## The Future of Safety in Sheltered Housing

Navigating the Digital Switchover with Confidence

A Guide for Housing Providers and Technology Partners



### 1. Executive summary

The UK's sheltered housing sector is undergoing a significant transformation. With the national Digital Switchover set for 2027, thousands of properties and service providers are still operating with analogue alarm systems—technologies that are fast becoming obsolete. While this shift is often seen as a regulatory hurdle, it also presents a pivotal opportunity.

The transition to digital is more than a technical upgrade. It's a chance to reimagine how safety, care, and operational efficiency are delivered in sheltered housing. By adopting a modern, digital alarm management platform, providers can not only ensure compliance but also enhance care quality, streamline staff workflows, strengthen system resilience, and ultimately deliver better outcomes for residents.

This whitepaper explores how embracing digital solutions can transform the sector—solving today's challenges while unlocking the potential for smarter, safer, and more person-centred housing services.

# The Current Landscape: Why Analogue Is No Longer Enough

Across the UK, sheltered housing schemes were predominantly built between the 1960s and 1980s, a time when safety technology looked very different from today. These buildings were designed with analogue infrastructure in mind, and the alarm systems installed reflected the technology of the era: simple, hardwired, and fit for purpose at the time.

Most schemes consist of around 25 apartments, often supplemented by 5 or more call points strategically placed in communal areas, lifts, and corridors. Each apartment is typically equipped with a wall-mounted intercom panel, pull cords, and, in some cases, smoke or heat

#### **Limited functionality:**

These systems were never built for today's needs like remote working, mobile responders or data-driven care.

#### Dependency on a vanishing network:

As PSTN infrastructure is decommissioned ahead of the 2027 Digital Switchover, alarm failures linked to network outages are becoming more frequent.

detectors, all linked through hardwired 8-core bus cables back to a central control unit located on-site. This unit typically connects externally through a single PSTN DTMF communicator, sending alarms to an ARC (Alarm Receiving Centre).

This setup has served generations of residents well, combining emergency alarms with functions like door entry systems. But the world has changed a lot since the 60s, and the analogue systems are now struggling to meet the demands of modern care, connectivity, and reliability. This is becoming increasingly clear through challenges like:

#### **Declining reliability:**

Failures are increasingly common, especially when analogue systems interact with digital networks, which often result in dropped or failed alarm calls.

#### Costly and disruptive maintenance:

A damaged bus cable can take down alarms for multiple apartments, requiring invasive repairs inside residents' homes.

These are not hypothetical risks. Alarm failures are already being reported across the UK as analogue systems struggle to operate reliably over modern digital networks. According to the Telecare Services Association (TSA), there are cases where alarm calls have failed without the user being notified, only being discovered during routine tests or after service disruption. These failures will likely become more common as PSTN services are phased out ahead of the 2027 switchover. (TSA, 2022)

## The Digital Switchover: What's Happening in 2027?

By the end of January 2027, the UK's Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), the copper-based telephone network that has powered voice and data communication for over a century, will be permanently shut down. This means that all services still running on analogue phone lines, including alarm systems in sheltered housing, will stop working unless they are transitioned to digital, internet-based (IP) networks.

This is not a minor upgrade. It is a nationwide infrastructure shift, driven by the fact that the PSTN is increasingly outdated, costly to maintain, and no longer fit for the needs of a digital society. Telecom providers are phasing out analogue infrastructure in favour of digital networks that are more resilient, flexible, and future-proof.

For sheltered housing, this has a very real consequence: any system still relying on analogue lines, including alarm systems, will simply stop working when PSTN is switched off.

#### Failing to transition in time can lead to:

- Service interruptions: Alarm calls may fail, leaving vulnerable residents at serious risk.
- Operational disruption: Maintenance costs rise, and emergency fixes become more frequent as analogue infrastructure deteriorates.
- Compliance risks: Providers risk falling behind modern safety standards, regulations, and the expectations of both residents and their families.

#### **Built for the Future.**

A digital alarm solution is designed to adapt. It evolves as your organisation grows, as the residents' needs change, and as new technologies emerge. Unlike the traditional systems, which are static and tied to physical infrastructure, a digital solution is flexible, scalable, and built for the future.

- Easily scale operations, whether adding new apartments, new buildings, or expanding to new regions.
- Integrate with future technologies, such as AI-driven fall detection, wearable health monitoring, and smart building systems.
- Stay compliant and resilient. Automated testing, maintenance alerts, and comprehensive reporting are built in to ensure operational excellence and regulatory compliance long term.

Moving to a cloud-based, digital alarm platform is about far more than just replacing outdated technology. It's a unique opportunity to upgrade and create safer, smarter, and more efficient ways of working, ultimately improving the everyday lives of residents and housing staff.

A digital platform transforms what used to be a static, building-bound system into a dynamic, flexible service that supports everything from emergency alarms and door entry to welfare checks, technical alerts, and compliance reporting. Everything is connected, automated, and fully transparent. This provides a level of reliability, flexibility, and control that analogue systems simply cannot match.

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# Unlocking New Possibilities with a Digital Solution

#### **Benefits for Housing Staff and Managers:**

For housing staff and managers, a digital system provides the clarity and control needed to deliver safer, faster, and more coordinated care.



Real-time visibility: Staff get a full overview of all alarm activity, across one scheme or an entire portfolio of properties, directly in the system dashboard.



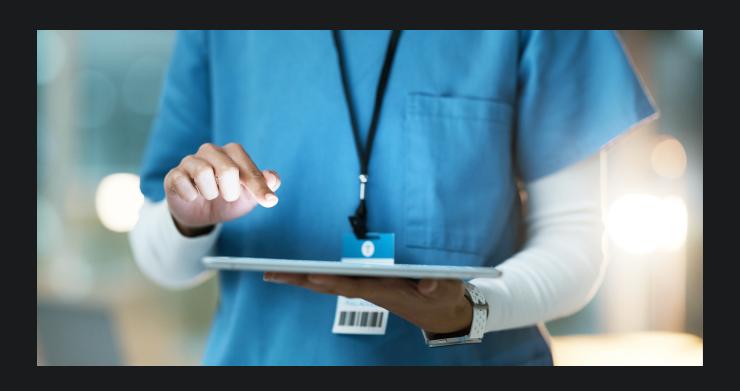
Smarter workflows: Routine tasks like welfare checks, testing, and compliance reporting are automated. For example, the system logs every site visit, every alarm response, and every action taken by wardens or ARC, which ensures full transparency and accountability.



Seamless response handling: If a warden is on-site, they receive and handle the alarm. If not, the alarm seamlessly escalates to an ARC, with no disruption to the resident.



Proactive risk management: Staff can easily spot patterns, such as frequent welfare check alerts or repeated technical alarms, and take preventive action before an incident occurs.



#### **Benefits for Residents:**

For residents, digital alarm systems mean more than just faster responses, they provide a sense of safety and support in everyday life.



#### Alarms that always go through

Whether it's a pull cord, a fall detector, or an alarm in a shared space, the system makes sure help is always reached.



#### The right help at the right time

Depending on the setup, alarms go to the person best placed to help, like a warden on site, an external responder, or a monitoring centre. If one is unavailable, the system automatically escalates to someone else.



#### Support beyond emergencies:

The system can remind staff to check in regularly, log visits, and alert them about technical problems like power cuts or low batteries, making sure that residents feel safe and supported in their home.



#### Modern, discreet devices

Instead of bulky boxes on the wall, residents can use sleek, modern devices or pendants that are easier to use and more comfortable to wear.

#### **Benefits for Installers and Technicians:**

Gone are the days of pulling cables through walls or rewiring entire buildings just to update an alarm system.

#### No more rewiring or drilling:

Devices are connected via IP or wireless networks, meaning installation is faster, cleaner, and less disruptive for residents.

#### Remote onboarding:

All configuration and onboarding is handled remotely. Technicians simply power up the device and activate it in the system. No on-site programming required.

#### Fast, scalable deployments:

Adding new apartments, new devices, or even entire buildings takes minutes, not weeks.

# Skyresponse: The Backbone of Digital Alarm Management

How is all of this possible? At the heart of every digital alarm ecosystem, there needs to be something that holds it all together. Something that connects devices, alarms, response centres, wardens, and service users into one seamless, reliable flow.

#### That's the role of Skyresponse.

Skyresponse is not a hardware provider. We are a vendor-neutral software platform that acts as the intelligent backbone of digital alarm management, connecting alarms, digital devices, mobile responders, and monitoring centres, regardless of hardware brand or supplier. Our job is to make sure that every signal, every alert, and every response happens instantly, securely, and reliably.

#### How it works:

- With an open architecture, Skyresponse integrates seamlessly with a wide network of certified devices, sensors, and technologies from a large ecosystem of trusted partners. This ensures that housing providers can choose the hardware that best fits their needs, without being locked into a single supplier.
- End-to-end alarm handling routes alerts in real time to the right person

   whether that's a warden on-site, a mobile responder, or an external
   ARC based on availability and response plans.
- Built for resilience. The platform has no single point of failure. Even if one part of the system goes offline, alarms are instantly rerouted to ensure continuity at all times.
- Fully compliant with all relevant European regulations, including GDPR, data security, and telecare standards.

## A Partner Ecosystem Where Everybody Wins

Skyresponse is what turns a collection of devices into a living, breathing safety ecosystem. And this ecosystem consists of a network of partners, from hardware manufacturers to ARC (Alarm Receiving Centre) providers.

At the core of this ecosystem is choice, flexibility, and collaboration. Housing providers are no longer locked into a single supplier or limited by rigid system architectures. Instead, they have the freedom to choose from a wide range of certified devices, sensors, and services - all fully interoperable through the Skyresponse platform.

#### **Why Partners Choose Skyresponse:**

- Faster sales cycles: Partners offer solutions that directly solve customer pain points, accelerating decision-making and procurement.
- Simplified operations. The user-friendly interface allows partners to manage configurations, workflows, and changes without relying on extensive support or heavy training.
- Higher customer satisfaction: The combination of reliable hardware and a flexible, future-proof platform results in solutions that adapt to the customer's needs.
- Data ownership and control. Partners can choose whether they handle data management themselves or delegate it to their customers, offering flexibility for different business models.
- Reduced technical complexity: The Skyresponse platform manages the alarm logic, routing, and data handling. This means partners can focus on delivering great products and services, while we handle the orchestration behind the scenes.
- Scalability without limits: Partners benefit from a platform that makes it easy to serve both small-scale local schemes and large, multi-site operations, all without additional technical burden.

#### The Benefits for Housing Providers

The value of this ecosystem doesn't stop at the partner level, it translates directly into better, more flexible solutions for housing providers and their residents.

- Freedom to choose: Housing providers are free to select the hardware and services that best match their properties, routines, and resident needs without being tied to a single supplier.
- Flexible implementation: The system supports gradual migration and local adaptations. Providers can upgrade one scheme at a time, test new setups, and scale across sites when ready.
- Simplified operations: By integrating alarms, door entry, welfare checks, and reporting into one platform, housing providers reduce system complexity and make staff workflows more efficient.
- Future-ready infrastructure: he open ecosystem allows for continuous development. As resident needs shift or new technologies become available, housing providers can expand or adjust without replacing the entire system.
- Better outcomes for residents: With faster, more reliable alarm handling and access to features like mobile response, proactive welfare checks, and technical monitoring, residents benefit from a safer and more supportive living environment.

# 7. Recommendations and Next Steps

While the 2027 deadline might seem far away, the reality is that planning, procurement, and implementation take time. Acting early means fewer disruptions, more control, and better choices.

It might also seem like a big and scary step to take the leap from the long-serving analogue system to a modern, digital system. So, let's break down the steps you need to take.

#### **How to Get Started**

#### **For Housing Providers**

Map Your Current Systems

Start by reviewing your current setup. Which parts of your alarm system are still analogue? Are any schemes still using PSTN-connected alarms? Do you have an inventory of devices like intercoms, pull cords, smoke detectors, and control units?

Doing this will give you clarity on what needs to be replaced, upgraded, or integrated and where to begin.

Engage Your Suppliers

Reach out to your current suppliers. Are they prepared for the Digital Switchover? Can their devices integrate with a modern, cloud-based platform like Skyresponse? What does their transition plan look like?

These conversations will help you evaluate whether your current partners are ready, or whether it's time to explore new options within the Skyresponse partner network.

Plan Your Migration and Start Early

Build a step-by-step migration plan. Prioritise sites that are most vulnerable or most reliant on analogue infrastructure. Consider starting with a pilot to test the setup and gain internal confidence.

#### **How to Get Started**

#### For Technology Partners and Suppliers

- Assess Your Existing Install Base
  Identify which customer deployments still rely on analogue or PSTN-based systems. Review which hardware or integrations will be impacted by the Digital Switchover, and where upgrades may be required. This step helps you anticipate which clients will need migration support and which solutions may become obsolete.
- Evaluate Integration Capabilities
  Ensure your product or service offering can integrate with cloud-based platforms like Skyresponse. Use this opportunity to modernise your roadmap and highlight interoperability as a key value point.
- Engage with the Skyresponse Team
  If you are not yet part of the Skyresponse partner ecosystem, now is the time to explore the benefits. We support partners with integration guidance, go-to-market enablement, and long-term collaboration.

If you are already a partner, consider how you can proactively support your customers with migration planning, training, and updated offers.

#### **How Skyresponse Can Help**

If you're unsure where to begin, or need help moving forward, we're here to assist. We can connect you with the right partners, advise on setup and system readiness, and provide support throughout the entire process.

#### What we can help with:

Review your current setup and assess digital readiness

Recommend suitable hardware and ARC partners

Provide integration guidance

Support you through planning, rollout, and beyond



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## The future is digital. The time to start is now.

