

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MONDAY 24 MARCH**

## **Crucial government leadership now vital during digital switchover – APPG warns**

The Digital Communities All-Party Parliamentary Group has criticised successive governments for the handling of the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) migration in its first report, Care to Connect.

The PSTN migration – also known as the digital switchover – will see communication providers move customers from the existing analogue landline network to new, upgraded fibre services. Analogue lines are rapidly deteriorating putting at risk millions of residents who rely on these connections, many of whom are elderly or have a disability and need additional support.

The digital switchover has been left to providers to manage and deliver; however, the APPG's report argues that this 'approach creates a complex landscape in what is a technical project with deeply personal repercussions.'

Over the past 12 months, government ministers have increased their involvement in the digital switchover following reported concerns about residents' safety, including a small number of fatalities. From December 2023 to January this year, non-voluntary migrations were paused at the request of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. Other ministerial interventions include publications of the PSTN Charter, PSTN Checklist and Telecare National Action Plan.

Despite these interventions, the APPG report has called for the role of government 'to be clearly defined in digital transformation projects.' This is particularly important when customer size, migration approach, technological solutions, and timelines for migrations varies from provider to provider.

Evidence to the APPG expressed concerns over proposed plans for a national telecare campaign (NTC). It is now understood that the NTC will be delayed from Spring 2025 to Summer 2025. The campaign will be funded by BT and Virgin Media O2 (VMO2).

Whilst the APPG says it supports the principal of a national campaign, industry fragmentation has the potential to undermine the delivery of an effective NTC which stakeholders are eager to see delivered. Witness evidence highlighted the critical need for 'buy-in and support from the voluntary and community sector (VCS)' to deliver an effective communication campaign.

Concern was also raised on the overreliance of residents to self-identify as 'vulnerable' throughout the PSTN migration, Further evidence raised the potential risk of an increase in scam activity, and there is growing concern that this may worsen as a result of the national campaign.

Chair of the APPG and Liberal Democrat Health Spokesperson, Helen Morgan MP (North Shropshire), said:

"The APPG agreed to fast track an inquiry into the PSTN migration and shine a light on the risks associated.

"The digital switchover should be known and understood by every resident across the country to ensure the most vulnerable in our communities are protected.

“Successive governments have not provided leadership or coordination to this programme, and it is now time for this new government to correct course. The risk to life if residents are not safely migrated is real. A digital transformation project of this kind cannot be allowed to be led by industry operatives alone.

“Unfortunately, whilst a national campaign is essential, DSIT must urgently intervene to ensure coordination and provide clarity to the wider network of stakeholders. This will ensure the campaign has a strong ground-up approach to complement TV and radio adverts.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The APPG will formally launch its report in Parliament at 16:30 on Monday 24 March.

The Local Government Association (LGA) provides secretariat to the Digital Communities APPG.

The APPG conducted three evidence sessions with witnesses including: BT, VMO2, SKY, Ofcom, GMCA, WMCA, TSA, Essex County Council, Digital Poverty Alliance, Citizen’s Advice and Age UK. Written evidence was received from the LGA and TalkTalk.

About the APPG

The Digital Communities APPG is a cross-party group of parliamentarians, with the aim to promote the delivery of digitally equipped places that support and foster a connected, healthy, and productive community. This includes the creation and maintenance of sustainable digital infrastructure, as well as providing residents with equal opportunity to thrive in a digital world. The Local Government Association (LGA) provides the secretariat to the APPG.

About the LGA

The LGA is the national voice of local government. We are a politically led, cross party membership organisation, representing councils from England and Wales. Our role is to support, promote and improve local government, and raise national awareness of the work of councils.