

Decision Report – Lead Member Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/24/02/04

Decision Date – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Key Decision – Yes

Confidential Information – Appendix A

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## Digital Switchover for the Somerset Lifeline Service

Executive Member(s): Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture

Local Member(s) and Division: All

Lead Officer: Jan Stafford, Service Director – Customer Services.

Author: Gareth Denslow, Service Manager – Digital Customer and Strategy.

Contact Details: [gareth.denslow@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:gareth.denslow@somerset.gov.uk)

### 1. Summary / Background

- 1.1 Telephone providers throughout the UK are in the process of moving their customers from old analogue landlines to new upgraded digital landline services. This process, referred to as the Digital Switchover, is due to be completed in December 2025. This has a significant impact on customers of the Somerset Lifeline service as equipment installed in over 5000 properties only works through the soon to be decommissioned analogue lines. This means that these Lifeline machines will need to be replaced with digitally complaint units to ensure continuity of service and that our vulnerable customers can continue to connect to the Lifeline service to access emergency help, 24/7.
- 1.2 The Digital Switchover project is being led by the Somerset Lifeline service, working closely alongside the Council's Sheltered and Extra Care Housing teams, and aims to replace all non-compliant equipment by December 2024, a year in advance of the nationwide completion of the telephony infrastructure changes. A procurement exercise has been undertaken to identify a supplier for equipment replacement, ensuring value for money and delivery of a future-proof, reliable and safe service to our customers. Utilising a procurement framework, an evaluation of telecare suppliers has been undertaken and this report seeks approval to direct award to the preferred supplier.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture agrees to:

- Approve the recommendation to direct award the supply of replacement technology enabled care equipment to the preferred supplier, as detailed in Confidential Appendix A.
- Agrees the case for applying exemption information provision as set out in the Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12A and therefore treat the attached confidential appendix A in confidence, as it contains commercially sensitive information, and the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.

### 3. Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 Failure to install digitally compliant equipment will mean that customers are unable to connect to the help and support they need in an emergency. The delivery of the programme of replacement equipment will therefore mitigate this risk. Furthermore, there is a significant risk of loss of income as service provision will no longer be possible for the 5000 plus customers that currently have analogue equipment.

### 4. Other options considered.

- 4.1 The opportunity to tender for the supply of equipment was considered. However, using a Framework agreement ensures that Public Procurement Regulations are complied with and allows for greater flexibility in the types and quantity of equipment the Lifeline service procures from the supplier. This flexibility is essential as the purchasing of equipment will be determined by the needs and preferences of our customers.

### 5. Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

- 5.1 The successful delivery of the Digital Switchover project is essential in enabling additional income which has been modelled for the MTFP. This commits to £705,000 additional income, reflecting a 100% move to digital equipment from 2025, with £223,000 generated through a 10% increase in charges in 2024/25. Over time, we are actively seeking to grow the service through aligning and extending service provision across Somerset, particularly in the Mendip area which until vesting day had no dedicated Council provided Lifeline service.

5.2 The Digital Switchover project will contribute to the following Council priorities and adopted strategies:

- Healthy & Caring Somerset - customers can remain safe and independent at home and this links to our commitment to ensure that our residents' mental and physical health will thrive.
- Flourishing & Resilient Somerset - We will play a key role in providing support for the digital switchover. Whilst our focus is on replacing Lifeline equipment, we will, where possible, continue to support our customers to liaise with their network providers to ensure a safe and smooth transition to the digital infrastructure.
- Customer & Digital Strategies - Somerset Lifeline will be able to meet the needs of customers and ensure our services continue to be accessible, post digital switchover. The replacement of older analogue equipment supports the 'Digital Care' theme and vision to enable people to live healthy independent lives, to prevent the onset of avoidable illness and support active self-management.
- Adult Social Care Strategy – the digital switchover supports prevention and early help and the commitment to invest in digital and community equipment to support and reduce demand for care, developing our assistive technology offer to enable people to remain as independent as possible within their own homes.

## 6. Financial and Risk Implications

6.1 In 2023, Members agreed a capital bid for £2.23m to deliver the equipment replacement programme for Somerset Lifeline and Homes in Sedgemoor, and therefore this was added to the Council's Capital Programme. The funding of this capital bid is external borrowing by the Council:

	2023/24	2024/25
Somerset Lifeline	160,000	1 340 000
Homes in Sedgemoor	0	730,000

6.2 Modelling of equipment replacement costs against the pricing schedule provided by the preferred supplier should result in an estimated underspend of £800,000 to the approved budget of £2.23m and therefore reduce our borrowing requirement. The amount of estimated underspend is however

dependent on the accuracy of the assumptions made within the modelling, which is based upon digital exclusion and customer data.

### 6.3 Key risks during the course of this project are:

<b>Lack of resource capacity to deliver the programme of equipment replacements.</b>					
<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Mitigation/s:</b> The Establishment Control and Recruitment Board have approved the recruitment of six Digital Switchover Installers and a Support Officer to deliver this project.					

<b>The additional income which has been modelled for the MTFP may be jeopardised if a decision is made to not borrow the required funds.</b>					
<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Mitigation/s:</b> The Project team will continue to work closely with colleagues in the Finance service to reduce this risk and will continue to monitor and closely scrutinise project spend to ensure value for money and to reduce borrowing requirement.					

<b>Ahead of the switch over, individuals and organisations may use phishing emails, fake websites, or phone calls to trick residents into providing personal information, such as bank account details or passwords.</b>					
<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Mitigation/s:</b> Information has been sent to Somerset Lifeline customers and tenants of Sheltered and Extra Care Housing warning of scams under the pretence of the digital switchover. Customers have been asked to call the police or contact the Somerset Lifeline service directly for support and advice. These messages will continue to be conveyed through multiple channels throughout the course of this project.					

<b>Technology Enables Care suppliers have been experiencing an increase in demand due to the national scale of the switchover. There is a risk of delay in delivery due to this increase in demand.</b>					
<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Risk Score</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Mitigation/s:</b> Following the evaluation, discussions have been held with the preferred supplier about lead in times for equipment and the volumes the Lifeline service require. The clear expectations set out in the Framework					

agreement, as well as previous positive experiences of working with this supplier has provided reassurance however this is an active risk which will continue to be monitored throughout the duration of the project.

## **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 This procurement exercise has been undertaken in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. The Council's Procurement team have advised on the procurement route and approval has been given by the Commercial and Procurement Board.

## **8. HR Implications**

8.1 The Establishment Control and Recruitment Board has approved the recruitment of six temporary Digital Switchover Installers and a Digital Switchover Support Officer on fixed term contracts until December 2024.

## **9. Other Implications:**

### **9.1 Equalities Implications**

The Equalities Impact Assessment has highlighted three protected groups that may be impacted by the replacement of equipment.

As ONS data indicates, people over the age of 65 are more likely to be digitally excluded. Whilst having no internet connection or lack of digital skills is not a barrier for customers to continue to access the service, some customers may find it more difficult to understand the reasons for change and the wider impact of the switchover relating to their telephone connection. Alongside the communications already sent to our customers, the quality of the information provided prior to scheduled appointments and at the installation visit will be key to successfully managing these potential impacts. Working alongside the Council's Comms team, we are designing information developed around the needs of our customers and we will work with the TEC Services Association to draw upon examples of best practice.

The rurality of Somerset means that some areas in Somerset suffer from poor broadband connectivity, can be subject to more power cuts and at risk of digital exclusion. Again, whilst these are not barriers to accessing the Lifeline service,

but customers do need to be made aware of risks and we will work with customers, their family members, and carers to ensure that the right equipment is installed to meet their needs. The areas and customers that are higher risk have been identified and this has assisted in our project and comms planning as well as cost modelling.

## **9.2 Community Safety Implications**

No detrimental community safety implications have been identified relating to this project. The replacement of Lifeline equipment means that, through its support off over 6000+ across Somerset, the service strengthens community safety through peace of mind and reassurance of help at the touch of a button, as well as providing silent alarms for customers that are an increased risk of harm, such as domestic abuse.

## **9.3 Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

There will be a need for Installers to travel across the County to visit customers and replace equipment. The replacement schedule is being designed to minimise travel, encourage vehicle sharing and the use of pool cars where possible.

## **9.4 Health and Safety Implications**

There are no detrimental risks to employee health and safety. The digital switchover presents increased risk to the safety and wellbeing of our customers, as the failure to replace equipment before networks are switched over will result in a loss of service and vulnerable customers being unable to contact Somerset Lifeline in an emergency. Some customers are already being contacted by their telephone providers to switchover to digital lines and we have asked customers to let us know as soon as they are contacted by their provider, so we can plan to replace their equipment. This programme of work and its delivery by December 2024, will mitigate the risks of failure to contact the service when the customer needs to do so.

## **9.5 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

The provision of Lifeline technology has significant, positive impacts on health and wellbeing, allowing vulnerable customers to remain independent in their own home, whilst providing additional peace of mind and reassurance to carers. The Lifeline service is working with Adult Social Care to focus on prevention and early help and the commitment to invest in digital and community equipment to support and reduce demand for care.

## 9.6 Social Value

The replacement of Lifeline equipment means that, through its support of over 6000 vulnerable people across Somerset, the service strengthens community safety through peace of mind and reassurance of help at the touch of a button and has positive impacts on health and wellbeing, allowing vulnerable customers to remain independent in their own home, as well as providing additional peace of mind and reassurance to carers.

## 10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

10.1 The proposed decision has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee.

There will be a Members Information Sheet sent to inform of the national Digital Switchover and the specific work being undertaken to replace Lifeline equipment and ensure the continued safety and wellbeing of our customers. It is proposed that a progress update is provided to Scrutiny for Communities regarding the project in September 2024.

## 11. Background

11.1 The Digital Switchover project formally commenced in September 2023 and working with stakeholders from Adult Social Care and Housing, the focus has been on ensuring that robust processes and procedures are in place to ensure the smooth and efficient roll out of the replacement programme.

11.2 The Lifeline service no longer provides non-complaint equipment to new customers and some replacements have already been provided as many customers are already transitioning to digital telephone lines, usually as a result of moving home or coming to the end of the contract they have with their provider.

11.3 The digital switchover is a challenge for the wider technology enabled care sector and we have worked closely with the TEC Services Association (TSA) to learn from the work of other local authorities and providers. We have also supported the work of the TSA to engage with network providers and ensuring they take the needs of vulnerable customers into consideration when changing telephone lines and do not leave customers at risk of not being able to summon help when needed.

## 12. Background Papers

There are no background papers.

### 13. Appendices

- Appendix A – Confidential Supplier Evaluation




#### Assurance checklist

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark, Service Director, Governance, Democratic and Legal.	12/04/2024
Communications	Peter Elliott, Head of Communications.	16/04/2024
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix, Service Director, Finance and Procurement.	25/04/2024
Workforce	Dawn Bettridge, Service Director, Workforce.	28/04/2024
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams – Service Director, Strategic Asset Management.	11/04/2024
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Chris Hall, Executive Director, Community Services. Jan Stafford – Service Director, Customer Services.	15/04/2024
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones, Executive Director – Resources and Corporate Services.	17/04/2024
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture.	29/04/2024
<b>Consulted:</b>		
Local Division Members	Not applicable	
Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr Andy Dingwell, Opposition Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture.	02/05/2024
Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Gwil Wren, Chair for Scrutiny Committee – Communities.	02/05/2024



## Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA, please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer or [www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment)

Organisation prepared for (mark as appropriate)						
Version	1.0		Date Completed	21/03/2024		
Description of what is being impact assessed						
<p>The UK's telephone network is changing. Between now and 2025 telephone providers will be moving their customers from old analogue landlines over to new upgraded landline services using digital technology. This means services that rely on the old landline system such as some Lifeline devices need to be replaced. Over 5000 Lifeline customers will require new 'digital ready' equipment to allow them to continue to use the service following the switchover. This service provides vulnerable people with help in the event of emergencies and/or the need for support through the provision of an emergency alarm, monitored by a 24/7 contact centre and on-call emergency response officers.</p> <p>This impact assessment is in relation to delivering a future-proof, reliable and safe Lifeline service that will enable customers to remain independent in their homes for as long as possible, providing valuable preventative services and reduced costs to health and social care services.</p>						

## Evidence

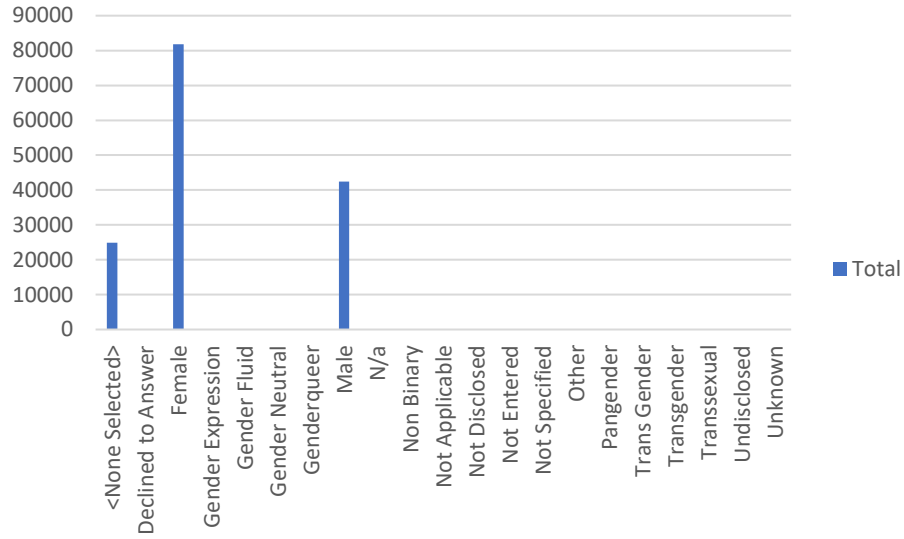
What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the [Office of National Statistics](#), [Somerset Intelligence Partnership](#), [Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis \(JSNA\)](#), Staff and/ or [area profiles](#), should be detailed here

### **1. Our current customers:**

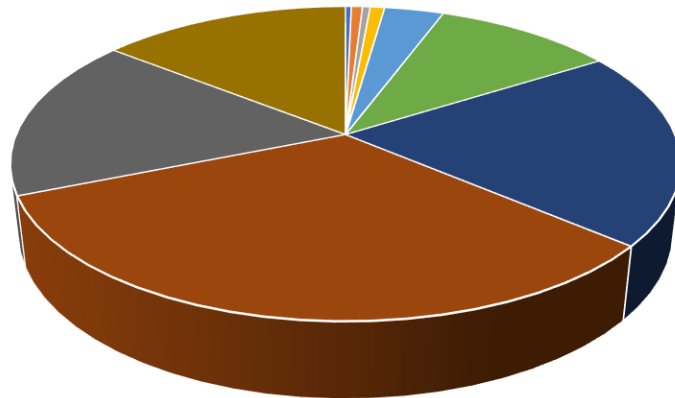
The data collated from the Lifeline Customer Relationship system identifies:

- Most customers are female, accounting for 65% of those where data is present.
- 93.4% of customers are aged 60+
- 58.0% of customers are aged over 80.
- 5.9% of customers are of working age.

### Customers by Gender (all services)



Customers by Age (all services)



< 30    100+    30-39    40-49    50-59  
60-69    70-79    80-89    90-99    Unknown

## 2. Digital Exclusion Data

The office for national statistics advises that on average 6.1% of the UK's population do not have access to the internet [Internet users – Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-and-population/digital-technology-and-communications/internet-users).

[Rurality – Somerset Intelligence – The home of information and insight on and for Somerset – Run by a partnership of public sector organisations](#)

people in rural areas can experience relatively poor mobile signals or broadband speed. Around 48% of Somerset's population is classified as 'rural' and 52% 'urban'. Rural Somerset has an older population demographic, particularly in respect of people aged 45 and over.

**Digital Exclusion Areas**

Old Cleave (Watchet)

Watchet (South)

Wellington (Northeast)

Ilchester (South)

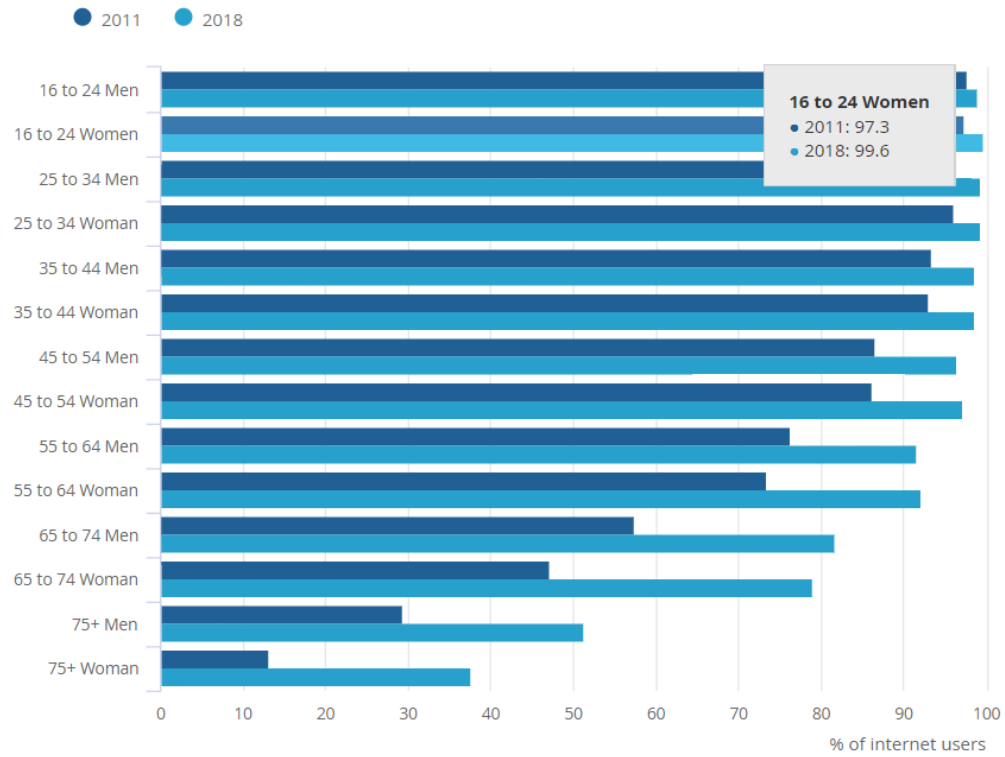
Shepton Mallet (Southwest)

Highbridge (Northeast)

Yeovil (West Field)

ONS Data shows that since 2011, adults over the age of 65 years have consistently made up the largest proportion of the adult internet non-users, and over half of all adult internet non-users were over the age of 75 years in 2018. This reflects the pattern of the younger generations becoming more likely to be frequent internet users.

**Percentage of adults who have used the internet in the last three months,  
by age group and sex, UK, 2011 and 2018**



**Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups and what have they told you? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?**

**Sheltered and Extra Care Housing (Homes in Sedgemoor and West Housing)**

Representatives from these services have been engaged and consulted throughout the duration of this project. Officers from these services have helped develop specific letters and information about the digital switchover, designed to make the concept of the digital switchover, its impact/s, and the action we will be taking as easy to understand as possible.

**Our customers (inc. Sheltered and Extra Care Housing tenants).**

Information has been sent to all of our customers by letter/information sheet to inform of the digital switchover and our intention to replace Lifeline equipment in 2024. Customers have been able to seek further support about the switchover and what it means for them through multiple channels – telephone, e-mail, web survey and pressing their alarm. For example, as of 26<sup>th</sup> March, 100 survey responses have been received with just over 50% requesting and being provided with further support and reassurance.

**Adult Social Care**

As commissioners for the Lifeline service, regular updates have been provided on project progress and information has been provided to staff through ‘The Loop’ – the weekly ASC staff newsletter.

**TEC Services Association (TSA)**

As part of our ongoing dialogue and through annual audits, we have provided updates on our approach to digital switchover and the processes and procedures are designed in accordance with the TSA Quality Standards Framework. An audit will be undertaken in the Spring of 2024 which will review our approach and adapt this if required.

## Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, assess the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	<p>As ONS data indicates, people over the age of 65 are likely to be digitally excluded. Whilst no internet connection or lack of digital skills is not a barrier for customers to access the service (alternative SIM based machines can be provided), these customers may find it more difficult to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the reasons for change.</li> <li>• The wider impact of the switchover relating to their telephone connection.</li> </ul>	☒	☐	☐
Disability	<p>Customers with a learning disability or cognitive impairment may find it more difficult to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the reasons for change.</li> <li>• The wider impact of the switchover relating to their telephone connection.</li> </ul>	☒	☐	☐



<b>Disability (2)</b>	New, digital ready Lifeline units will continue to have the option for devices that can meet different accessibility requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	Potential impact of staff going in to people's homes where there could be cultural/conduct considerations due to culture or religious reasons, conduct and language used of those installing the equipment.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>	No impacts were identified for this protected group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	No impacts were identified for this protected group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>	Potential impact of staff going in to people's homes where there could be cultural/conduct considerations due to culture or religious reasons, conduct and language used of those installing the equipment.  There may be a need for translation and interpretation services.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Religion or belief</b>	Potential impact of staff going in to people's homes where there could be cultural/conduct considerations due to culture or religious reasons, conduct and language used of those installing the equipment.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sex	No impacts were identified for this protected group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	Potential impact of staff going in to people's homes where there could be cultural/conduct considerations due to culture or religious reasons, conduct and language used of those installing the equipment.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Armed Forces (including serving personnel, families, and veterans)	No impacts were identified for this protected group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, e.g. carers, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.	Rurality – as identified in the data presented above, there are some areas in Somerset that suffer from poor broadband connectivity and digital exclusion.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Negative outcomes action plan</b> Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.				
Action taken/to be taken	Date	Person responsible	How will it be monitored?	Action complete
Ensure that further correspondence sent to customers detailing their options and asking for their choice of equipment is thoroughly reviewed for use of accessible language.	31/05/2024	Gareth Denslow	Through project plan and monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>

Liaise with TSA for their insights and best practice examples around installation processes and procedures.	31/05/2024	Gareth Denslow	Through project plan and monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure that customers' family members, carers and professionals involved in their care are contacted as per customers' needs and/or wishes (records kept within Lifeline service system).	31/12/2024	Gareth Denslow	Ongoing as part of standard operating procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use the Somerset Intelligence Network's Digital Exclusion heat map to inform priority areas for connectivity issues and ensure customer safety.	31/12/2024	Gareth Denslow	Ongoing as part of standard operating procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
New staff, being recruited to deliver this project, will receive all appropriate equality and diversity training and supervision to ensure that the potential impacts identified relating to culture and conduct are mitigated.	30/06/2024	Gareth Denslow	Through project plan and monitoring – induction procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Translation and Interpretation services will be provided in accordance with Somerset Council policy and procedure.	31/12/2024	Gareth Denslow	Through project plan and monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>
If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.				

<b>Completed by:</b>	<b>Gareth Denslow</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> March 2024</b>
<b>Signed off by:</b>	<b>Jan Stafford</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup> April 2024</b>
<b>Equality Lead sign off name:</b>	<b>Tom Rutland</b>
<b>Equality Lead sign off date:</b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup> April 2024</b>
<b>To be reviewed by: (officer name)</b>	<b>Gareth Denslow</b>
<b>Review date:</b>	<b>31<sup>st</sup> May 2024</b>

