

Reference: FOI.ICB-2425/036

Subject: Communication Services Funding, Providers and Procurement in Primary Care

*I can confirm that the ICB **does hold some of the information requested**; please see responses below:*

QUESTION	RESPONSE
1. Overview of Communication Services Funding and Providers: i. Could you provide a detailed overview of the current communication services (including SMS, email, and patient engagement platforms) funded by the ICS for use in GP practices within your jurisdiction? ii. Please list all providers currently contracted to supply these communication services, specifying the nature of the services they provide in full.	The ICB funds the Accurx messaging bundle for our GP practices. Email is through nhs.net using Outlook. The ICB pay for SMS messaging fragments sent by practices via BT SMS service and Accurx messaging.
2. Procurement and Contract Details: i. Can you detail the procurement process followed for selecting communication service providers, specifically mentioning any open tenders or frameworks used? ii. For each contract awarded for communication services in the last five years, please provide: • The name of the awarded provider, • The value and duration of the contract, • The specific services covered under the contract.	Accurx was purchased through the GPIT futures framework from April 2021 for 12 months, supported by the NHSE procurement hub. The services included within this were for video consultations, single patient messaging, and questionnaires. The annual cost for the messaging licences within this contract was approximately £223,000 + VAT. Accurx was again purchased through the GPIT futures framework from April 2022 for 12 months and extended to June 2023, supported by the NHSE procurement hub. The services included within this were for video consultations, single patient messaging, and

	questionnaires. The annual cost for the messaging licences within this contract was approximately £223,000 + VAT. The current Accurx messaging bundle (along with the patient triage function) was purchased through the GCloud Framework from 1st July 2023 for 1 year with Accurx. This process was supported by South Central and West CSU. The messaging bundle includes, single patient messaging, batch messaging, appointment reminders and questionnaires. As messaging services are part of a wider contract with Accurx and it is not possible to extract the value of the messaging element. It is approximately £260,000 + VAT annual cost for messaging licences. The BT SMS contract is for 1+1 and ends in 2025 and is charged monthly based on usage and at 1.85p a message. In the financial year 2023-24 SMS cost was £650,000.
3. SMS/Text Messaging Specifics: i. Regarding contracts awarded, could you provide the rationale for the selection, particularly in terms of cost-effectiveness, service comprehensiveness, and any unique features or benefits that influenced the decision? ii. Were any contracts directly awarded without a competitive tender process? If so, please provide the reasons for this approach and any documentation justifying the decision.	Products were chosen based on functions that practices wanted, ease of use was very important and the Accurx questionnaires have been extremely useful. Having a provider that could offer all the products we wanted in a bundle was very attractive both for interoperability and cost effectiveness. Products were procured using a framework and were not directly awarded.
4. Future Procurement and Innovation Opportunities: i. Are there any upcoming opportunities for new providers to bid on communication services within the ICS?	Yes, however we will look to purchase future products using the new NHSE Digital Pathways Framework when available.

ii. How does the ICS support innovation in patient communication and digital health solutions? Are there specific criteria or challenges you are looking to address with future procurements?	The ICS supports innovation that creates efficiencies in general practices and reduces costs for the ICB. We are also looking to ensure that patient communication tools are accessible for all our population's needs.
5. Compliance and Framework Agreements: i. Please confirm whether the contracts with current communication service providers, adhere to NHS procurement guidelines and framework agreements. ii. If there have been any deviations or exemptions in following standard procurement protocols, could you provide details and justifications for these cases?	All current ICB contracts with communication service providers adhere to NHS procurement guidelines / legislation and have been awarded within associated framework agreements. There have been no deviations or exceptions.

The information provided in this response is accurate as of 24 May 2024 and has been approved for release by Dave Jarrett, Chief Delivery Officer for NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire ICB.