 2025, what will the impact be?

At present, we currently stand at around 30% fully digital for dispersed alarm units and around 10% fully digital for scheme based solutions. There will still be analogue equipment in the field post 2025, and this may potentially bring critical risks to end users. TSA urge organisations to ensure they have a robust plan for digital rollout and encourage services to risk profile their customers to prioritise digital installations.

Q4 Where can we find information of successful digital deployment from other organisations?

It is critical that as a sector we are actively sharing updates of digital roll-out programmes, the barriers/challenges and also the enhanced outcomes to service delivery/customers. TSA host regular forum sessions for TEC service providers to come together to share learning and best practice - <https://www.tsa-voice.org.uk/events/tsa-surgeries/>

We also urge TSA members, both suppliers & service providers to engage with the membership team to create blogs/case studies/ best practice examples that can be shared with our network and wider stakeholders to evidence the progress & best practice from across the sector. Please contact the TSA Membership team to discuss further membership@tsa-voice.org.uk

Q5 What are the options/solutions currently on the market for digital Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) platforms?

TSA recently hosted a webinar focusing on digital ARC platforms. Our recommendation is that all ARC's who are currently using solely analogue platforms, must act quickly to commence their upgrade plans. Remaining on a analogue only platform is a huge risk to end users. The recording of the webinar can be found here: <https://www.tsa-voice.org.uk/events/tec-arc-platform-web/> and includes presentations from a wide range of ARC platforms.

Q6 What is the process for engineers on the day of a telephone line upgrade? What happens if a customer is switched to a digital telephone line but their current telecare alarm is not compatible?

The OTA, OFCOM, along with representatives from communication providers (CP's) and the TEC sector, have been working on a 'On the Day Guidance' which is to standardise the process of when an engineer from a communication provider completes a visit to a customer to upgrade their telephone line, who has been identified as vulnerable/telecare user. The guidance is currently at final stages of approval before it is implemented across all CP's, once the guidance is released TSA will ensure publication to all members.

Q7 Can IP Convertors/ IP Bridge solutions be used as a long term option?

Digital/IP convertors are an option to consider when planning your upgrade of your scheme based solutions. They are not currently recommended as a long term solution until further testing and roll out has taken place. TSA are actively seeking evidence of deployed digital convertors to be provided to us so we can share throughout the membership. If you have any feedback on testing please share to allip@tsa-voice.org.uk

Q8 What are the critical areas that need to be included within Business continuity plans in the event of an outage that impacts the delivery of service?

Key considerations to be embedded into Business Continuity Plan (BCP) for in the event of a system outage:

- Categorisation of service users into Red / Amber / Green of criticality, based on age / living alone / fault history / device type etc...
- Mapping of clients into product groups / SIM groups etc. For example, if issue with one product or one SIM then can identify clients quickly.
- Ensure Device Management Platforms (DMPs) are kept up to date and proactively monitored for missing heartbeats etc. (Refer to Digital social care alarm guidance for more information on heartbeats.)
- Make direct contact with your TEC device manufacturer and ask for ongoing updates to the service status. For customers with a VPN, please contact your provider directly to check the status of your VPN availability.
- Ensure you are signed up to alert lists from your SIM provider (the organisation who provides the sim cards within your TEC devices) to receive direct alerts.
- Ensure devices are configured to reach the outside world in multiple different methods – Dual SIM / SIM & Broadband etc.... over multiple protocols – SCAIP / Analogue
- Be prepared for influx of alerts once devices reconnected and manage this alongside your ARC platform provider.
- Make sure you are aware if any of your devices are reliant on 3G for connectivity

Full BCP guidance can be found below; https://irp.cdn-website.com/a9a7c1d1/files/uploaded/Business%20Continuity%20Planning%20Best%20Practice%20Examples%20v3.0%20September%202023_.pdf

Q9 What is the process of receiving a battery back up unit from a communication provider?

At present, each communication provider has their own process regarding the supply of battery back up (BBU) units to connect into a customer's broadband hub. TSA's recommendation for battery back up is a minimum of 24 hours, and we have stated this to communication providers that the current BBU's they are offering, do not meet the industry standards. Communication providers (CP) have confirmed they will give a battery back up unit to any customer they identify as vulnerable and they are currently finalising a 'definition of vulnerable' for CPs to use to increase a standardised approach to how they identify a vulnerable customer.

Q10 If I have analogue devices still installed, how can I monitor them more proactively to be aware of any failures/outages?

TSA advise against the use of analogue equipment over a digital line, however we understand that due to funding & resource pressures, a full roll-out of digital before the end of 2025 is not achievable for some. In this case, we suggest an increased monitoring of the status of the device through the call failure report, for example pulling this report on a daily basis and track any changes of trends/repeat failed calls coming from devices to identify which alarm units need prioritised upgrades. For those that commission ARC services, this will require regular engagement with the commissioned provider to review failed calls activity. TSA have recently released The analogue social alarm communications over digital networks report, focusing on the sharing of test results on legacy analogue TEC devices that make up most of the TEC alarm devices in the UK, where there is the most risk to alarm users when working on digital telephone lines.

<https://www.tsa-voice.org.uk/tec-guidance/i-ndustry-call-to-action-analogue-social-alarm-communications-on-digital-networks/>

Q11 How can I collect information on which communication providers provide the telephone lines to our service providers?

TSA suggest that you incorporate the question into any new referral/installation or ask on any customer review, who currently provides their phone line and store this information on their customer record. It is also possible to use automated communication methods (such as text messaging) for mass outreach to gather the data.

Communication providers are currently requesting Data Sharing Agreements to be put in place with service providers to allow customer telephone numbers to be shared to help identify which numbers are associated with which communication providers. The intention for the data sharing agreements is not to provide data to communication providers to use for any other reason. It is advised to reshare the data with communication providers on a monthly basis.

Please contact the TSA membership team if you require contact details to discuss the data sharing agreements with the relevant communication providers- membership@tsa-voice.org.uk

Q12 Is there support available for the creation of a digital specifications for both dispersed or scheme solution that can ensure the relevant digital requirements are referenced correctly?

TSA constantly update the Commissioners Buyers Guidance for Digital that includes key elements to consider when purchasing digital solutions. The guidance is reviewed on a regular basis to make sure the content is relevant and as up to date as possible, both the full guidance and a supporting checklist can be found via the TSA website- <https://www.tsa-voice.org.uk/campaigns/digital-shift/social-alarms-systems-from-analogue-to-digital/>

For more specific support, please contact the TSA membership team to discuss your requirements and how TSA can work with you throughout the procurement process - membership@tsa-voice.org.uk

Q13 For telephone lines going into my alarm receiving centre or into a grouped living accommodation, who do I contact/which team is best to speak to within the communication providers?

Make sure you contact your Account Manager from your telecomms provider (for example BT/EE or Virgin Media O2) to discuss any queries relating to business lines, as the migration plans for these lines are different to consumer lines within individual's own homes.

Q14 Where can we find up to date guidance focused on the switchover?

All guidance, communication, webinar recordings and other helpful information linked to the digital transition produced by TSA can be found at our dedicated help page on the TSA website. All content is available to members & non-members of TSA - <https://www.tsa-voice.org.uk/campaigns/digital-shift/>