



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Viewpoint 101

Analogue to digital: Future proofing your group living systems

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Introduction

The coronavirus crisis has thrust technology enabled care (TEC) into the spotlight; from tablets connecting shielding relatives, to GP consultations by video, the role that digital technology can play in improving health and wellbeing is better understood - and more visible - than ever.

This new Viewpoint for the Housing LIN reveals that this is especially the case in sheltered and extra care housing. It highlights how, during the pandemic, many social landlords have relied on monitoring and communication systems to keep vulnerable residents safe but also to enhance their quality of life as social isolation has become widespread.

Going Digital - supporting people in supported housing

Some supported housing providers have also moved from a reactive approach to one that is more proactive. For example, data from TEC systems has been used to identify residents at risk of falling and put preventative measures in place such as wellbeing calls and daily reminders to take medication, stay hydrated and keep active.

The beauty of digital isn't just its ability to learn someone's patterns of behaviour and pre-empt when they might need extra care. The true value lies in how it can help that person to understand and self-manage their health - increasing their independence, choice and control whilst also reducing pressure on health and care services.

Operationally too, digital has supported housing providers throughout the pandemic, enabling the rapid deployment of 'plug and play' TEC that is managed via the cloud, allowing more flexible alarm call handling and helping large swathes of staff to work from home.

Although COVID-19 may have lifted the lid on digital technology and the possibilities it presents, the challenge now is whether housing providers can unleash this 'digital premium'. Shockingly, a large proportion of the sector are still procuring analogue telecare equipment and using traditional infrastructure and processes.

Time to get switched on to TEC

Yet, in less than five years the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), which has connected analogue telecare systems for decades, will be switched off and replaced by a digital all-IP network. In fact, as early as 2023, it won't be possible to buy an analogue phone line from BT.

This digital switchover has big implications for supported housing providers. Analogue assisted living alarms won't work in the same way on digital networks. They may become less reliable, with a higher rate of failed calls, and it's likely that traditional devices will become tougher to install and maintain.

However, new digital technologies - using web or cellular connectivity to communicate with alarm receiving centres - come with their own set of challenges.

The cost of upgrading analogue equipment to digital is a real issue for many housing providers. Confusion is also common, particularly amongst social landlords with little experience of digital technologies. Without the right practices and processes, challenges around cyber security, safety and reliability may arise. And interoperability problems could stem from the multitude of digital TEC systems available and the fact that despite many sheltered schemes wanting to use digital alarms, their monitoring centres don't have the right infrastructure to connect.

Raising the standard

Regulation is crucial here and if there's one standard that providers of supported housing should be aware of as they embark on their digital journey, it's BS8521-2:2020. This brand new digital 'protocol' as many people refer to it, may sound like a mouthful but it's actually a simple new rule that allows supported housing schemes to speak the same language as their monitoring centre, even if they upgrade their grouped call systems.

Also known as the NOW IP protocol, the standard was published by BSI in April 2020, but I've actually been involved in its development since 2009. Myself, our Managing Director Chris Dodd and a range of suppliers, led by national TEC body TSA, wanted to develop an industry standard that would overcome the interoperability issues facing grouped living systems as TEC shifted from analogue to digital.

We knew that supported housing providers were worried that their residents may not be able to benefit from the opportunities offered by digital because new grouped living equipment couldn't always communicate with alarm receiving centres.

The new NOW IP protocol changes everything. Supported by all UK TEC manufacturers, it's become a de facto industry standard for digital grouped living systems. So, what exactly are the benefits of procuring TEC equipment that complies with this standard?

Flexibility

TEC equipment manufactured to this new open standard guarantees interoperability. It means that social landlords don't have to buy all their kit and monitoring services from one supplier, they have the freedom to pick and choose the products that suit their scheme, knowing that different technologies will talk to each other.

Safety

Buying digitally-enabled equipment that adheres to this published protocol will give housing providers reassurance about the reliability of their TEC service. Failure rates are rising for analogue telecare alarms working on digital networks and social landlords must upgrade their analogue equipment sooner rather than later to improve resilience.

Future proofing

Putting a secure, robust digital infrastructure in place, now, will help you build in new services for your residents in the future. Being able to safely integrate exciting new devices with existing systems and services such as connected homes, health and wellbeing apps and lifestyle monitoring will offer endless benefits to the individuals you support, helping you to future-proof your procurement.

Cost savings

Grouped living systems that comply with BS8521-2:2020 use Voice Over IP. This means that all emergency calls are made over the internet, so there are no telephony charges.

Call reliability

Since the COVID-19 crisis, the number of phone calls being made over mobile and landline networks has soared. This has put the UK's telephone system under significant strain, resulting in a reduction in call quality and some outages. Digital TEC that adheres to the new standard uses an internet-based call service, Voice Over IP rather than a phone network, thereby guaranteeing the reliability of emergency calls.

Always connected

In the past, communication failures caused by damage to PSTN lines have meant that emergency calls made via analogue systems don't always get through. Some monitoring centres actually dial up in the night to check their lines are still working. The advantage of the NOW IP protocol is that systems are always connected and won't be affected by telephone line failures.

No queues

One of the big benefits that digital offers grouped living communication is unlimited simultaneous calls. With analogue technology, if someone presses their pendant and has a long conversation with the operator then all other emergency calls from that scheme stack up behind them. This can be dangerous, especially if fire alarm alerts and other critical calls have to wait in line.

Having been so closely involved in the development of this new protocol, it will come as no surprise that Legrand Assisted Living and Healthcare offers a range of digitally enabled grouped living systems with NOW IP built in as standard across our Tynetec grouped living devices and our Answerlink monitoring centre solutions.

For instance, our cloud based digital ecosystem, which allows housing providers to integrate simple digitally enabled devices in grouped living environments with other systems and services such as monitoring centres, smart home technology and mobile applications is becoming increasingly popular. Indeed, in recent months we have seen sales of our digital alarm units overtake those of traditional analogue devices.

And finally....

Digital technology will revolutionise the way in which housing providers deliver care to their residents. The possibilities are endless but to many social landlords, this shift feels like a long and confusing journey to navigate. One place to start is the Good Governance Institute's white paper, '[Unleashing the Digital Premium](#)', which explores the opportunities arising from the digital switchover. National body for TEC services, TSA has also published a [number of resources](#) that offer guidance as you begin your transition.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About Legrand ALH



ASSISTED LIVING & HEALTHCARE

Legrand are global experts in electrical and digital building infrastructures, with a presence in over 90 countries. The Assisted Living & Healthcare business unit specialises in creating innovative technology based care solutions for health, housing and social care sectors through our brands Tynetec, Jontek and

Aid Call. Currently, we're all living longer and as a consequence, the care and health services we rely upon need to change in order to support more effectively, those who are vulnerable or at risk.

Tynetec's digitally enabled at-home alarms and telecare devices work seamlessly together to empower individuals in their own homes. Our grouped living and access control systems are designed to ensure that local authorities and housing associations have flexible future proofed support for their residents. And we also offer a true digital end to end solution with our Answerlink monitoring and response center software. Aidcall has been a leading manufacturer of wireless nurse call technology for over 40 years, Aid Call's wireless nurse call solution greatly reduces installation cost and minimises disruption. Wireless configuration offers complete flexibility and mobility, which makes our system infinitely changeable and expandable, allowing for the constant ability to deal with ever changing priorities and demands.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations

To access a selection of related resources on going digital and technology enabled care and housing, visit our dedicated pages at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/going-digital/>

And for more information about how the Housing LIN can advise and support your organisation on community-led approaches to shaping your 'offer' for an ageing population, go to:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/consultancy/consultancy-services/>

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