

Our Reference North East and North Cumbria
ICB\FOI ICB797

[NECS – John Snow House](#)
Durham University Science Park
Durham
DH1 3YG

Tel: 0191 301 1300
E-mail: necsu.icbfoi@nhs.net

26th March 2024

By Email

Dear Applicant

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Request for Information – NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB)

Thank you for your request received by North of England Commissioning Support (NECS) on 29 February 2024 for information held by NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

NENC ICB covers the areas of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Cumbria, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside, Sunderland, and Tees Valley (which covers the 5 councils that make it up – Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees).

Please find the information you requested on behalf of the ICB as follows.

Your Request

Please could I ask you for some further information in relation to below questions.

1. Does your ICB provide Age-related Hearing Services (including hearing aid provision) throughout your ICB area? (Y/N). If there are areas or localities without provision, then please provide the reason(s) for this. Are there areas where distances for patients to travel to an appointment are deemed by the ICB, or relevant regulatory body to be excessive, or somewhat concerning? Please highlight any such areas, with an idea of the distances patients need to travel. This is likely to relate to smaller population, remote communities.
2. Is the Hearing aid provision set up differently across different areas within the ICB borders? (Perhaps these sub-areas were inherited from the CCG era but still operating within the current ICB set up?) Please document the type of service set-ups within your ICB indicating the type for each area e.g., AQP, single provider, Community Services, ENT-led, Hospital-based only etc.

For example:

Area X within ICB – Multiple AQP community providers
Area Y within ICB – Single Provider / Secondary Care Provider
OR
Entire ICB Area – AQP with multiple community Providers

3. Please let us know who the audiology providers are within the ICB .

For example,
Area X within ICB – Company A, Company B, Company C
Area Y within ICB – Hospital D
OR
Entire ICB - Company A, Company B, Company C

4. No question 4
5. When did the contract(s) start?
6. When is/was the contract end date according to the original contract? (Please detail for all contracts in the ICB area)
7. Has the contract been extended with existing Providers beyond the original contracted end date (without going to Tender)? (Please detail all dates for all contracts in the ICB area. If they have been extended multiple times, then please itemise all extensions)
8. If the required contract renewal has been delayed beyond the original contracted End Date, then why was a new tender not issued and what are the intentions for the future required contracting of the service? please detail for all contracts in the ICB area and send any documents or minutes of meetings that relate to the ICBs consideration of their options for the required future contract arrangements.
9. Are there plans to merge/harmonise multiple services within the ICB into one service Contract for the entire ICB? If so, then please supply information together with proposed start dates. Or are there any plans to change the Contract type significantly in some other way e.g. combine all into AQP, add ear wax removal to the service, change to self-referral model. Please highlight the reasons for the delay in harmonising the service or delays in changing contract specification. Please supply all internal/external documents and minutes of meetings that relate to this question.
10. Can a Provider be admitted to the contract mid-term/mid-contract? i.e. can new providers be admitted during the current contract, after the initial contract had been awarded. If so, please advise how the Provider would apply to be included within the Contracts Provider List for a mid-term entry. Please also advise how a new Provider could apply to be included at the point of Contract extending i.e., be added to the existing Providers when the original contract is extended. If an interested Provider who holds similar AQP contracts currently elsewhere cannot apply to be added to the current Provider List mid-term during the current contract, and cannot be considered at the point of the extension of an existing current contract, then please indicate on what grounds the ICB feels this entry would not be acceptable.
11. What are the current typical wait times for accessing (the various) Hearing Aid Services within the ICB? Please also indicate the areas or localities within the ICB where wait times have breached KPIs in more than two months within the last 6 months.

12. Have any Providers left the contract for any reason, or restricted their intake very significantly? Please provide as much detail as possible.
13. Have any current Providers been awarded the current Contract without the ICB tendering the opportunity? And why was this deemed permissible? This may be a short term contract that was issued for emergency reasons e.g., due to COVID or Provider terminating their service suddenly. Please detail contract extensions and indicate on what grounds the ICB felt they were able to directly award the contract, and on what grounds they felt that they were not obliged to issue a tender to the market or invite new Providers to apply.
14. Have there been any material changes during the course of the current specification. (This includes changes during the period of any contract extensions that were based on the original contract) e.g.:
- Earwax Removal services
 - Self-referral pathway
15. Please advise:
- a. For AQP services within the ICB, are there any areas or localities where services are currently only available from a single Provider?
 - b. For AQP services within the ICB, are there any areas or localities where services are currently only available from a single Provider for in-clinic appointments, as per activity reports in the last 3 months?
 - c. For AQP services within the ICB, are there any areas or localities where domiciliary services are only active from a single domiciliary Provider, as evidenced in ICB activity reports in the last 3 months?
16. Please comment further on any future intentions for the procurement of Age-related Hearing services within the ICB (that may not have been mentioned above). Please send any available documents or meeting minutes that support your answers to this issue.
17. Will commissioners be reviewing the current contract under the new Provider Selection Regime (PSR)? Please detail how the ICB will issue contracts under the PSR requirement. What is the ICB's understanding of how AQP Audiology fits within the PSR requirement, and how does the ICB understand how PSR requirements should be executed for AQP Audiology?
18. What are the referral to assessment times for patients being seen for domiciliary services specifically? Has this been breached by any Provider for two or more of the last 6 months? Are there any areas or localities where domiciliary services are not available in the ICB?
19. In reviewing the KPI data for domiciliary services, would the addition of a new domiciliary Provider improve the service for patients?
20. Please could you inform us of any tariff uplifts, if so, how much and which year(s)?
21. Are there any areas or localities within the ICB where there are typically days without provision e.g., Sundays or Bank Holidays? Similarly, are there any areas or localities where evening appointments are not provided i.e., between 6pm and 8pm?
22. NHS hearing aids are now available with Bluetooth functionality, providing better value to NHS, taxpayers and patients when fitted. Are any Providers in your area providing less than 75% of

their hearing aids without Bluetooth enabled features including mobile phone streaming, remote control Apps, remote aftercare? Please itemise for each Provider. Please state whether the Provider's 'standard' model(s) provision tends to include or exclude these Bluetooth-enabled functions for their cohort.

23. Has the ICB noted any areas of concern re Health Inequalities or Access within the current Provision of services? Are there KPIs or Standards not being met with regard to Health Inequalities and /or Access?
24. NHS England has made self-referral a requirement of AQP audiology. Has Self-referral been implemented for the ICB's Audiology contract(s)? Please provide the self-referral commencement dates. If Self-referral has not been implemented, then on what date will Self-referral commence?
25. Is ear wax removal part of the audiology pathways? If so when was this implemented? If not, then please detail any documented plans to integrate ear wax removal as part of the Audiology pathway.
26. Separate Ear Wax Removal Pathway - Do you have an Ear Wax Removal pathway (that is entirely separate from the Audiology service a)? If yes, the please provide the following information:
 - a. When did the contract start?
 - b. When is the contract end date?
 - c. Who is the Contracted Provider (or Providers)
 - d. Was the contract subject to a market Tender? If so please send us the link to the Tender.
 - e. If there was no open market Tender then how were the Providers or the Provider selected? On what grounds, with what rationale and with what selection process were the Providers or the Provider recruited?
 - f. If the current Contract was extended then on what grounds was the contract extended? Using what rationale? Why was the contract extended and a competitive Tender not applied?
 - g. Can new Providers be considered for entry mid-term, at contract extension, or via Tender process. Please advise the process required for a new Provider to apply.
 - h. Will PSR be applied to future ear wax contracts? How will the PSR process be implemented given the different ways that PSR should be used to issue awards?

Our Response

We can confirm, as per Section 1(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the ICB holds some of the information you have requested.

County Durham place

1. Yes and No
2. For Durham, the service is set up as an AQP Community Service.
3. AQP Providers for Durham are Scrivens, Specsavers, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and Minor Ops Limited.
4. 1st April 2016
5. 31st March 2019
6. Yes, all contracts have been extended year on year since 1st April 2019.
7. Not applicable.
8. Not at the current time.

9. No this was a procured service.
10. The ICB do not monitor average waiting times therefore we do not hold this information.
11. No.
12. No.
13. No for Earwax Removal Services and Yes for Self-referral pathway as this has been implemented following NHSE guidance.
14.
 - a. No
 - b. No
 - c. No
15. Re-procurement of service put on hold pending ICB decision to undertake potential joint procurement with other places within the NENC ICB during 2024/25.
16. Current contracts have been reviewed under the new Provider Selection Regime (PSR) and it is the ICBs intention that these will be awarded to existing providers via Direct Award C under the Health Care Services (PSR) Regulations 2023 for a further 12 months from 1st April 2024.
17. We do not have any specific KPIs for domiciliary care. No, there are no localities where domiciliary services are not available.
18. Same response as question 17.
19. No inflation has been previously applied as tariffs agreed following procurement in 2016 but the tariffs from the 1st April will be uplifted in line with the national net tariff uplift of 0.6%: -

Service	New Tariff for 2024/25
Assessment Only	£52.31
Assessment, Fitting of 1 Aid, Cost of 1 Aid, Follow Up, 3 Years Aftercare and 3rd Year Review	£265.58
Assessment, Fitting of 2 Aids, Cost of 2 Aids, Follow Up, 3 Years Aftercare and 3rd Year Review	£367.19
Annual Aftercare and Review (after 3rd Year Review where hearing needs have not changed and re-assessment into the pathway is not)	£25.15
Replacement Hearing Aid (due to mechanical failure outside of warranty during a period of annual aftercare following the 3rd year review)	£67.40

20. Operating hours of the service across the geographic area covered by the respective NHS NENC ICB, should be 8.00am – 6.00pm, Monday to Friday, with an additional minimum of 5 hours regular extended opening hours on an evening or weekend.

Opening the service on statutory public holidays is for the discretion of the provider; however, there will be a requirement for Providers to ensure patients are notified in advance of closures and have access to an emergency service for the provision of batteries and tubing.

21. NENC ICB do not hold this information.
22. No
23. Self-referral was implemented in County Durham from 1 December 2023.
24. No
25. a. 1 April 2023

- b. 31 March 2024
- c. Durham practices. – details are available online.
- d. No
- e. Ear wax removal forms part of a wider Enhanced Service Specification (in line with applicable national standards i.e., NICE) that GP Practices are commissioned to deliver, as part of an enhancement to primary care core services.
- f. Not applicable as per response to question 25b.
- g. The enhanced service specification which ear wax removal is part of, will only be offered to GP Practices.
- h. County Durham place does not offer contracts solely for ear wax services, but contracts that are being issued that include ear wax removal as part of the service specification will be awarded in line with PSR Rules and Regulations.

Gateshead place

1. Yes. There are some more remote areas of Gateshead however we are confident these are covered by local transport links.
2. Services are equal across Gateshead – AQP with multiple community Providers and Queen Elizabeth Hospital offers services
3. Specsavers, Outside Clinic, Queen Elizabeth Hospital
4. There was not a question 4 within the request
5. Unsure of exact start date but contracts have been rolling over for a number of years. Current contracts are for 12 months and expire on 31/3/24.
6. Gateshead Place community contracts end on 31/03/24
7. Not applicable.
8. There is no delay to contract renewal – future intentions of contracting this service are currently being discussed ICB wide.
9. There are ongoing discussions around this service within the ICB.
10. We would not look to find additional providers in-year unless there were issues with existing providers.
11. Average 92% of patients are seen within the required 16 days for assessment.
12. No.
13. No
14. None
15. a, b, & c. Not in Gateshead
16. Current contracts have been reviewed under the new Provider Selection Regime (PSR) and it is the ICBs intention that these will be awarded to existing providers via Direct Award C under the Health Care Services (PSR) Regulations 2023 for a further 12 months from 1st April 2024.
17. We do not have any specific KPIs for domiciliary care. No, there are no localities where domiciliary services are not available.
18. Referral to assessment time of 16 working days. This has not been breached by any provider for two or more of the last 6 months. Domiciliary services are available right across Gateshead.
19. No
20. 2021: 0.2% 2022: 1.7% 2023: 1.8%
21. Yes
22. Information on specific types of hearing aid is not held by Provider Management – this would be accessed via the individual provider.
23. No
24. This has not yet been implemented in Gateshead and is part of an ICB wide discussion.
25. No – no imminent plans to implement this service

26. No

Newcastle place

For Newcastle ICB place, the response refers to community contracts only. We are able to respond with the following:

Question 3: Newcastle Place – The Grove Medical Group; GP with Special Interest ENT Service (GPwSI)

Question 5: The Grove ENT GPwSI Start Date: 01.04.2021

Question 6: The Grove ENT GPwSI End Date: 31.03.2023

Question 7: The Grove ENT GPwSI extended 01.04.2023 to 31.03.2024.

Question 8: The Grove ENT GPwSI extension 01.04.2023 to 31.03.2024 took place under Regulation 32c where there was clear benefit to be gained from maintaining continuity and no expected financial benefit in competitive quotations as services in place are deemed good value and there are no performance issues of note. A further contract is to be awarded to the Provider under PSR Direct Award C for 01.04.2024 to 31.03.2025.

North Cumbria place

1. The ICB does not provide this service. In North Cumbria ICB place.
2. North Cumbria – Single Secondary Care Provider
3. North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust
4. No question 4
5. Current contract start date: 1st April 2023
6. Current contract end date: 31st March 2024
7. No
8. There is no contract extension.
9. No this was a procured service.
10. No
11. Please redirect to North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust at FOIRequests@ncic.nhs.uk
12. No
13. No
14. No
15. No
16. Current contracts have been reviewed under the new Provider Selection Regime (PSR) and it is the ICBs intention that these will be awarded to existing providers via Direct Award C under the Health Care Services (PSR) Regulations 2023 for a further 12 months from 1st April 2024.
17. We do not have any specific KPIs for domiciliary care. No, there are no localities where domiciliary services are not available.
18. No
19. No
20. N/A – part of a wider block payment arrangement with NCIC NHS FT.
21. Please redirect to North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust as referenced in question 11.
22. Please redirect to North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust as referenced in question 11.
23. No
24. No
25. Yes, April 2022
26. No, not applicable.

North Tyneside place

We have an audiology service as part of the Newcastle Hospital Trust contract which provides hearing aid provision. However, we do not have any other services, e.g., AQP services. As the service is part of overall NuTH contract, please refer request for information to [Freedom of Information - Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust \(newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk\)](https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk)

Northumberland place

The Northumberland service is provided by Newcastle hospitals therefore, the same response applies as to that for Newcastle.

South Tyneside place

1. Yes
2. Multiple AQP Community Providers
3. Outside Clinic, Scrivens, Specsavers, South Tyneside and Sunderland FT
4. No question 4
5. Contract start dates:
 - Outside clinic – 1st April 2022
 - Scrivens – 1st April 2022
 - Specsavers – 1st April 2022
 - South Tyneside and Sunderland FT – 1st April 2022
6. Contract end dates:
 - Outside clinic – 31st March 2025
 - Scrivens – 31st March 2025
 - Specsavers – 31st March 2025
 - South Tyneside and Sunderland FT – 31st March 2025
7. No
8. Not applicable
9. No
10. No
11. On average 96% patients are assessed within 16 working days following receipt of referral
12. No
13. No
14. No
15. Responses are as follows
 - a. South Tyneside
 - b. Yes
 - c. Yes
16. Current contracts have been reviewed under the new Provider Selection Regime (PSR) and it is the ICBs intention that these will be awarded to existing providers via Direct Award C under the Health Care Services (PSR) Regulations 2023 for a further 12 months from 1st April 2024.
17. We do not have any specific KPIs for domiciliary care. No, there are no localities where domiciliary services are not available.
18. Referral to assessment time of 16 working days. This has not been breached by any provider for two or more of the last 6 months.
19. No
20. South Tyneside and Sunderland – no uplifts have been applied during the procured period.
21. Yes

22. South Tyneside does not hold this information.
23. No
24. Yes, 1 April 2022
25. No
26. Separate ear wax removal pathway information:

- a. 1st April 2023
- b. 31st March 2024
- c. Farnham medical Partners
- d. We do not hold this information.
- e. We do not hold this information.
- f. We do not hold this information.
- g. We do not hold this information.
- h. We do not hold this information.

Sunderland place

Please refer to the responses provided for South Tyneside as this service covers both geographical areas.

Tees Valley place

1. Yes. There are no areas where distances for patients to travel to an appointment are deemed by the ICB, or relevant regulatory body to be excessive, or somewhat concerning?
2. For Tees Valley the service is set-up as an AQP Community Service
3. Audiology providers in Tees Valley ICB place are:
 - North Tees Trust
 - Specsavers
 - Scrivens
 - Outside Clinic
 - Minor Ops
4. No question 4
5. The contract started 1 July 2023.
6. 30 June 2026
7. No
8. No
9. Not at this point in time
10. No as this was a procured service
11. We don't monitor average waiting times as part of the contract. No provider has breached the KPI in the contract relating to waiting time standards.
12. No
13. No
14. Material changes:
 - Earwax Removal services – No
 - Self-referral pathway – Yes this has been implemented following NHSE guidance
15. No to questions a to d
16. Service was procured in 2023/24
17. N/A – contract was issued as part of a procurement.
18. We don't have any specific KPIs for domiciliary care. No, there are no localities where domiciliary services are not available.
19. As above, there is no specific data for domiciliary services.

20. Following a procurement, the tariffs changed from 1 July 2023 in Tees as follows:

Tariff 1 – £52
Tariff 2 – £218.14
Tariff 3 – £319.14
Tariff 4 – £24.51
Tariff 5 – £67

Prior to this the tariffs were as follows:

Tariff 1 – £47.94
Tariff 2 – £199.06
Tariff 3 – £292.86
Tariff 4 - £22.93
Tariff 5 – £56.28

21. Operating Hours of the service across the geographical areas are 8.00am – 6.00pm Monday to Friday with an additional minimum of 2 hours regular extended opening hours on an evening and a minimum of 3 hours on a weekend (subject to evidence of demand).

22. We do not hold this information. Please re-direct query to providers.

23. No

In accordance with the Information Commissioner's directive on the disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 your request will form part of our disclosure log. Therefore, a version of our response which will protect your anonymity will be posted on the NHS ICB website <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/>.

If you have any queries or wish to discuss the information supplied, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above telephone number or at the above address.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to request a review of our decision, you should write to the Senior Governance Manager using the contact details at the top of this letter quoting the appropriate reference number.

If you are not content with the outcome your review, you do have the right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the North of England Commissioning Support Unit.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

www.ico.org.uk

Any information we provide following your request under the Freedom of Information Act will not confer an automatic right for you to re-use that information, for example to publish it. If you wish to

re-use the information that we provide and you do not specify this in your initial application for information then you must make a further request for its re-use as per the Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 www.legislation.gov.uk . This will not affect your initial information request.

Yours sincerely

Pamela Coxon

Pamela Coxon
Information Governance Officer