



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Holyrood Telephone System Replacement

19 May 2022

Reference: SPCB (2022) Paper 36

Executive summary

1. This paper provides a high-level overview of the plans to replace the systems which are used to provide the telephone services at Holyrood and to provide information on how service continuity will be achieved during the digital switchover affecting all telephone services in the UK.

Issues and options

2. The telephone system used at Holyrood was procured and installed prior to the Parliament moving to the Holyrood building in 2004. The telephone service covers approximately 1400 extensions covering over 2000 numbers and serves all building users as well as delivering a public switchboard service. The system has generally been reliable and has served us well. However, we are now experiencing an increasing failure rate of components and periods of unplanned downtime as the system comes to the end of its usable life.

3. The current system has now entered a phase of extended support where the standard support from the manufacturer has ended. This means that the components and software updates required to keep the system running effectively and securely are no longer readily available. Where issues do occur, we are no longer guaranteed a fix from our support partner meaning there is an increasing risk of prolonged downtime or catastrophic failure of the Holyrood telephone system. This risk has already materialised for part of the telephone system that supported the IT helpdesk service which irreparably broke and had to be replaced with an alternative solution separate from the current Holyrood telephone system.

4. In addition to addressing the issue of aging infrastructure and the associated risks on a business-critical service, there is an immediate need to

address a looming challenge presented by the UK's move from an analogue to a digital telephone network.

5. The move to a digital telephone network in the UK, is being driven by the telephone providers looking to modernise their aging infrastructure and equipment which is becoming more difficult and expensive to maintain. BT, who run most of the current public telephone network in the UK, known as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), have taken the decision to retire the PSTN by December 2025. Other providers plan to follow broadly similar timescales.

6. Holyrood currently connects to the telephone network through an exchange in Edinburgh which provides our "telephone lines". The exchange we connect to is being upgraded to a new digital service this summer as part of the UK wide switch to digital. At this time, the technology we use to provide our telephone lines will no longer be available to us and we will have to replace the lines which connect our telephone environment with a new technology to maintain service.

7. A project was started prior to the pandemic with the goal of replacing the current Holyrood telephone system. Much of the work on the project was paused during the pandemic, though the project did continue with design work, planning, testing whilst also undertaking remedial work on the current environment. The project has now fully restarted and the work will continue to replace the telephone system at Holyrood with a new service. The project will also address the more immediate issue of having to manage the transition of our current telephone lines to allow us to still connect to the telephone network post digital switchover in our local telephone exchange during the summer.

8. The project will modernise the Scottish Parliament telephony service used at Holyrood including replacing the switchboard service, helpdesk services, voicemail services and specialist telephony needs such as lifts, etc. The project will also use lessons learned during the pandemic to further shape the new service to deliver a flexible telephone solution, which can be effectively and seamlessly used beyond the Holyrood building.

9. When designing the new system, we have also been mindful of the feedback received from Members so far regarding the potential to offer telephony services to local offices and to enable flexible working. The local office component will be a future phase of the project once we have addressed the immediate needs associated with Holyrood and further discussions with SPCB will be required prior to finalising an approach.

10. The project has already completed a great deal of engagement, requirement gathering analysis, and market research. Members have been engaged prior to the pandemic and the project will now undertake further engagement with Members and other telephone users whilst undertaking the technical changeover of our telephone lines before the end of the summer.

11. Post summer the project is planning to pilot a new telephony solution and further engage, before starting the migration from our aging legacy telephone system by the end of December 2022.

Governance

12. The project is part of the portfolio of projects for which the Digital Strategy Board, chaired by the Group Head of Digital Services, has responsibility. In addition, the project has its own project board with an SRO (Head of BIT Infrastructure) who is accountable for the successful delivery of the project A project manager is also in place and is responsible for the day to day management of the project.

13. The project is part of the delivery plan associated with the Session 6 Strategic Plan and as such is part of the reporting mechanisms set up to report on progress on a quarterly basis to the Leadership Group and SPCB.

14. The project has previously undertaken an Equalities Impact Assessment, and this will be revisited regularly throughout the project.

Resource implications

15. The total project cost is currently estimated at £550k - £650k. The project budget sits within the digital projects budget envelop which is part of the overall SPCB budget.

Publication Scheme

16. This paper can be published.

Next steps

17. The project will continue with the preparatory work to ensure that we successfully manage the retiral of the technology used to supply the current telephone lines to Holyrood and implement new supporting technologies to ensure service continuity.

18. Further engagement with Members and other phone users will be undertaken followed by the pilot of a modern telephony environment. Assuming a successful pilot, including receiving positive Members feedback, the current plan is to begin migrating to a new telephone solution around the end of 2022.

Decision

19. This paper provides a high-level overview of the project to replace the Holyrood phone system and ensure service continuity post digital switchover of our telephone lines. SPCB is asked to note the project's intent to further engage with Members throughout the next phases.

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