

**Frequently asked questions**

* **Why is NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (GCCG) procuring the Primary Care out of hours Service?**

The Primary Care Out of Hours service in Gloucestershire has not previously been subject to competitive market testing.

GCCG’s existing contract is provided by two healthcare providers; South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASFT) and Gloucestershire Care Services NHS Trust (GCS). Each organisation provides approximately 50% of the service requirement.

Although the combined OOH service benchmarks well in terms of service quality, the overall service cost is high compared with other comparable Clinical Commissioning Group OOH services.

Although Out of Hours services have traditionally been provided by NHS healthcare providers, these services are not exempt from market testing and are frequently opened to competition along with other core Ambulance services such as non-emergency patient transport services. NHS Gloucestershire PCT, GCCG predecessor, was aware that there was a mature OOH service market and therefore a number of NHS, 3rd sector and private organisations existed capable of providing OOH services to its patients in Gloucestershire.

* **Is Gloucestershire CCG legally required to put the out of hours service out to tender?**

The original decision to tender OOH services was at the PCT’s discretion. In 2012 NHS Gloucestershire PCT committed to market test OOH services for the reasons indicated above and a procurement process commenced in the autumn of 2012.

GCCG’s current contract with SWASFT was due to expire on 31 March 2013 but was extended until 31 October 2013 to allow a formal procurement process to be undertaken. Notice on the existing GCS contract was given so that that contract would also terminate on 31 October 2013, in-line with the SWASFT contract termination.

GCCG, established April 2013, decided to abandon the PCT’s 2012 procurement process over concerns about the activity data contained in its service specification as well as other factors which included the anticipated hard launch of its NHS111 service, mobilisation of its non-emergency patient transport contract (scheduled for 1 December 2013) as well as other concerns around the potential impact upon emergency department winter pressures.

Following the introduction of the National Health Service (Procurement, Patient Choice and Competition) (No.2) Regulations on 1 April 2013, GCCG received advice that it would be at risk of legal challenge if it did not immediately signal its intention to undertake a second procurement process.

GCCG was required to extend its existing OOH service contracts with SWASFT and GCS until 31 March 2015 to allow sufficient time for a second procurement process to be conducted and advised previous OOH procurement bidding organisations accordingly.

* **What are the financial costs that NHS Gloucestershire CCG will incur from this process?**

NHS Gloucestershire CCG expects to incur relatively small expenses associated with professional legal advice, limited consultancy services for specification development, conference facilities plus payments to one out of county medical professional (GP) assisting with the evaluation of submissions from potential providers.

* **Were the relevant unions consulted before this service went out to tender?**

No. The out of hours service being commissioned by NHS Gloucestershire CCG is not a significant service redesign and although the CCG voluntarily consulted with a wide variety of stakeholders, there was no mandatory requirement to do so. Likewise, there is no requirement to specifically consult with trade union organisations.

Current out of hours service providers (SWAST and GCS) retain responsibility for their own staff consultation and engagement processes. They have been aware of the PCT/CCG intention to market test this service since 2012 and have briefed their staff accordingly. The NHS Gloucestershire CCG Communications Team has also provided all SWAST/GCS staff with a briefing paper which outlined the CCG’s commissioning intention in respect of out of hours services prior to commencement of this procurement process.

The procurement process is being conducted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings, (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.

* **What hours will the re-tendered service cover?**

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| Monday to Thursday | 18.30 to 08.00 |
| Friday to Monday | From 18.30 on Friday through to 08.00 on Monday |
| Bank Holidays | 24hrs |

* **Where do local GPs fit into the out of hours service? Could GPs be asked to provide more than they currently provide within the same remuneration package?**

In 2004, changes to the national GP contract gave GPs the opportunity to opt out of providing an out of hours service for their registered patients. Consequently a countywide service was established in Gloucestershire.

We recognise that the out of hours services have been well supported over the years by local GPs and nurses and we want this to continue. The specification makes clear the expectations that the service provider should retain a core of clinical staff throughout the term of the contract who have an excellent working knowledge of Gloucestershire in and out of hours services.

Changes to the GP Contract for England for 2014/15 includes a requirement for GP practices to monitor the quality of out of hours services offered to their patients and report any concerns to NHS England. Further guidance on this is expected in due course.

* **Could resources be directed to “self-help” and health prevention to reduce GP workload in “in-hours”?**

The service specification for out of hours includes the requirement for the provider to ensure that information for patients and carers about common conditions, health promotion and self-care options is readily available. Those working within the service will also be expected to redirect patients to alternative services when appropriate, such as a local pharmacy.

* **Will there be financial penalty clauses in the contract?**

The contract will be performance managed under the 2015/16 standard national NHS contract. This includes mechanisms for withholding payments where providers do not fulfil the terms of a contract.

The contract will include compensatory payments linked to performance against a series of quality standards.

* **Will this service extend to patients who reside in England but are registered with a Welsh GP practice?**

The out of hours service for these patients is currently provided by their own GP practice. There is no intention to change these arrangements at this point in time. Patients who reside in Wales but are registered with an English GP Practice will receive a service from the new provider. We have specified that there should be reciprocal arrangements in place with neighbouring out of hours services so that residents living in border areas can access the closest possible treatment centre and home visiting service when needed.

* **Will the time from receiving a call from a patient to them having a home visit be affected if they live in a rural location?**

The criteria for a home visit response will be determined by the individual patient need and level of urgency rather than the location in which they live. However, there is national guidance relating to timescales for home visits and these will be incorporated into the Gloucestershire contract.

* **Carers needs must be taken into account. Please recognise the carers role and its importance.**

NHS Gloucestershire CCG recognises the significant contribution made by carers and we are committed to ensuring that the specification reflects this. Engagement and communication with patients and carers is a key feature of the specification. Both carers and patients are represented on the stakeholder panel that has been established to support the procurement process.

* **The out of hours professionals must be able to have rapid reliable access to information on the patients, particularly those with mental health problems and patients at the end of life. Health care professionals must be able to communicate information in to the service and information must also be available to ambulance personnel.**

Integration and communication between the out of hours service and other health care professionals is a core theme of the specification. The out of hours provider will be a valued and integral part of the local health and social care economy with a place on the Gloucestershire Urgent Care Board and Governance Groups.

The provider will be required to develop a good working knowledge of local services and have clear lines of communication in place for sharing relevant patient information in a secure manner.

* **The out of hours service will need a robust clinical governance process – to ensure a high standard of service, which is clinically effective.**

We agree the need to have robust processes in place is essential. These are detailed in the specification and will undergo rigorous scrutiny and evaluation as part of the procurement process.