

Most care technology services will require some form of purchasing or procurement. Undertaking a procurement is an expensive and time-consuming process, but can add a huge amount of value if it is well planned and well executed. It is a big decision for any council to set off on this path, and for many councils it may be the first time that they have considered procuring a care technology service. So, whether you are planning to purchase a full care technology service, or seeking to procure technology to be provided as part of an in-house operating model or service, the points below will help you to consider some of the key elements you need to consider to maximise the chances of a successful procurement process.

Top Tip: The LGA Care Technology Diagnostic and Planning Resource is a good place to start if you are thinking about your approach to care technology and want to assess your current approach [Care technology diagnostic and planning resource | Local Government Association](#)

Strategy

1. Digital care tech strategy

A care technology strategy that sets out a long term vision and a route map for your care technology service is a key reference point for guiding your approach to procurement. It should be clear how care technology is contributing to the overall strategy and approach for adult social care and the extent to which care technology is seen as an integrated, social care intervention. This should help you and potential suppliers be clear about your priorities such as:

- Financial benefits and levels of investment
- Priority cohorts
- Priority care settings
- Intended impact on outcomes: for users, carers and families

Top Tip: whilst most councils will have an investment envelope, care technology should be value creating and generate savings. Consider how you will measure return on investment (ROI) and payback – by user / cohort / total service – and whether you want flexibility to extend services / investment beyond the investment envelope so that you can extend the service if it meets targets, to generate further value.

2. Delivery / operating model

Be clear about your operating model (how the care technology service will be delivered) and which elements will be commissioned and which might be delivered in-house. Whatever the model, how will the service interface with front line social care teams? With partners? If it is a blended in-house / commissioned service, are roles and responsibilities clear? How will performance and data be shared to provide an integrated view of the service and outcomes? Interface or handover points are always points of increased risk – is there a clear and good fit between suppliers and in-house teams so that all functions are covered? How will you nurture, incentivise and systematise suppliers to collaborate? This may require an element of culture change work, alongside tactical adjustments to your operational and strategic governance.

You may want advice and input from the market about how your operating model could be shaped and improved as part of the process. Do you want a partner who will work with you and develop the service / offer over time or a more simple supplier relationship?

Top Tip: consider the performance framework and metrics that you will use to manage the service upfront and keep it under review. Consider productivity (costs), supplier performance (responsiveness, meeting service standards), and service quality metrics (customer feedback); use the procurement process to seek input and intelligence from suppliers about how they can best demonstrate to you that they are doing a good job.

3. Current service

Ensure that you understand the strengths and weaknesses of your current service and offer. This is key information to shape your specification and approach to procurement. Are you looking for radical change or improvement? Or is your current service strong, but just needs a stronger technology offer? How satisfied are you with your current provider/s? Make sure that the effort and investment of a procurement will leave you with a better service and offer than what you've currently got. Who are your champions for change internally and how can you use their support? Do you have any lobbying to undertake to communicate your vision and secure more support?

4. Market intelligence

There is no single source about the digital care technology market and there is a mix of long-standing national providers, local organisations, and new market entrants operating in this space. The advent of digital technology and solutions has triggered disruption in the care technology market as it has in many other areas. And some suppliers focus on the service element, and their technology offer is provided by others.

Draw on the expertise and experience of other councils – in your area and across the country. And undertake soft market engagement as soon as you can. Talking to suppliers can really help shape your thinking and approach about what is possible.

5. Procurement / commercial strategy

It is really important that the approach you take to the procurement matches your strategy and long term aims. In very simple terms, if you are confident about what you want to procure at a detailed level (how to specify, what it should cost, how it can be measured) then the procurement approach does not need an extensive dialogue and negotiation process. If you want to get the benefit of intelligence from the market and test supplier capability through the procurement, then consider a process that includes strong market engagement, dialogue and negotiation.

Top Tip: engage with your procurement specialists early on; their expertise in shaping an effective process will be key to ensuring you achieve your long term aims and get a good supplier onboard.

Planning

1. Timescale

Be realistic about the timescale and process that a procurement will take. It is common that procurements are triggered by the end of an existing contract. In general terms, planning should begin 18 months in advance of contract end dates and – depending on the procurement approach – it may take 12 months to undertake an effective procurement. Remember to include a mobilisation period – typically three months but speak to your procurement lead about this. Make sure you leave time for your internal governance and decision-making processes, particularly if this is a significant investment that will require member approval.

2. Building a team

You are likely to need a range of skills and inputs to deliver a successful procurement. Consider involvement from:

- Project management
- Commissioning
- Social care operations
- In-house care technology specialists
- Commercial / procurement specialists
- Finance
- IT
- Communications
- Data protection / Information governance
- Legal
- HR – if there are TUPE implications

Consider if you have all the skills you need in-house or if you need some specialist support to help you deliver a strong process and achieve the best outcome.

3. Developing a specification

Your statement of requirements setting out what you want to buy is the cornerstone of any procurement and getting this right will be fundamental to how the market responds. Research what other councils have produced through any recent procurements but be confident about setting out your own needs clearly.

Take a look at the LGA's Local Government Care Technology Network which has a practice resource containing useful, internal care technology documents and information. These have been provided by councils to help other councils wanting to develop their own local approach. More details about how to join or contribute to the repository is [available here](#).

Key things to consider include:

- Striking the right balance between detail and allowing suppliers to help inform your thinking and approach
- Balancing outcome / outputs with input and process detail. Which inputs are fundamental and non-negotiable for you?
- How will you assess the quality of the technology being proposed? Do you want a technology agnostic approach or are you comfortable with a static core offer that can be augmented?
- How can you create the right incentives and mechanisms so that the supplier keeps the technology offer fresh and cutting edge?
- Do you want to buy a full end to end service or just elements? Do you need a monitoring and responder service? How will this service sit alongside existing contracts and services e.g. community equipment, reablement, prevention, incumbent telecare
- Do you want support for culture change internally and with wider partners in the system? This can be crucial – particularly in the early months of a new contract – to stimulate referrals and shift culture, systems and processes towards an embedded and instinctive approach to care technology
- Are there any potential staff (internal or with existing providers) who will be affected by this procurement and who might be eligible for TUPE? Consider and plan for this upfront

4. Evaluation framework

At its simplest, the evaluation framework will set the decision-making framework against which bids are assessed and will be balancing quality with cost. Some councils have a corporate standard about the balance between these elements, often with a strong focus on cost to ensure good value for money. For care technology, quality can cover a range of issues: service quality, innovation, technology offer, process / culture change support. If possible, scenario test your evaluation framework to ensure that you have the flexibility you need to make the best possible appointment. Particularly if this is a new service, consider if you have a strong enough focus on quality and its individual elements, and that your framework won't force you to choose the cheapest, but not necessarily the best value / best quality provider.

Top Tip: cost / price is not the same as value. You may want to think about how your process focuses on value creation (outcomes as well as savings) and prioritises return on investment (value created against cost) over or as well as cost / price.

5. Mobilisation

Though the focus of this guide is on procurement and developing a new service, you will eventually reach a point where your service and contract mobilises. There is supplementary information to support mobilisation and deployment of care technology services available [here](#).

Process

6. Procurement approach

Your in-house teams will be able to provide you with the best advice about the process and how it can be run to maximise the change of achieving your aims. In broad terms, the process will include:

- **Pre-market engagement:** early discussions and engagement with the market which often happens before a formal process has started. A chance for you to share your thinking with suppliers and get their input into whether what you are planning is achievable. Talk to procurement colleagues about how you run this element as it needs to support the formal process and suppliers are likely to ask information about any potential procurement.
- **Market engagement:** building on any pre-market engagement, a more formal phase of briefing the market on your plans and signalling a forthcoming procurement. The market will probably want more detail at this stage – but it is still a chance to shape your plans in response to any issues or opportunities raised by providers.
- **Procurement start:** issuing of formal bid documents and the beginning of the formal phase of the process. What follows will depend on the type of procurement process you have decided to pursue.

7. Social Value

All councils are required by law to consider how they can achieve additional social value as part of any procurement for services. Social value covers a range of themes which includes local economic development, environmental sustainability, and community development. It is likely that your council will have a defined framework for you locally that reflects the needs and priorities for your area; they may have standard rules and tools about how social value features in procurements. Engage with them and get their advice early to make sure you are appropriately considering social value to contribute added value for your project.

Top Tip: The LGA has developed a social value calculator tool with councils which can be accessed [here](#) along with other tools and information about social value.

8. User / partner participation

Consider before you begin your procurement how you want to involve users, frontline staff and partners in the procurement process. If you want partners to use the service and possibly contribute to funding then it will be important that they are involved throughout. Service users can be meaningfully involved in a range of ways – but it is important to give them the support they might need to do this well.

Top Tip: You may wish to use case studies to test provider solutions and ask service users to help assess these, or ask providers to present their solutions to a user panel.

9. Eligibility, funding and private pay

Cohorting your potential customers/service users is a crucial early process. You may wish to phase the prioritisation of your cohorts too, as the service delivery scales up and culture change work is phased in order to create more trust, appetite and demand for care technology. Consider upfront what your eligibility criteria will be for care technology. Will it be free to all or only to those eligible for social care funding? Will there be a chargeable element? Do you want to stimulate a private pay market locally? Will you fund care technology to support carers or as part of your prevention offer?

This will be important for your financial modelling and for the operating model. It will also be important for the provider to consider the wider commercial opportunity working with you could offer.

10. Communications

Many stakeholders, internally and externally, will want to be kept up to date with your plans and progress. Providing regular updates will be key to building confidence and engaging people for the long term – getting them excited and ready for when the service goes live. It can also make the difference in attracting bidders whose ambitions are aligned with yours.

Good luck!

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