

Contract title:	Health and Care Related Equipment Service
Contract Number:	EC09/01/2862
Service Provider(s):	Nottingham Rehab Ltd T/A NRS Healthcare
Commissioning Organisation:	Southampton City Council and Portsmouth City Council (This service is jointly funded by SCC and ICB on a 50.3%-49.7% basis)
Contract start date:	1 July 2020
Current contract end date:	30 June 2025
Maximum contract end date:	30 June 2027
Current financial year value £:	£1.54m

Service Summary

The current service provider was appointed following a tender process in 2019-20. The service was re-commissioned in partnership with Portsmouth City Council, based on the previously successful cooperation between the authorities.

The prescribers who request equipment from the contract are health and care staff across the Council, University Hospital Southampton, and Solent NHS Trust. At the start of the contract, an equipment catalogue was agreed with the service ensuring that each item was the most appropriate and cost effective. Prescribers make requests from that catalogue and where there is a need to go off the catalogue owing to a particular bespoke service user need, there is a process in place which commissioners oversee.

To provide additional scrutiny for this contract, an Operational Lead who is an experienced practising OT with contract/commissioning experience, works alongside Commissioners in the Integrated Commissioning Unit. The Operational Lead undertakes daily monitoring of prescribing team activity/ costs and intervenes as required. This provides commissioners with assurance that all spend on the contract is legitimate. The Operational Lead holds regular sessions with prescribers to make sure they are aware of the latest equipment and eligibility requirements to ensure that the contract is performing appropriately.

A further area of commissioning focus is to achieve best value in the recycling of equipment. Recycling levels are monitored each month. Equipment/spare parts are sourced when needed and the Operational Lead will formally sign off any equipment to be condemned if it is over a certain level of value.

Currently there are over 550 clinicians who access the service across 51 Health and Social Care teams. There are over 440 pieces of standard equipment available on the catalogue covering minor adaptations, children's and adults' equipment, tissue viability, specialist seating and beds, household, personal care, palliative stairlifts, moving and handling, ceiling tracks hoists, sensory impairment, and children's medical equipment.

Children's medical equipment and private sector ceiling tracks have been added to the contract within the last year.

NRS also undertakes equipment collection, delivery, decontamination of mainstream education disability equipment.

Contract Performance

The contract has a high service user satisfaction rate - 98% of service users indicating that they are very satisfied/satisfied with the service.

There was a significant dip in delivery and collection performance in autumn 2021, which was due to a combination of sudden staff departures and supply issues resulting from port congestion.

Manufacturers/suppliers being unable to supply certain equipment in a timely way to NRS was particularly challenging between the months of August 2021 to May 2022. This was due to Port congestion at all the major Ports, shipping container availability and the worldwide limited supply of certain raw materials such as foam and bent metal. Production in factories around the world was sporadic due to Covid-19 outbreaks. NRS responded by switching Ports/transportation to the most efficient supply routes. NRS also worked with the Operational Lead to identify equipment that had a suitable close technician equivalent available so that existing supplier/s could be changed to ones with stock/quicker delivery timeframes. Order quantities and stock holding amounts were also increased.

Activity levels

Activity is determined by prescribers placing orders for essential needs. The contract saw a large uplift in the activity between the months of November 2021 to March 2022 and overall, the contract is operating 26.6% above the original tender outline.

NRS is reporting this increased trend across all their 23 contracts and Portsmouth witnessed a 38% increase in activity. This suggests that more people are being discharged from hospital sooner and requiring equipment and more complex conditions/disabled people are being supported in the community. This also supports the national hospital discharge policy which came into force in March 2020.

Recycling Rates

Between July 2021 and June 2022, the average catalogue equipment recycling rates were 86% which is one percent higher than last year and exceeds the contract target of 80%. This has continued to be strong despite NRS staffing challenges. Southampton is one of the best performing authorities in the south region when it comes to recycling of equipment. The recycling rate has a direct impact on the monthly credits received from the provider, and therefore on the total contract expenditure.

Planned and Preventative Maintenance/LOLER regulations (ppm)

It is a legal requirement that all electromechanical and lifting items undergo annual planned and preventative maintenance/weight testing. During Covid-19 many families refused access to their properties despite being informed that NRS staff would be wearing PPE. This resulted in a large backlog of over a 1000 outstanding ppms. NRS focused on reducing the backlog and managing the usual ppm list and had several technicians undertaking this work from October 2021 to March 2022. The backlog has since been reduced and the ppms are now under control.

Financial Data

The council commissions this service on behalf of the council and the ICB. Both partners contribute into a pooled fund, with contributions of 50.3% from the council and 49.7% from the ICB, to pay for the service.

The contract payment mechanism comprises two components - a small element of fixed costs (mainly relating to overheads such as staffing, premises, transport) and then a larger variable cost element which relates to payment by piece of equipment and includes delivery, installation, collection and cleaning. Funds are also credited back to commissioners when catalogue equipment is returned to the store in a useable condition. Spend will therefore always be influenced by the amount of equipment issued and this is directly generated by the demand from health and care prescribers who make the requests for their clients.

Special equipment provision is overseen by the Operations Lead who ensures that the recycled stock is being utilised, equipment prices are competitive, and the clinical need is appropriate. The Operations Lead is also the authoriser for all children's equipment, out of area provision, and items which tend to be more expensive in addition to authorising any collective order or adaptation exceeding authorised limits for prescribers.

Operational Issues and Good Practice

Since the start of the contract, a good working relationship has been established with the provider. The provider has proved willing to 'go the extra mile', both on an organisational level as well as with individual members of staff. Below are some examples of the operational good practice observed and recorded by the SCC operational lead for the service.

- Customer service staff and management being utilised and delivering items on their way home after work if the driver technicians are overloaded.
- Excellent communication and organisational abilities, sourcing items at the last minute and transferring from other sites nationally.
- Excellent collaboration and communication with the Clinical Advisory Team; sourcing items that are not on the catalogue.
- All complaints, concerns, issues, queries are dealt with quickly and professionally. Daily communication between Management and Operational Lead; great working relationships, honest and transparent.
- A culture of finding a solution to solve problems that arise; for example, using spare parts to quickly make an item serviceable whilst waiting for a permanent replacement part or repair.
- Good customer service - when family members are collecting from the warehouse, NRS will always offer to take the equipment to the customer's vehicle.
- The NRS Service Manager and team are passionate about doing a great job and working together. They realise that it's an important job, take pride and find it satisfying and rewarding. The NRS Service Manager is knowledgeable and quick to respond to any queries with regards to legacy stock compatibility etc.
- Flexibility - NRS have opened outside their contracted hours e.g., Saturday and Sunday opening, when asked to do so by Commissioning. NRS have taken on additional services such as Children's Medical Equipment and private sector ceiling track hoists. NRS have expressed a willingness to provide an increased range of adaptations to help with Disabled Facility Grant backlogs.
- NRS are currently planning to undertake a 'bed push' through Southampton City Centre to raise money for Southampton's Children's Hospital and to raise awareness about the importance of returning equipment that is no longer needed. This will benefit Commissioning by increasing the equipment returned credit and increase stock levels.
- A culture of networking and working together - following Covid restrictions, NRS identified that there were many new health and social care clinical staff who had not visited the service/warehouse. NRS organised an open day which was well attended; clinical staff enjoyed the visit and were positive about what they had learnt.
- Solent's Clinical Advisory Team (CAT) has an office at the NRS warehouse. When the Moving and Handling Occupational Therapist retired, NRS organised a drop in lunch event to wish her well and provided the buffet lunch/refreshments.