



EXECUTIVE

17th August 2023

Report Title	Framework Agreement for Assistive Technology Equipment
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Lead Member	Councillor Helen Harrison, Executive Member for Adults, Health & Wellbeing

Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To outline the intention to procure a new framework agreement for the supply of Assistive Technology (AT) equipment to commence on 1st April 2024, when the current AT service will have disaggregated.
- 1.2. To seek delegated authority for the Executive Member for Adults, Health & Wellbeing in consultation with the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing to take any further decisions and/or actions required to procure a new AT equipment framework agreement for North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and award and enter into a framework agreement for a term of four (4) years.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The AT service is currently provided by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) as a hosted service and will disaggregate to North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) on 1st April 2024. The current framework arrangement expires on 31st March 2024. The service will need a framework agreement for the supply of AT equipment from that date for NNC use. The service will supply a range of AT equipment to approximately 2,000 people across North Northamptonshire.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive:

- a) Approve the commencement of a procurement process to establish a framework agreement for the supply of AT equipment.
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Member for Adults, Health & Wellbeing in consultation with the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing to take any further decisions and/or actions required to procure, award and enter into a framework agreement for the supply of AT equipment.

- 3.2. Reason for Recommendation:

- The current contract for the supply of AT equipment expires on 31st March 2024. The recommended course of action enables the procurement of AT equipment so that the service can continue to purchase equipment which supports people to live more independently and reduces the need for higher cost care packages.

- 3.3. Alternative Options Considered:

- To request that WNC include NNC as a named contracting authority capable of accessing the proposed framework agreement being set-up by WNC.
- To not have a framework agreement for the supply of AT equipment.

Neither of those options are recommended. The first option may constrain future NNC service development and flexibility. The second option, having no framework agreement, will lead to the service not being able to provide services to the vulnerable people of North Northamptonshire.

4. Report Background

- 4.1. AT is any product or service designed to enable independence for disabled and older people. This broad definition means that a wide range of products and

services are eligible and considered AT. As technology advances, the breadth of work covered is constantly expanding.

- 4.2. The overall outcome of the Service is to enable vulnerable people to maintain their independence, health and wellbeing in their own home for as long as possible.
- 4.3. The specific outcomes are to:
 - Prevent admissions to hospital and residential care.
 - Create efficiencies within the delivery of Social Care Services.
 - Prevent people dying prematurely.
 - Help people to recover from ill health and injury.
 - Help keep people safe and protecting them from avoiding harm.
 - Support informal Carers to improve family life and reduce carer strain.
- 4.4. The existing AT equipment framework agreement has been in place since April 2022 and has allowed the AT team to source and provide AT equipment to residents of Northamptonshire to meet their needs. With the constant innovation presented in the world of AT, it is important that the AT service has access to the most updated devices in order to provide the best possible support to residents.
- 4.5. If an agreement is not in place for AT, it will mean that the service being delivered to support the delivery of the Care Act 2014 will no longer be able to operate. This will mean that NNC will be unable to meet all the prevention requirements under the Care Act 2014. This may result in NNC having to provide higher cost care packages as a replacement.
- 4.6. An invitation to tender with a specification setting out a general statement of needs or requirements is our favoured approach. This model allows a variety of suppliers of AT equipment to apply to be appointed to the framework, encouraging innovation and competition.
- 4.7. The framework would be established with quality in mind (the variety of AT devices and specialised providers making it difficult to match equipment price for price). It is expected that the agreed price for individual items of equipment etc will be defined at the beginning of the framework agreement. It is expected this agreed price for the equipment will apply as and when specific purchases are being made during the framework agreement. It is expected that purchases of products of a similar nature will be subject to mini competition, and price may become a determining factor between suppliers appointed to the framework. Companies who focus on their own and exclusive product, e.g. Canary and Docobo, would not be able to provide pricing on telecare or keysafes and vice-versa. It is also common for equipment providers to focus only on one or two devices, instead of offering a range of equipment, and therefore a pricing comparison exercise may not always be possible as, in some cases, there are no alternatives.

- 4.8. By their nature, framework agreements allow for the procurement of goods and services from a list of pre-approved suppliers, with agreed terms and conditions and legal protections. In most cases a framework agreement will not itself commit either party to purchase or supply.
- 4.9. The spend of the AT team (countywide) in 2022-23 on Equipment was £445,000K, including RITA and Docobo (funded projects) at £165,000. RITA stands for Reminiscence / Rehabilitation and Interactive Therapy Activities and is an all-in-one Touch Screen solution which offers digital reminiscence therapy, which is a relatively new tool in the fields of nursing and healthcare. It encompasses the use of user-friendly interactive screens and tablets to blend entertainment with therapy and to assist patients (particularly with memory impairments) in recalling and sharing events from their past. Docobo is a market-leading UK digital health company that provides remote patient monitoring and virtual care to improve the quality of life of patients, carers and clinicians.
- 4.10. We would also like to increase the value of the proposed framework to £3 million over four (4) years to allow us to continue to develop our existing projects and expand our offer and partnerships with our partners.
- 4.11. There are opportunities for growth within AT services and it is proposed that the framework agreement is established to allow other named contracting authorities to use the framework agreement. This will be subject to those named contracting authorities entering into an access agreement with NNC, which will include reporting and monitoring arrangements to ensure NNC maintain a record of spend under the framework and that the advertised value of the framework is not exceeded.
- 4.12. A timetable has been prepared with Procurement and highlights the steps and timescales to complete the framework in time for a contract start of 1 April 2024.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. Not to approve the procurement of an AT framework will lead to the service not being able to operate and provide a service to the vulnerable people of North Northamptonshire.
- 5.2. Approval to proceed with the procurement of an AT framework agreement, will result in the service being able to continue to provide equipment to the vulnerable people of North Northamptonshire.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. If approval is given by Executive, then the next steps are to prepare a Specification and issue an Invitation to Tender (ITT) to potential suppliers and to follow through with an evaluation of tender responses to then set up suppliers on the new framework agreement.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1. The framework agreement value will be set to a limit of £3 million. There is budget provision for AT services to spend within this amount. This does not mean that the AT team will spend that amount in the proposed four (4) year term of the framework agreement. It allows the service and potential named contracting authorities (as set out in section 4.10) to use the framework up to that limit.
- 7.1.2. The AT service generates income circa of £300,000, through selling or leasing AT equipment. Following disaggregation, this is expected to be circa £150,000 for NNC. Purchasing of AT Equipment is initially made through Revenue Budgets and then Assets that are retained by the Council are capitalised.
- 7.1.3. There are no implications to the existing budgets or expenditure levels in procuring and implementing an AT equipment framework agreement and there are no implications on staffing levels.
- 7.1.4. Finance have been consulted over this paper.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. The Care Act 2014 (as amended) places general responsibilities on Local Authorities to ensure the provision of services, facilities, and resources to help prevent, delay, or reduce the development of care needs.
- 7.2.2. The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities a 'general power of competence' that allows them to do anything that an individual can do provided that the proposed action is not specifically prohibited by other legislation and the power is exercised in accordance with the limitations specified in the Act which enables the Council to procure and enter into the proposed new framework arrangement.
- 7.2.3. The approach recommended is a framework agreement. A framework agreement is an agreement with suppliers to allow for specific contracts to be awarded during the term of the framework agreement. A framework agreement sets out the terms and conditions for making specific purchases of goods, services and works also known as "call-offs".
- 7.2.4. The procurement exercise must be conducted in accordance with NNC's governance and legal obligations, specifically in compliance with NNC's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contract Regulations 2015 (PCR2015).
- 7.2.5. Legal services, where instructed, will advise and assist officers with regard to the conduct of the procurement process and the resulting contractual arrangements.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. The proposals support the Corporate Plan, particularly in its commitment to have active fulfilled lives and modern public services. It also supports the Adult Social Care Strategy (Transforming In-House Provider Services) to deliver the highest quality assessment, reablement and enablement to support people to live their lives independently and be ambitious for their future.

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. Delays in the approval decision or procurement process will put at risk the procurement of an AT equipment framework agreement being able to be completed on time. To mitigate these risks, the service would buy additional equipment under the current framework agreement to cover a short period of time should there be any delays to the approval and procurement process. NNC is also being identified as a contracting authority capable of using WNC's new framework arrangement and so would be able to purchase equipment beyond April 2024 too.

7.4.2. There is a risk that costs will increase and that we will be able to purchase less equipment than we would like over a period of time.

7.4.3. If there is no Framework Agreement in place, there is a substantial risk that NNC would not be able to purchase any AT equipment, with serious consequences for many vulnerable people in our community.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. There has been no specific consultation on this proposal.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. No comment has been sought by the relevant Executive Advisory Panel in respect of the report and its recommendations.

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1. No comment has been sought from the Scrutiny Committee in relation to this report and recommendations.

7.8. Equality Implications

7.8.1. The new framework agreement will not alter the service provision and so all previous equality implications will still apply. Nothing new will change.

7.8.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening assessment (ESA) has been completed. There are no negative impacts on any of the protected groups owing to the recommendations of this report.

7.8.3. The Equality Screening Assessment is provided as a background paper to the report and is available on request.

7.9. Climate and Environment Impact

7.9.1. The use of assistive technology promotes efficient ways of support for individuals who have health and social care needs. The technology can support independence or reduced dependency on social care type services reducing the climate / environmental impact of physical support, which causes additional road use and traffic in our communities.

7.10. Community Impact

7.10.1. The community impact would arise from non-provision of assistive technology to the people of North Northamptonshire. Additional financial pressures would arise through the need to meet peoples eligible care needs through more formal care packages. This may disproportionately be felt in more deprived areas where usage is higher.

7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1. There are no implications for crime and disorder from these proposals.

8. Background Papers

8.1 Equality Screening Assessment (ESA)