

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Corporate Director

22 June 2026

### Consolidation of North Yorkshire Council's in-house Lifeline service provision and fees

#### Report of the Assistant Director, Housing

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed changes to the Lifeline service, the rationale for those changes, and the current position following implementation of key elements of the service transformation. The changes are intended to ensure the Lifeline service remains safe, resilient, and fit for the future, particularly in the context of national digital switchover requirements and identified compliance risks.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Lifeline service provides technology-enabled support to help residents live independently and safely. Historically, the service has evolved differently across former district councils, resulting in a range of service offers, responder arrangements, charging models and levels of resilience.
- 2.2 The national transition from analogue to digital telephony by January 2027 has accelerated the need for change. In response, the Council has undertaken a programme of transformation covering call handling, digital equipment, internal processes, service boundaries and financial sustainability.
- 2.3 Progress with the digital Lifeline switchover is positive. The phased rollout of digital equipment across the county is progressing well, supported by clearer processes and improved coordination.
- 2.4 Based on current delivery rates, the digital switchover is expected to be substantially in place by late autumn, placing the service in a strong position ahead of the national analogue switch-off in January 2027 and significantly reducing risk to service continuity.

#### **3.0 REVIEW OF SERVICE OFFER ACROSS LEGACY AREAS**

- 3.1 A review of the Lifeline offer across legacy areas identified significant variation in provision, reflecting historical local delivery models rather than a consistent countywide approach.
- 3.2 In some areas, the service has operated primarily on a friends and family response model, with emergency services supporting more serious incidents. In other areas, Council responders have been available, although the scope of provision has varied, including differences in lifting assistance and hours of cover. This has resulted in uneven resilience and gaps in provision.

- 3.3 The review also highlighted that some aspects of the historic offer have not been consistently or fully delivered and that the current charging structure does not fully reflect the true cost of operating a resilient responding service. Current budgets for the Lifeline service and Sheltered Housing schemes are interlinked. As a result, the true costs of service delivery are not fully transparent, and the respective proportions of General Fund and Housing Revenue Account funding will need to be reallocated to accurately reflect the actual cost of service provision.
- 3.4 The intention is for the Lifeline service to continue as a preventative, competitively priced service, with clearly defined boundaries, strong call-handling resilience and transparency about what support is and is not provided.
- 3.5 Across the county there is variation in how falls and lifting are managed. In Selby and Richmondshire, most non-injury falls are managed by a single responder, using specialist equipment such as Mangar lifting cushions or Raizer chairs. A small number of customers are assessed as requiring two-person lifts due to factors such as weight or significant mobility issues, including where a resident cannot balance independently on lifting equipment. These customers are clearly flagged on the call monitoring system.
- 3.6 During core working hours, where a two-person lift is required, a second warden may be called to assist. Out of hours, any two-person lift, injury-related fall, or situation where it is not safe to use lifting equipment is referred directly to the Ambulance Service. In these circumstances, the responder's role is to provide comfort and reassurance while awaiting assistance. If the responder is required to attend another call, they will ensure the resident is comfortable but may need to leave.
- 3.7 In the Harrogate area, all falls are referred directly to the Ambulance Service, with any local responders notified where appropriate, but Council staff are not called to attend falls. In the Ryedale area, family and friends are contacted alongside the Ambulance Service.
- 3.8 These arrangements demonstrate the structural vulnerability of the responder model. In Harrogate, Selby and Richmondshire, there is typically only one responding officer available at any given time. Once that officer is attending an incident, they are unavailable for further calls. If a second fall occurs, the resident must rely on emergency services without responder support in the interim.
- 3.9 National health and safety guidance recognises that assisting a person following a fall is a high-risk activity, particularly when undertaken by a single responder. The use of lifting equipment is only appropriate following risk assessment, and where there is any doubt, referral to emergency services is the correct course of action.
- 3.10 The geography of North Yorkshire further compounds these challenges. While historic data is limited, available records indicate that in the Harrogate area, outside of core hours, there have been 11 warden call-outs and a further eight occasions where wardens were unable to attend over a 12-month period. This demonstrates a relatively limited level of demand for the service outside core hours.
- 3.11 Delivering a fully resilient responder service across a large, predominantly rural area would require significant staffing capacity held on a 'just-in-case' basis to account for travel time, sickness absence, annual leave and fluctuations in demand.
- 3.12 The costs associated with providing this level of resilience are not reflected in current charges and, if fully costed, would prevent the service from operating on a cost-recovery basis. Any fee set to recover these costs would be unaffordable for customers and significantly higher than comparable market rates. As such, the existing responder model is not considered cost-effective or financially sustainable, which informs the proposed future operating approach.

- 3.13 The Lifeline service operates alongside the Health and Adult Services telecare service, which is commissioned separately and delivered by Medequip. The two services complement each other:
- The housing-based Lifeline service provides a lower-level, preventative offer for residents with minimal or emerging care needs
  - Health and Adult Services Telecare provide a package of support based on assessed need, forming part of wider care and support arrangements
- 3.14 The Lifeline service also operates within a wider market of external and voluntary sector lifeline providers. The Council's intention is to work alongside other provision, rather than expand into geographical areas already covered, avoiding duplication while supporting resident choice and sustainability.
- 3.15 Historically, Sheltered Housing and Lifeline services have been closely intertwined, reflecting legacy council arrangements that supported effective local delivery.
- 3.16 As a single authority, there is now a need to review and consolidate both service areas separately, while ensuring that they continue to work in a complementary way. This supports clearer governance, greater consistency across the county, and more sustainable delivery, while retaining joined-up working where residents access both services.

#### **4.0 PROPOSED FUTURE OPERATING MODEL**

- 4.1 Due to the complexity of service delivery and the interdependencies between Sheltered Housing and the Lifeline service, the separation of services is likely to need to be implemented in two stages. A further stage will then include the Health and Adult services commissioned service.

**Stage 1** will focus on the consolidation of the Lifeline service offer, including the introduction of a single consolidated fee and a phased withdrawal of the ad-hoc arrangements for in-person response. The digital transition of the Lifeline service will also be completed during Stage 1.

**Stage 2** will be closely linked to the wider review of Sheltered Housing provision across North Yorkshire. This stage will include the development of a tailored offer for Sheltered Housing residents, informed by the necessary consultation with tenants and staff.

**Stage 3** will include a holistic review of the commissioned Adult Social Care telecare and the Housing Lifeline service to ensure clarity, value for money, and alignment with customer needs and commissioning intentions. This work has been planned with Transformation colleagues and is expected to conclude by 2028. Any recommendations arising will be subject to separate governance, financial appraisal, and decision-making.

- 4.2 As part of the **Stage 1** consolidation of services, the proposed operating model will include the following:
- Sheltered Housing and Lifeline will operate as distinct but complementary services, with clear service boundaries.
  - Sheltered Housing will continue to utilise the Council's call-handling and administrative functions, alongside a newly developed and clearly defined offer for its residents developed under stage 2.
  - The Community Lifeline (dispersed) offer will be focused on supporting residents living independently within the community.

- 4.3 Community Lifeline (dispersed) customers will be supported through:
- An external 24/7/365 emergency call-handling service (currently Tunstall)
  - Careium covers the call handling in Harrogate (this is currently in the process of transferring to Tunstall)
  - Council support during core office hours, delivered through a central hub – comprising of administrative staff.
  - Support in the community to carry out maintenance, repairs and installations and welfare support will be undertaken across the county by Healthy and Sustainable Homes Caseworkers and the Handyperson service.
- 4.4 The new simplified offer for Community Lifeline customers will include one complimentary wellbeing visit per annum by a Healthy and Sustainable Homes caseworker. This visit will include equipment testing and maintenance and consider wider preventative needs, including:
- Energy efficiency
  - Crime prevention
  - Mobility and fall risks
  - Fire prevention
  - Social isolation
  - Housing conditions
- 4.5 Where additional needs are identified; residents will be supported via our housing renewal services or signposted to appropriate Council services or partner organisations as appropriate.
- 4.6 Sheltered Housing schemes operate from central equipment (which is currently in the process of being upgraded to digital) residents therefore only require a pendant. A cost-recovery re-charge will therefore be applied to cover:
- Emergency call handling (24/7/365)
  - Equipment
  - Administration and monitoring
- 4.7 Continuing to utilise a 24/7/365 call-handling service will provide operational resilience for Sheltered Housing teams when emergency support is required. This model ensures that emergency calls can always be managed, with the call-handling centre responsible for triaging incidents and, where appropriate, instructing the relevant emergency services to attend. Sheltered Housing staff will remain available to provide on-site support and reassurance where appropriate.
- 4.8 Wider response and welfare support for sheltered housing tenants will be considered through the Sheltered Housing Review, including the scope of reassurance visits and associated operating hours. Consequently, the role of the Healthy and Sustainable Homes service will be limited to delivery of the Community Lifeline offer.
- 4.9 Ongoing maintenance and compliance of sheltered housing equipment will be delivered through a dedicated service and maintenance arrangement. For dispersed services, support will be provided by Healthy and Sustainable Homes caseworkers and Handyperson colleagues, removing the requirement for Lifeline to deliver ongoing maintenance.
- 4.10 Current costs range from £5.90 to £12.22 (plus VAT) depending on the level of service, see Appendix A. The proposed Lifeline charges are set out in the cost comparison table below. All prices are shown exclusive of VAT where applicable, although many customers may be exempt due to medical conditions. Charges will be subject to annual review, the proposed charge includes the proposed pay award for 2026/27).

<b>Service Element</b>	<b>Proposed Charges</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Call handling, Equipment and Administration	£6.56	24/7/365
HSH Caseworker Well-being visit	Community only	One visit per annum
Handyperson service	Community only	Installation & maintenance
Sheltered Housing (call handling and administrative services only)	£2.63	24/7/365 Sheltered Housing residents only

- 4.11 To mitigate risk to customers and allow sufficient time for adjustment, and subject to approval of the proposed model, the Council will issue formal notice to terminate existing Lifeline agreements on three months' notice. Customers will then be invited to enter into new agreements which reflect the revised service offer, excluding the current responder provision.
- 4.12 This approach ensures contractual clarity while providing customers with adequate time to consider their options, make alternative arrangements where required, and access appropriate advice and signposting during the transition period.
- 4.13 During the transition period, and where capacity allows, staff working across the Lifeline and Sheltered Housing teams will continue to undertake reassurance visits as part of emergency response activity during core hours. This transitional arrangement is intended to provide additional reassurance and reduce immediate risk while customers adapt to the new service model.
- 4.14 This transition period will also enable a review of processes across legacy service areas, supporting the implementation of a consistent and robust operating model in line with the Council's Target Operating Mode
- 4.15 To mitigate health and safety risks to both customers and staff, lifting support will cease. . This reflects recognised manual handling risks and ensures that incidents requiring physical assistance are managed appropriately by clinical or emergency services.

## **5.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Lifeline service primarily supports older people and residents with disabilities, and the proposed changes have therefore been considered carefully in the context of the Council's equality duties under the Equality Act 2010. The revised service model retains a preventative; affordable offer designed to support independent living and reduce risks to health and wellbeing.
- 5.2 The move to a clearer and more consistent service offer improves transparency and fairness, ensuring residents across the county have a more equitable understanding of what support is provided and how it is delivered. Removing reliance on a limited and variable responder model also reduces the risk of unequal access to support depending on location or time of day.

- 5.3 To mitigate risk to customers and allow sufficient time for adjustment, and subject to approval of the proposed model, the Council will issue formal notice to terminate existing Lifeline agreements on three months' notice. Customers will then be invited to enter into new agreements Targeted communications and signposting will be used to support residents who may be more vulnerable, ensuring they are aware of alternative arrangements, family support options, or assessed care pathways where appropriate. A equalities impact assessment screening has been undertaken indicating that a full assessment is not required.

## **6.0 FINANCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Current budgets for the Lifeline service and Sheltered Housing schemes are interlinked, which limits clear financial visibility over the true cost of service delivery. To strengthen financial governance, transparency, and audit assurance, the respective proportions of General Fund and Housing Revenue Account funding will need to be reviewed and reallocated to ensure that costs are accurately identified, appropriately apportioned, and fully aligned with statutory funding requirements.
- 6.2 In Stage 1, this will be achieved through the introduction of a cost-recovery model for the Community Lifeline service. Establishing this model within the General Fund will create a clear and transparent baseline of service costs and income, ensuring that the Lifeline service can operate on a sustainable and financially accountable basis and stand-alone budget. This will then enable the budgets for Sheltered Housing to be reviewed and realigned as part of Stage 2, ensuring that funding accurately reflects service provision and statutory responsibilities, and that neither service is subsidised by the Council from 2027/28 onwards.
- 6.3 The proposed operating model has been developed to ensure that the Lifeline service operates on a sustainable cost-recovery basis, while remaining competitively priced and affordable for customers. The review identified that the historic responder model is not financially sustainable, with costs significantly exceeding income when delivered at a safe and resilient level.
- 6.4 Removing the responder service as a standard element of the offer reduces financial risk and avoids the need to introduce charges that would be unaffordable or uncompetitive when compared to the wider telecare market. The revised charging structure therefore focuses on the core elements of the service, including call handling, equipment provision, administration, and monitoring.
- 6.5 This approach supports longer-term financial resilience by aligning service costs more closely with income, reducing subsidy pressures on the Council while maintaining the preventative value of the Lifeline service and minimising the risk of future unplanned budget pressures.
- 6.6 Fees will be subject to annual review and adjusted as necessary to maintain a consistent cost recovery position.

## **7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Lifeline service is not a statutory care service and the Council may therefore review and amend the manner in which the service is delivered, subject to compliance with applicable contractual obligations.

- 7.2 A new customer agreement is currently being developed for Community Lifeline customers by the Council's Legal Services team. The service will work closely with Legal Services to ensure that any changes are implemented in line with existing contractual arrangements, with appropriate variation or termination and replacement of existing agreements where necessary.

## **8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The proposed operating model supports the Council's climate ambitions by helping to reduce unnecessary travel across a large and predominantly rural county. Moving away from re-active call-outs as a routine part of service delivery is expected to reduce vehicle mileage and associated emissions over time. Visits will instead be planned and geographically coordinated, allowing for more efficient scheduling and less overall travel. The annual wellbeing visit for Community Lifeline customers will be introduced, replacing ad-hoc arrangements and this will support wider objectives by identifying energy efficiency issues and signposting to relevant Council schemes.
- 8.2 The digital transformation of the Lifeline service further supports the more efficient use of resources, reducing reliance on analogue systems and enabling improved remote monitoring and diagnostics. This will help also help to minimise unplanned visits while maintaining service quality and resilience.
- 8.3 These changes represent operational improvements rather than a fundamental shift in resource use and are not expected to have a material impact on the Council's overall carbon footprint. A climate change impact assessment screening has been undertaken indicating that a full assessment is not required.

## **9.0 CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 The proposed changes establish a clearer, safer and financially sustainable Lifeline service, aligned with national digital requirements and operating effectively alongside health and social care and sheltered housing provision.
- 9.2 The service will remain a key preventative offer, competitively priced, resilient in call handling, transparent in scope and focused on what can be delivered safely, consistently and on a cost-recovery basis, ensuring long-term sustainability for both residents and the Council.

## **10.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 10.1 That the Corporate director for Community Development, in consultation with the Executive Member for Culture, Arts and Housing approve the proposed future operating model for the Lifeline service, including revised charging arrangements and implementation plans, and authorise officers to take all necessary steps to implement the changes in line with this report.

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix A - Current Charging Structure  
Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment  
Appendix C – Climate Change Initial Assessment

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS - none**

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