

Wednesday 29 January 2025, LGA

The panel heard how the PSTN switchover requires collaboration between service providers, local authorities, and the government to ensure a safe and consistent migration process. Funding is needed to support collaboration and scale up efforts, particularly in rural areas and for vulnerable populations. Addressing the digital divide and ensuring everyone has access to digital services is crucial for the success of the switchover and for overall well-being.

Witnesses expressed how the switch from copper to fibre networks presents challenges, including the need to identify and address potential risks, such as legacy equipment and analogue lines. A public awareness campaign is needed to inform businesses and individuals about the switchover and its implications, including the potential impact on telecare services. Collaboration between industry, government, and local authorities is crucial to ensure a smooth transition and mitigate risks.

Local authorities are struggling with inconsistent messaging and lack of understanding regarding data sharing agreements, hindering the implementation of telecare services. While some local authorities are actively engaged and have implemented data sharing agreements, others are hesitant or lack the resources to do so. There is a need for a national risk register and improved communication between government, communication providers, and local authorities to address these challenges and ensure the successful rollout of telecare services.

The importance of standards across the telecare sector were raised and how providers need encouragement to join the TSA's TEC quality framework.

The APPG heard from witnesses that digital champions are crucial for managing the transition to PSTN, but they need to be funded and have the necessary expertise and authority. A regional model for digital champions, rather than individual ones for each authority, would be more effective and cost-efficient.

Battery backups for PSTN infrastructure were described as insufficient and need to be improved to ensure continuous service during power outages.

Witnesses discussed the need for infrastructure and collaboration to address digital exclusion, highlighting the importance of government support and consistent standards. They also touched on the impact of 2G and 3G network switch-offs on communities and the need for clarity and communication to ensure a smooth transition.