

Adults and Health Committee

Date of Meeting:	27 September 2021
Report Title:	Recommissioning of the Assistive Technology Service
Report of:	Nichola Thompson, Director of Commissioning
Report Reference No:	AH/07/21-22
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Assistive Technology (also known as Telecare) is an umbrella term to describe a range of electronic devices which can support someone in their home and in their local community. This enables the Council to meet duties under the Care Act.
- 1.2. This report recommends the recommissioning of this service with a revised model built on learning from the last three years including feedback from users and changes in the Assistive Technology market. This approach aligns with the priority within the Corporate Plan of; “A Council which empowers and care about people”.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Adults and Health Committee:
- 2.2. Approve the recommission of the Assistive Technology service.
- 2.3. Delegate authority to the Director of Commissioning to award the contract(s).

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. Assistive Technology plays an important role in ensuring that the Council meets its statutory duties under the Care Act and also supports the choice and control of service users thereby increasing their independence.

3.2. A survey of Assistive Technology users carried out from May-July 2021 disclosed that a large majority value the service. For instance, 93% (634 responses) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that it, “provides reassurance for your family knowing that access to help is available quickly”.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1. Decommissioning the service - this would divert incidents (such as non-serious falls) to formal and informal support routes (such as the North West Ambulance Service) most likely leading to individuals receiving delayed help (in comparison to the current service). This would increase the risk of problems escalating into crisis.

4.2. Varying the Community Equipment Service contract to include Assistive Technology – this option is still actively being explored due to the potential economies of scale that it would offer. The potential drawback of this approach is whether the provider could offer the same level of innovation as a specialist technology provider. Additionally, it could make the service more complex to run.

5. Background

5.1. Assistive Technology describes a range of electronic devices which can support an individual to be independent at home and in the community. This includes devices such as pendant alarms (involving a button an individual can press when they need help), falls detectors (which automatically send an alert when a fall is sensed) to bed and chair sensors which identify when an individual has decided to stand. These function in conjunction with a call centre and mobile response team to monitor and protect individuals.

5.2. A survey of Assistive Technology users conducted between May-July 2021 underscores how valued the service is. For instance, 93% of respondents said it, “Provides reassurance for your family knowing that access to help is available quickly” (634 responses). This approbation was also confirmed in one-to-one interviews undertaken with service users.

5.3. A number of priorities detailed in the Corporate Plan 2020-2025 relate to Assistive Technology. These include:

- Reducing health inequalities across the borough
- Reducing the reliance on long term care by improving services closer to home and providing more extra care facilities, including dementia services
- A commitment to protect the most vulnerable people in our communities
- Increasing the life opportunities for young adults and adults with additional needs.

- 5.4.** Work is currently underway on developing the Council's Digital Strategy. This commission will also be aligned with this approach.
- 5.5.** New products emerge onto the Assistive Technology market regularly, some of which offer appreciable improvements such as new functionality or greater battery capacity. Moreover, this includes a shift for more standard consumer products to include aspects of Assistive Technology functions. For instance, the Apple Watch contains a falls detector which can alert the Emergency Services. Mobile phones can also serve an alert function. This will create opportunities for service development in the future. However, there will still be a need for devices which are specifically designed for people with social care needs allied with the support from a specialist team.
- 5.6.** Another shift within the industry is growing recognition that use of Assistive Technology needs to facilitate proactive care. This means putting temporary support in place where an individual's behaviour appears to have altered to prevent or delay escalation in the intensity of their long-term needs. Developing this further locally will require strengthening of referral processes to relevant services (such as the Local Area Coordinators and People Helping People).
- 5.7.** The Council recommissioned the service in 2018, with Welbeing (part of the Doro Group) delivering the service from December of that year. In May 2021, around 2,254 users accessed this service. The model is relatively traditional in scope and is thus similar to services commissioned by other Local Authorities. It provides the following service components: a mobile response service (including falls pick-up), a monitoring centre, assessment of users for specific devices, supply/ installation/ maintenance and collection of equipment.
- 5.8.** A recommissioned service would aim to build on learning from the current contract and also aim to widen the scope of support offered. This would involve moving from a position where we are purely providing traditional telecare devices, to exploring widening the service scope by promoting the use of apps, tablets and mobile phones for a proportion of service users who could derive real benefit from these options. This would have the object of meeting assessed care needs more effectively and will also include increased support for people who are socially isolated.
- 5.9.** A key challenge for the new service will be to take account of is the national Digital Switchover which will take place by 2025. This will see the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) replaced by a digital all-IP network, meaning that current analogue devices (such as most telephones and telecare kit) will no longer work as they do now. This will bring both opportunities and challenges.

- 5.10.** A short-term solution is the use of an adapter to plug a device into the Wi-Fi router which will utilise the new IP network. However, at the moment there is a lack of consensus in the industry over how devices will function practically. In recent market engagement sessions held with providers, the majority view was that it is likely that there would be failures in communication with the telecare monitoring centre (note: a device would repeatedly send a signal until contact is made). However, the full extent of the problem is unclear.
- 5.11.** As a result of this, it is likely that there will be cost implications for the service given that the Council owns the current stock of analogue Assistive Technology devices. Currently, the cost of digital telecare equipment is estimated to be around 25% higher. As a result of this, the Council plans to work with the new provider to transition to digital only equipment where this is necessary. This would also seek to use devices connected to the mobile phone network to allow greater portability. There is also the opportunity to explore utilising devices that service users already own into the offer (where it is safe and effective to do so). For instance, the recent survey established that 19.3% of users had a smartphone and a further 33.4% said they had a simple mobile phone.
- 5.12.** The recommission will take place via a competitive procurement process and will continue to be shaped by engagement with providers (through a second market engagement event) as well as other stakeholders such as GPs and operational social care managers. It is projected that the core components of the service (such as assessment for specific devices by the Provider, a call centre and a mobile response team) will remain the same as for the current model of provision.
- 5.13.** An ongoing priority for the Council in the delivery of an Assistive Technology Service is the issue of information governance given the range of data that can be collected. As such, ensuring transparency of data use and consent will remain central to how the service is delivered in the future. It is of note that research considering barriers to adoption highlighted that privacy was a central concern for older people¹.
- 5.14.** Referrals to Assistive Technology are predominantly from Adult Social Care. However, there is the ambition to increase the range of professionals who can refer into the service in the future. For instance, GPs and other health professionals. A key change that we would like to introduce is a free trial of the service, followed by which a customer can choose to continue provision or opt out.

¹ Yusif S, Soar J, Hafeez-Baig A. Older people, assistive technologies, and the barriers to adoption: A systematic review. *Int J Med Inform.* 2016 Oct;94:112-6. doi: 10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2016.07.004. Epub 2016 Jul 7. PMID: 27573318

5.15. Partnership working is continuing to take place given the interrelationship between this service and others e.g. the North West Ambulance Service, Acute Trusts and hospital discharges. It is of note that Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group is currently exploring increasing the capacity of two hour response services from April 2022 as a result of increased Department of Health funding. However, this will predominantly target people with complex medical conditions.

6. Consultation and Engagement

6.1. Engagement has taken place with all current Assistive Technology users via a survey which was sent to them by post. 932 responses were received out of a total user base of 2,254. This asked key questions related to the recommission and will help shape it.

6.2. In addition to this, interviews have been held with service users to understand their views about technology in more depth. The intention is to continue to involve social care users with the development of the service in the coming years. This includes involving them in the piloting of devices.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

7.1.1. If the total value of this contract (net of VAT) over its entire term (including any options to extend) exceeds the financial threshold of £189,330.00 it will need to be procured in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The proposed contract is for the provision of equipment as well as installation and maintenance services and is likely to be classified as a mixed contract in accordance with Regulation 4 of the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

7.1.2. When procuring mixed contracts it is important to identify which category they fall into (i.e. supplies, services or works) because the correct categorisation determines whether or not or the extent to which the PCR 2015 will apply. For mixed contracts that have two or more categories as their subject matter, the correct categorisation is made by reference to the main subject matter of the contract which will be the part which has the greater value.

7.2. Finance

7.2.1. The Assistive Technology service should be funded in full via the Better Care Fund and by client contributions. However, the service has been significantly overspent for the last few years. The overspend on the contract in 2020/21 was £471k.

7.2.2. The budget for the Assistive Technology contract is £757k per annum and is within the Peoples Commissioning Team Plan.

7.2.3. As well as planning to address the cost of the digital switch over mentioned in 5.9, the recommission also needs to address the budget pressure.

7.2.4. If it is anticipated that the contract can't be brought in line with the current budget through the recommission then this needs to be addressed through one or more of the following actions:

- Increasing the agreed contribution from the Better Care Fund for Assistive Technology. This would need to be agreed by the Better Care Fund Governance Group which includes Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group.
- Increasing client charging above the current budgeted level.
- A growth bid in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

7.2.5. There is a current proposal around Assistive Technology charging which would result in an increase in client contributions, but this has not yet been approved. Due to the unknown impacts of this proposal, on both uptake and financial assessments, we are not able to estimate what the likely additional income could be at this time.

7.3. Policy

7.3.1. None.

7.4. Equality

7.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment is available in Appendix 1.

7.5. Human Resources

7.5.1. It is likely that TUPE would apply for staff from the existing provider.

7.6. Risk Management

7.6.1. Recommissioning of the service follows a project management approach which includes the identification of risks. Any significant risk will be controlled for and escalated for action where appropriate.

7.7. Rural Communities

7.7.1. Assistive Technology is particularly useful for individuals in a rural communities who may find it harder to access informal and formal support networks.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

7.8.1. None.

7.9. Public Health

7.9.1. Assistive Technology can be an important element of a solution to address the health and wellbeing needs of people in receipt of social

care. In addition to this, it offers the opportunity for carers and the public to obtain greater reassurance through knowing that they would be alerted through technology if there was an issue with the individual.

7.10. Climate Change

7.10.1. The recommission of the service will include social value questions including one specific to the environment. This will seek to minimise the environmental impact of the service. The service specification will also contain specific requirements relating to this.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Nik Darwin, Senior Commissioning Manager Nik.Darwin@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01606 275897
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	Cheshire East Corporate Plan 2021-2025 Cheshire East Digital Strategy