

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 26 February 2026
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Migration of Schools Telephony System to a Cloud Based Solution
Purpose of Report:	To seek Cabinet approval to progress procurement of the migration of the Council's schools telephony service from the existing on-premise Cisco Unified Communications Manager (CUCM) platform to a cloud based telephony solution.
Report Owner:	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Responsible Officer:	Head of Digital and Customer Experience
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	None required
Policy Framework:	This Report is within the Policy Framework and Budget and for Executive decision by Cabinet
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council currently provides a telephony service to 38 schools using centrally managed, on-premise software • This report seeks Cabinet approval to migrate Local Authority (LA) maintained schools to a modern, resilient cloud telephony platform. The proposal replaces end-of-life on-premise PBX systems and disparate lines with a unified, scalable service aligned to the Council's digital strategy and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The change will improve service resilience, safeguarding, management insight, and user experience while delivering predictable costs and reducing technical debt. • The estimated five-year Total Cost of Ownership saving is expected to be in excess of £200k which will be ratified as we undertake market discovery and procurement. This saving will be represented in reduced costs to schools (currently cross-charged) and Digital. <p>Cabinet approval will enable officers to proceed to procurement, ensuring a competitive and controlled selection of a solution that meets the needs of schools while delivering value for money and long-term sustainability.</p>	

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet approves the progression to procurement of a cloud-based telephony solution for schools currently using the corporate Cisco Unified Communications Manager platform.
2. That the use of the Council's urgent decision procedure, as set out at section 15.14 of the Council's Constitution, be agreed to ensure the tender can be let on the planned date of 2nd March 2026 to ensure the project can be delivered by October 2026.
3. That Cabinet approves the use of the Digital reserve drawdown to fund one off implementation and any essential handset replacement costs, on the basis that savings generated over a five-year period will replenish the reserve to the level of the draw down.
4. That the Director of Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Executive Leader, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources and the Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to:
 - finalise the procurement approach and contract award.
 - agree contract terms within an anticipated 3+1+1 year arrangement.
 - ensure appropriate safeguards around cost control, data protection, and exit provisions.
5. That delegated authority is granted to the Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services to enter into and sign the appropriate contract documentation including extension options and variations consistent with the details contained in this report.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure that the telephony service provided to schools is cost effective and fit for purpose.
2. To ensure the tender can be let on the planned date and ensure the project can be delivered by October 2026.
3. To ensure that any implementation costs of the project are met.
4. To ensure that the Council are within contract for a cost effective and fit for purpose cloud-based telephony solution for schools.
5. To ensure that the Council can efficiently enter into, extend and vary the necessary contract documentation without delay, enabling timely contract formation.

1. Background

- 1.0** The Council currently provides a centrally hosted telephony service to 38 schools using Cisco Unified Communications Manager (CUCM), located within the Council's data centre. Calls charged largely on a pay-per-minute basis for the calls as well as infrastructure costs which are allocated proportionally based on number of handsets per school.
The CUCM platform is increasingly resource intensive to maintain, dependant on specialist technical skills and reliant on legacy infrastructure that does not align with the Council's modern cloud-based architecture.
- 1.1** The Council is also aware that Cisco's CUCM product set is evolving, which is expected to require further upgrades and investment to remain supported. In contrast, cloud-based telephony platforms are now widely adopted across the public sector and education, offering improved features, greater resilience, and predictable costs.
- 1.2** The Council moved to the Microsoft Teams cloud telephony platform in 2024 and decommissioned the on-premise Cisco telephony platform delivering cost savings, improved functionality and operational efficiency. We are unable to implement the same solution within the schools environment. Whilst the vast majority of schools use Microsoft Teams, this is provided by Welsh Government under the Hwb scheme, and they are unable to implement Teams Voice.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

Strategic Case for Change

- 2.1** The proposal supports the Council's strategic objectives by aligning our approach to use a Cloud solution where it offers good value, security and access. The operational risk associated with ageing infrastructure will be reduced and support and administration will be simplified enabling more flexible self-service capabilities for schools.
- 2.2** Failure to act would result in increasing technical and financial risk and would continue the council's exposure to volatile call charges. There would be an ongoing dependency on on-premise infrastructure which would conflict with future planned infrastructure architecture.
- 2.3** Modern cloud telephony provides fixed, predictable subscription pricing, scalable capacity aligned to school need and an improved disaster recovery and geographic resilience posture.

Scope of the Proposal

- 2.4** The initial scope includes only schools currently using the existing platform.
- 2.5** Schools with independent telephony systems will not be mandated to migrate and will retain their current contractual arrangements. However, the cloud

solution would provide a modern, flexible option for those schools when existing contracts expire. Given the potential for schools to generate savings, this work would be consistent with the procurement support being offered to schools currently in managing challenging budgets.

- 2.6** Charging is anticipated to be based on the number of handsets per school, providing flexibility and transparency for schools of differing sizes.-

Financial Implications

- 2.7** The current cost model is made up of a number of elements. These include pay-per-minute call charging (usage costs for making calls), infrastructure and hardware support charges, handsets and licences. The call costs have risen significantly recently. The total cost of ownership over 5 years for the current telephony platform is circa£705,600. A central budget is held by Digital Services and most costs are recharged to schools based on usage and a proportion of the support, maintenance and licencing costs.
- 2.8** The proposed cost model will be a fixed monthly subscription per user which will improve budget certainty and reduce exposure to external pricing volatility.
- 2.9** The estimated total cost of ownership over the 5 years of the new contract, based on a market test carried out in September 2025 is approximately £465K. This includes first year (one off) costs for new handsets, training and professional services. The estimated savings over the 5-year period of the contract would be in excess of £200K depending on successful tender costs and to what extent existing handsets can be re-used. Final savings will be confirmed at the end of the procurement process.
- 2.10** Year one (one off) implementation costs will be met by a drawdown from the Digital Reserve and will be replenished by the achieved savings over the period of the contract making the proposal financially sustainable. The exact cost of the drawdown required will be confirmed as part of the procurement process, it is estimated that it will be in the range of £50k - £100k.
- 2.11** –It is proposed that the procurement will be undertaken in accordance with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules and public sector procurement regulations with the support of the Council’s procurement partner, Ardal. The following procurement framework will be utilised: CCS Technology Products & Associated Services 2 Technology Products & Associated Services 2 – CCS, LOT 1 - Hardware and Software and Associated Services.
- 2.12** The Council will seek a 3 year core contract, with options to extend by 1 year, followed by a further year if appropriate. The preferred financial arrangements will be to secure CPI only subscription uplifts and a clear exit strategy to include portability and data provisions.
- 2.13** Whilst a single vendor cloud solution is preferred to simplify governance, final decisions will be informed through the procurement process.
- 2.14** Implementation will be managed by the Responsible Officer and project governance provided through the Digital Portfolio Manager, with close engagement with schools and high levels of communication and support.

- 2.15** To ensure a safe migration we will be undertake changes out of hours where possible, we will design a dual-running period to maintain resilience of service and there will be tailored planning for larger or more complex school sites.
- 2.16** Schools are considered technically ready, and School ICT capacity is not expected to be required to support the migration.
- 2.17** The target date for delivery is July 2026. Should this not be achievable, the Council would continue with the existing provider on an interim basis, ensuring continuity of service.
- 2.18** Ownership of the service will remain with Corporate ICT as part of Digital Services for the foreseeable future.
- 2.19** A revised operating model will be designed to maintain strong central oversight and allow appropriate delegated administration for schools.
- 2.20** Support arrangements will continue through the existing Halo ICT service desk, providing a consistent escalation route.
- 2.21** Safeguarding, emergency calling, call recording, reporting, and access control requirements will be explicitly addressed within the procurement specification and contract.
- 2.22** The table below details the risks identified with carrying out this project and associated mitigation measures.

Risk	Mitigation
Service disruption during migration	Phased rollout, dual running and Out of Hours migrations running and O
Cost escalation	Fixed subscription pricing, Consumer Price Index (CPI) only uplifts only uplifts
Supplier dependency	Contractual exit and portability provisions
Data protection risk	UK hosting and contractual assurances

- 2.23** Success will be measured through the delivery of forecasted cost savings, improved schools' satisfaction, the reduction in telephony infrastructure that is located on-premise within the Civic Offices data centre, and improved resilience and reduced operational risk.
- 2.24** Benefits include both cashable savings and non-cashable benefits such as service quality and risk reduction. Further benefits would be realised once the existing hardware infrastructure has been decommissioned in the form of lowering CO2 emissions, and the reduction in power and cooling requirements and costs.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

3.1 Long Term

This proposal supports a sustainable, future-proofed telephony model across the school estate. It reduces reliance on end-of-life Private Branch Exchange (PBX) systems and avoids the accumulation of further technical debt associated with unsupported or fragmented legacy infrastructure. By moving to a cloud-based solution with scalable licensing, vendor-managed upgrades and embedded security patching, the Council establishes a predictable, manageable cost model. This approach enables consistent standards across schools while supporting long-term digital resilience and planned investment rather than reactive replacement.

3.2 Prevention

The adoption of resilient, redundant cloud infrastructure significantly reduces the risk of service outages and the safeguarding risks associated with system failure. Improved call routing and business continuity arrangements ensure schools remain contactable during incidents, supporting continuity of education and parental communication. Modern call recording and analytics functionality strengthen safeguarding, quality assurance and compliance processes, while removing vulnerabilities inherent in unsupported systems. This preventative approach reduces operational, reputational and safeguarding risk across the school estate.

3.3 Integration

The proposed solution integrates with Microsoft 365 and Teams, service desk platforms, safeguarding systems and parental communication tools. This supports a unified communications model—bringing together voice, video and chat—reducing duplication of systems and improving user experience for staff and families. By aligning telephony with the Council’s broader digital ecosystem, the approach reinforces wider digital transformation priorities and supports consistent service delivery across education and corporate services.

3.4 Collaboration

The model enables practical collaboration across schools and services. Cross-school hunt groups, shared reception functionality and flexible or remote working arrangements support operational resilience and more efficient use of staff resources. It also facilitates improved multi-agency communication between education, inclusion and social care teams, ensuring clearer lines of contact and more responsive engagement with parents and carers. This shared infrastructure strengthens partnership working both within the Council and across external stakeholders.

3.5 Involvement

Implementation will include co-design of call flows and user journeys with headteachers and school office teams to ensure that local operational needs are reflected. Ongoing data-led improvements will be informed by call analytics and feedback from schools and families. Accessible options, including IVR design,

language selection and SMS callback functionality, will be shaped through engagement with school communities to ensure inclusive access. This approach ensures the solution is not only technically sound but designed around the needs of those who use it daily.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

Migration to a new cloud telephony solution for schools will allow for the decommissioning of physical hardware that is currently located within the Civic Office datacentre. Cloud based solutions consistently have lower carbon footprints due to the use of more efficient data centres.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The main financial implications are described above in the body of the report. The current cost of the service to is £141,120 per annum and is managed by a budget within Corporate Resources and the majority of this is recharged out to Schools based on usage and a proportion of the annual support, maintenance and licencing costs.
- 5.2** An initial drawdown of £50k to £100k to cover any implementation costs may be required from the Digital Reserve, but this will be repaid over the course of the contract from the savings generated by migrating to a cloud telephony solution.
- 5.3** Schools will continue to pay to use the new service on a subscription basis within their existing budgets.
- 5.4** An opportunity may exist to reduce costs for schools who are not yet utilising the central provision, however this will be a subsequent phase of the project.

Employment

- 5.5** There are no employment implications.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.6** The solution will be required to be hosted in the UK, comply with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 and meet OFCOM and UK telephony regulations.
- 5.7** The following procurement framework will be utilised: CCS Technology Products & Associated Services 2 Technology Products & Associated Services 2 – CCS, LOT 1 - Hardware and Software and Associated Services. The contract will be awarded as a call-off contract under this framework.

5.8 This framework has been procured in full compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as applicable) and provides a lawful route for the Council to directly call off the required services without undertaking a separate full procurement exercise. The call-off will be subject to the terms and conditions of the TPAS2 framework, together with any additional call-off provisions agreed between the parties.

6. Background Papers

None.