

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Consultation on amendments to provisions related to the ‘Telecare’ type of service in the Decision Notice “*Universal Service Obligations on Electronic Communications Services*”

Consultation and Proposed Decisions

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1 Introduction

This consultation document proposes amendments to the Decision Notice entitled "*Universal Service Obligations on Electronic Communications Services*" (MCA/D/23-4920, hereinafter the "USO DN"), which was published by the Malta Communications Authority (hereinafter the "MCA") on 28 April 2023. The proposed amendments concern solely the definition and provision of the 'Telecare' type of service, as established in **Decision 8** and **Decision 9** of the USO DN respectively.

The provision of the 'Telecare' type of service constitutes one of the universal service obligations (hereinafter "USOs") aimed at supporting vulnerable consumers with disabilities or special social needs. The requirement for these amendments arises from operational changes to the methodology of the scheme for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service, implemented by the responsible Ministry or Government entity with effect from 1 October 2024.

2 Background

The purpose of the USO DN was to redefine the USOs in line with national legislation, and to identify the universal service providers. These USOs are intended to ensure that all end-users, irrespective of location and social means, can have access to an adequate broadband internet access service and voice communications services, at an affordable price. The USO DN establishes a number of USOs in the electronic communications sector including, amongst others, the provision of specific measures to support vulnerable consumers with disabilities or special social needs. One of these USOs comprises the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service, as defined in **Decision 8** of the USO DN which mandates the following:

"The universal service shall include the provision of a 'Telecare' type of service at a reduced rate allowing easy access to a specialist emergency call centre to eligible consumers on the basis of specific criteria set by the responsible Ministry or Government entity.

A universal service provider may collect a nominal deposit for all new subscribers of the 'Telecare' type of service who are not benefiting from the reduced tariff scheme.

Any misplaced, lost, or damaged pendants used for the 'Telecare' type of service shall be replaced against a reasonable charge that may be levied by a universal service provider, or deducted from any deposit collected, to cover its cost.

Details on the eligibility criteria, and the form in which this support is to be provided to eligible consumers are to be established by the responsible Ministry or Government entity."

Decision 9 of the USO DN mandates the following:

"GO shall continue to be designated as the universal service provider of the existing 'Telecare' type of service being offered at a reduced rate to vulnerable consumers as per the criteria established by the responsible Ministry or Government entity and as per Decision 8. The MCA would consider changing this designation if:

- (a) The Ministry or Government entity implements operational changes to the methodology of the scheme to allow the participation of more providers; or*
- (b) A different provider expresses willingness to be designated as the universal service provider in this regard whilst demonstrating that there will be no increased administrative or financial burden for other providers or for Government.*

In each of the above cases, the MCA would consider carrying out an assessment on the basis of Decision 18 and it would consult as necessary before updating the designation."

Based on interactions with representatives from the Ministry for Health and Active Ageing and the Active Ageing and Community Care (AACC), it was established that, as from 1 October 2024, the 'Telecare' type of service is being provided by Connected Care Ltd following a public call for tender for the provision of a Remote, Emergency Communication and Wellbeing Service. The AACC is providing partly subsidised and fully subsidised services to eligible end-users. As part of this changeover, the subsidised 'Telecare' type of service is now reaching more eligible end-users across different providers of fixed voice communications services in the Maltese islands.

The AACC also informed the MCA that only the schemes for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service are within the scope of the changes introduced. No changes are being introduced to the provision of the reduced fixed line rental tariff scheme by GO plc (hereinafter "GO") under the universal service regime.

3 Assessment

The MCA notes that, as from 1 October 2024, the responsible Ministry or Government entity for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service has implemented operational changes to the methodology of the previous scheme which was based on GO being designated as the universal service provider for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service, in accordance with **Decision 9** of the USO DN. These changes improve end-user choice among eligible beneficiaries since it is no longer mandatory for these beneficiaries to be subscribed to GO for fixed voice communications services. Consequently, more providers of fixed voice communications services are allowed to participate in the new arrangement for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service to eligible beneficiaries, which corresponds to case (a) of **Decision 9** of the USO DN mentioned above.

The MCA considers that, in principle, the schemes currently being offered by the responsible Ministry or Government entity for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service by Connected Care Ltd satisfy the definition of the USO set out in **Decision 8** of the USO DN. Furthermore, the present schemes have the potential to reach more eligible end-users across different providers of fixed voice communications services in Malta. However, the recent operational changes have altered certain aspects of how the 'Telecare' type of service is administered. In particular, under the new arrangement, a deposit is collected from all subscribers, irrespective of whether they benefit from a reduced tariff scheme. Consequently, the provision in the current **Decision 8** that allows a universal service provider to collect a nominal deposit only from subscribers who are not benefiting from the reduced tariff scheme has become obsolete. Additionally, the treatment of misplaced, lost, or damaged pendants used in connection with the 'Telecare' type of service is now governed directly by the specific criteria set by the responsible Ministry or Government entity.

On the basis of the above, amendments to **Decision 8** and **Decision 9** of the USO DN published in April 2023 are warranted to ensure that the updated USO DN remains aligned with the current arrangement established by the responsible Ministry or Government entity, which holds the remit for defining the eligibility criteria and operational parameters for the 'Telecare' type of service.

Moreover, the MCA anticipates that the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service will be carried out through a well-coordinated procedure, with the active cooperation of providers of fixed voice communications services in Malta. Nevertheless, the MCA reserves the right to intervene, if necessary, should the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service to eligible end-users be jeopardised.

4 Proposed Amendments

Based on the assessment of the schemes currently being offered for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service by the responsible Ministry or Government entity to support vulnerable consumers with disabilities or special social needs, as outlined in Chapter 3 of this consultation document, the MCA proposes the following amendments to **Decision 8** and **Decision 9** in the USO DN published in April 2023:

- (a) Replacement of the two paragraphs in **Decision 8** relating to (i) the collection of a nominal deposit only from certain categories of subscribers, and (ii) the charges applied by the universal service provider for the replacement of misplaced, lost, or damaged pendants, with a new provision to ensure that any deposits associated with the supply and installation of equipment, as well as any charges applied to cover the replacement costs of misplaced, lost, or damaged pendants, are reasonable.

The revised text would read as set out in **Proposed Decision 8** below.

Proposed Decision 8

The universal service shall include the provision of a 'Telecare' type of service at a reduced rate allowing easy access to a specialist emergency call centre to eligible consumers on the basis of specific criteria set by the responsible Ministry or Government entity.

Any deposits applied to eligible consumers in association with the supply and installation of equipment for the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service at a reduced rate, as well as any charges applied to eligible consumers to cover the replacement costs of misplaced, lost, or damaged pendants, must be reasonable.

Details on the eligibility criteria and the form in which this support is to be provided to eligible consumers shall be established by the responsible Ministry or Government entity.

- (b) Replacement of the text of **Decision 9** in its entirety with the text of **Proposed Decision 9** set out below, to reflect the updated operational framework.

Proposed Decision 9

Under the arrangement in place between the responsible Ministry or Government entity and the provider of the 'Telecare' type of service, the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service at a reduced rate to vulnerable consumers, as per the criteria established by the responsible Ministry or Government entity and as per Decision 8, is expected to reach more eligible end-users and enhance end-user choice when compared to the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service by a single designated universal service provider.

In this context, the MCA anticipates that the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service will be carried out through a well-coordinated procedure, with the active cooperation of providers of fixed voice communications services in Malta. Nevertheless, the MCA reserves the right to intervene, if necessary, should the provision of the 'Telecare' type of service to eligible end-users be jeopardised.

The amendments being proposed are limited in scope and apply solely to **Decision 8** and **Decision 9** of the USO DN, which govern the definition and provision of the 'Telecare' type of service under the universal service regime. No amendments to other provisions of the USO DN fall within the scope of this consultation document. All other decisions set out in the USO DN remain unchanged and in full effect.

5 Submission of Responses

In accordance with its obligations under article 4A of the Malta Communications Authority Act (Cap. 418 of the Laws of Malta), the MCA welcomes written comments and representations from interested parties and stakeholders during the national consultation period which shall run between 17 February 2026 and 20 March 2026.

The MCA appreciates that respondents may provide confidential information in their feedback to this consultation document. Such information is to be included in a separate annex and should be clearly marked as confidential. Respondents are also requested to state the reasons why the information should be treated as confidential. The MCA will take the necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of such material as soon as it is received at the MCA offices in accordance with the MCA's confidentiality guidelines and procedures¹. Respondents are however encouraged to avoid confidential markings wherever possible.

The MCA will, after taking into consideration the responses received to this consultation document, publish an amended USO DN. For the sake of openness and transparency, the MCA will publish a list of respondents to this consultation in the aforementioned amended USO DN.

All responses should be submitted to the MCA in writing by no later than 12:00 CET on **20 March 2026**, and addressed to:

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Extensions to the consultation deadline will only be permitted in **exceptional circumstances** and then only where the MCA deems fit. The MCA reserves the right to grant or refuse any such request at its discretion. Requests for extensions are to be made in writing within the first ten (10) working days of the consultation period.

¹ https://www.mca.org.mt/sites/default/files/articles/confidentialityguidelinesFINAL_0.pdf



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