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Briefing Note

VoIP Telephony

Introduction

In November 2017, the telecoms industry announced its intention to retire analogue telephone networks such as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) by the end of 2025. The industry will upgrade landline services to new digital technology using an internet connection, such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), Digital Voice or All-IP telephony. As part of a gradual 'switch off' process, people will no longer be able to acquire new PSTN or ISDN services after September 2023. The old technology will then be completely switched off in December 2025. In short, this will see the end of analogue phone lines in the UK as we know them.

VoIP refers to making phone calls that are made through the internet rather than through a regular landline or a mobile phone network. A VoIP system works by taking an analogue voice signal, converting it into digital signals, then sending them as data over a broadband line.

At its meeting on 23 November 2023, the Committee considered a proposal for the renewal of the phone and broadband services for Court Bushes Community Hub and the Parish Council office/Village Centre currently with British Telecom, and it was:

F23/24.080: RESOLVED: That the Committee AGREED to postpone the renewal of the phone and broadband services for Court Bushes Community Hub and the Parish Council office/Village Centre currently with British Telecom until the technology improves, so lessons can be learnt from the roll out of VOIP by others.

Following a discussion with the Parish Council's IT Consultant, JB Computers, the following approach is now proposed because the opportunity exists to make the move before the costs for Microsoft Licences increase at our annual renewal in February 2024.

Proposal

The proposal is to move from a traditional analogue copper wire telephone system to a VoIP Teams Phone system with a domestic calling plan:

- The individual user Teams Licence fees will be £11.88 per user per month, with a minimum one year commitment. (There is a monthly commitment option but this is 20% more expensive.)
- The Licence includes 3,000 minutes/month per user license. This goes into a central pool for all users to use.
- Each of the four office based employee would have a direct dial number and mainline numbers can be added at no cost.
- Phones calls are answered using the Teams client on the employees laptop using the laptop's built in microphone and speakers, or a suitable corded or wireless headset/earpiece.
- Calls can also be received and made from mobiles (as long as the mobile is enrolled into the Parish Council's 365).

- There is an auto attendant that can route a call to different destinations (user or voicemail) based on times of the day, weekends and holidays.
- The setup can initially be configured using test numbers and tested to make sure everyone is happy with the setup.
- Then the Parish Council's current telephone number can be ported over to Teams from BT. Once that is complete, current BT telephone services can be cancelled. It should be noted that BT Sales Teams are operating very unethically in their hard sell approach which will only get worse as they lose more customers to other providers.
- BT or another provider would still be required to provide the broadband service.
- Less than a days IT Support would be required to complete the set up at a cost of £50/hour for approx. four hours, and this can be provided remotely if required.

Conclusion

With the reassurance of the Parish Council's IT Consultant that the technology has been proven to work well for other clients including Parish Councils, it is proposed that the move to VoIP using Teams is brought forward to take advantage of the current costs before prices are increased at the annual renewal stage. Savings will be made on the current BT phone contract but broadband services will still need to be supplied by BT or another suitable provider.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is asked to AGREE to proceed with the move to a VoIP Teams Phone system with a domestic calling plan at a cost of £570.24 per annum for the Licences, plus a one-off £200 for the costs of set-up by JB Computers.
