The Better Purchasing Framework for Advanced Cloud-based Telephony

Buyer's Guide

January 2023

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Designed for practices, Primary Care Networks and Integrated Care Systems, the purpose of this guide is to describe in simple terms what the Better Purchasing Framework is, how to use it, and how advanced cloud-based telephony solutions will benefit practices and patients.

Here to help

The Better Purchasing Framework has been constructed to give significant emphasis to ensuring practices have access to a comprehensive, wrap-around specialist commercial and procurement advice and support.

This guide contains an introduction to the breadth of support available to you via the NHS England National Commercial and Procurement Hub (The Hub), including how to access it.

To find out more about the Better Purchasing Framework for Advanced Cloud-based Telephony, and the wider work of the Advanced Cloud-based Telephony programme, please contact the NHS England National Commercial and Procurement Hub team at commercial.procurementhub@nhs.net.

ABOUT THE BETTER PURCHASING FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCED CLOUD-BASED TELEPHONY

Telephony is an essential and critical component of a general practice's ability to deliver its contracted service to patients. It is a public facing function affecting patient experience and practice efficiency and has a key role in business continuity, practice resilience and patient safety. The localised nature of GP telephony has in many cases meant that practice telephony systems have not kept pace with the practice clinical systems in terms of digital systems innovation.

Legacy systems may not offer the capacity or flexibility to service high and peak patient demands. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic this was recognised as a challenge for practices. The demands arising from and the response to the Covid-19 pandemic across general practice including dramatic increase in home working and telephone consultations further highlighted the limitations in many legacy practice telephone systems.

We are fast approaching the point at which the current analogue telephone network will be fully decommissioned, with British Telecom (BT) working to move all customers from the analogue public switched telephone network (PSTN) to a fully digital network by 2025. This will affect all business and home telephony in the UK. Further information on the UK's PSTN network switch off can be found here: https://help.business.bt.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/55133/c/5127

Telephony systems supporting general practices are now available which are IP (Internet Protocol) technology based, cloud hosted and integrate with the general practice clinical systems.

IP: converts calls into digital data to transport over the internet, rather than via dedicated phone lines.

Cloud hosted: your phone system is hosted and supported offsite, making it more efficient, reliable, resilient, flexible, and secure.

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IP-based telephony systems can deliver benefits such as:

For practices:

- support practice resilience and flexibility including remote working, home working, hub working and alternative locations (i.e. for business continuity response)

- support the practice to manage large workload and demand including growth in telephone consultations

For patients:

- improve patient experience and access e.g. with automated attendant and IVR routing of calls to the most appropriate service

- reduce call waiting times and improve patient experience

- support continuity of care for patients e.g. with automated redirection of incoming calls to hubs, alternative locations and out of hours sites

IVR: Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) allows callers to provide information (spoken or entered using their telephone keypad) which is then used to route their call. This includes the ability to route callers to pre-recorded messages.

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For the NHS family:

- provide a foundation for the ongoing integration of primary and social care

- secure good overall value for money

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- support local and national planning with better information on telephony-based patient interactions

- drive convergence of GP telephony and general IT / digital services ensuring that general practice can benefit from the latest and most innovative technologies
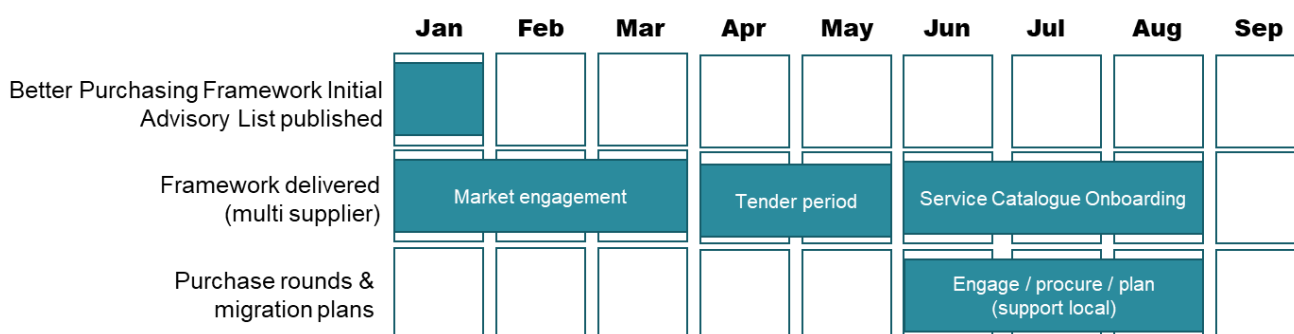
Annex A further lists some of the strategic and operational benefits which practices may expect from moving to an advanced telephony solution.

MAKING IT EASIER FOR YOU TO BUY THE RIGHT PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

There is a critical need to modernise telephony systems in primary care to ensure capacity, robustness, resilience and ultimately improved access to general practice for patients. Telephony systems with advanced features are essential to help practices manage high and peak demands, support resilience and flexible working, and improve patient experience.

A national approach to enable GP practices to procure a solution is time critical. To support this, the Better Purchasing Framework for Advanced Cloud-based Telephony has been developed. This enables practices to purchase from a list of suppliers who have been through early assurance with the added benefit of a wrap-around support offer from the NHS England National Commercial and Procurement Hub.

Later this year, a new Cloud Telephony Framework will be launched under the NHS Digital Care Services Catalogue. This will set the standard for telephony services in primary care. The new framework is being planned for implementation before the end of the first quarter of financial year 2023 to 2024.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Better Purchasing Framework Initial Advisory List published	■								
Framework delivered (multi supplier)	Market engagement			Tender period		Service Catalogue Onboarding			
Purchase rounds & migration plans						Engage / procure / plan (support local)			

The benefits of buying from the Better Purchasing Framework are significant, including:

Making it easier to buy

- demonstration videos and brochures to help you find the right product

- ability to direct award to your chosen supplier (under a certain financial threshold)

- comprehensive support from the Hub at every stage of the process, from exploring your needs through to managing and maintaining effective

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relationships with your chosen supplier

Increased confidence

- a choice of solutions that comply with the Digital Care Services Catalogue Agreement

- easier transition to the incoming Cloud Telephony Framework through pre-agreed contract novation processes for qualifying suppliers

- you will be purchasing from suppliers who have committed to meeting the expectations and behaviours defined within the Commercial Standard

- should you find, in the future, that the product or supplier is no longer meeting your needs, the framework makes it easier to address issues, and should you need to, change suppliers

Provide better value for money

- using the collective buying power of the NHS to negotiate lower product costs on behalf of general practice

- support from the Hub when negotiating exit costs from current solution providers

- reducing time and effort by making purchasing the right solution as straightforward as possible through specialist support & advice and simplified procurement processes

Key dates

January 2023: Better Purchasing Framework available to allow practices to purchase from suppliers on the list

End of Quarter 1 FY 2023/2024: new Cloud-based Telephony Framework available on Digital Care Services Catalogue

WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

The Better Purchasing Framework has been constructed to give significant emphasis to ensuring practices have access to a comprehensive, wrap-around, specialist commercial and procurement advice and support offer.

Figure 1.0: The Better Buying Framework wrap-around support offer

The NHS England National Commercial and Procurement Hub will provide practices with support, information, advice and guidance at each step of the way, from understanding the requirements through to purchasing the right solution and managing and maintaining good relationships with their chosen supplier. The Hub offer extends well beyond the steps required to establishing your advanced telephony contract:

Keeping things simple

The Hub can help you complete the things you need to do using our range of tried and tested tools and techniques, templates and resources (including video guides).

Keeping you informed

The Hub will provide practices with further information in the form of easy-to-digest briefing sheets describing:

- more about the Better Purchasing Framework (BPF)

- the benefits of advanced telephony, and using the BPF

Keeping you on the right track and keeping you safe

Your Hub lead will work closely with your designated local lead to ensure you are making good progress against your local plan. This will include working with you to ensure your plan contains all of the actions and outputs that will ensure the right solution to meet your needs whilst achieving value for money.

Reviewing suppliers

Through its work at both national level and supporting specific projects within ICB regions, the Hub is continuously gathering insight and intelligence into the market. This includes:

- intelligence and descriptions of the standards and capabilities each supplier meets

- market changes

- information about supplier products and developments

- supplier market share

- supplier experiences of working with the NHS

■ what is interesting and exciting to suppliers, and what are they finding challenging

Sometimes things may not be going as you would like. You may be experiencing a contractual performance issue and need help resolving this with your supplier or want advice on how to exit a contract. The Hub can also act on your behalf to investigate and resolve issues with supplier and support any exit negotiations.

When you just need a little more support or advice

There may be times when you need more support, for example: you may be considering a change such as consolidation of systems within a PCN.

Whatever the circumstance, the Hub is on hand to offer expert advice, guidance and support.

WHAT NEXT

To help you kickstart your plan, please consider the following actions:

- speak to your current supplier and ask for a copy of your contract if you don't already have a copy

- check your contract expiry dates – remember, if you don't act in time, you may be automatically tied into a lengthy contract extension

- review the list of things to do below

- engage with your ICB as early as possible

- contact the Hub for support and advice

Don't forget - the Hub are on hand to support you in understanding what is required next, and to help you in planning your procurement, and taking your next steps.

A draft Advanced Cloud-Based Telephony Specification Commissioning Support Pack is available from NHS England that describes the actions you should consider as you develop thinking about your requirements and develop the specification you will use to purchase the cloud-based telephony solution that is right for you. This document can be found here: http://www.england.nhs.uk/digitaltechnology/digital-primary-care/gp-digital-services-operating-model-21-23/appendix-f/

When planning their procurement, practices should undertake a Discovery exercise to understand:

What is currently in place, and where:

- ☐ Understand existing practice telephony provision e.g. local PBX based, local VOIP

- ☐ All existing extensions, external lines and numbers, including what they are used for

- ☐ What volumes of calls are existing numbers meeting, and what numbers are unused

- ☐ Existing sources of stored patient identifiable information such as call recordings or call logs, considering if this data needs to be retained

- ☐ Single purpose / dedicated lines

- ☐ Any third-party products have been integrated with your current telephony solution

- ☐ Branch sites and other locations where access to telephony might be required

- ☐ If the current system is shared with or used by any other parties

- ☐ Current mobile telephony usage and contracts

- ☐ How many staff currently work from home or remotely

- ☐ Where fixed handsets are needed and where software based phone applications (softphone) is installed on a device such as a PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone

- ☐ Assess existing connections and available bandwidth to determine suitability to be used by VOIP, requesting support from the ICB as necessary

- ☐ Determine with the ICB how local IT infrastructure (e.g. networks) may be accessed and utilised

Future change:

- ☐ Expected organisational and service model development expected locally in the future

Existing contracts:

- ☐ Examine existing contract and opportunities and exit terms including notice periods and costs

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HOW TO CONTACT THE NHS ENGLAND NATIONAL COMMERCIAL AND PROCUREMENT HUB

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Annex A – Benefits and Outcomes

Existing / legacy system scenarios and limitations	Advanced Telephony Enabling Functions	Benefit or Outcome
Incoming and outgoing lines are limited to the fixed service delivered to the practice premises and the capacity of the local PBX and onsite infrastructure.	Incoming and outgoing lines are dynamically drawn from cloud pool so that a lack of in/out line availability does not occur. Patients are automatically offered alternative services when contacting primary care out of hours or when "line busy", ensuring patients receive timely attention. Cloud-based VOIP telephony will be "service" based (not equipment based) and will be readily scalable (up or down).	Support major increase in telephony consultations. Practice able to handle peaks in demand. Improved patient experience. Meet needs of organisational change including growth, collaborations, mergers, splits and closures.
Redirection of incoming calls for out of hours / extended hours may be very limited functionality or at worst based on a pre-recorded voicemail redirection message.	Automated (programmed) or manual direction of incoming calls to hubs, alternative locations, out of hours sites etc Use of automated attendant and IVR to route calls based on need and availability.	Better and safer patient experience. Reduced (clinical) risk, especially out of hours.
Expensive to maintain, upgrade (capital) and operate (line rental and call charges).	Outgoing calls cheaper at scale tariff – may be built into fixed service charge. Internal calls (on-net) should be at no cost.	Significant savings on operating costs expected even with increased activity.
Legacy PBX analogue systems may not be well supported or not supported by future development work i.e. a "burning platform"	Cloud based VOIP will be centrally maintained and should expect investment in support and development in line with the scale of use.	Security for practices and supporting business continuity.
Reporting capabilities very limited. No understanding of failed or abandoned access.	Reporting outputs from the telephony solution to better understand demand patterns, system capacity and expected patient behaviour.	Better practice resource planning. Improved patient experience. Comply with national reporting as it develops.
Premises based telephony means practices within the same PCN and even branches of same practice cannot benefit from using the same telephony system.	Automated and manual redirection to staff, teams and practices anywhere within the group (PCN). Single Directory. No cost easy conference calls for teams.	Improve efficiency with easy access to all staff and teams. Improved patient experience.

Existing / legacy system scenarios and limitations	Advanced Telephony Enabling Functions	Benefit or Outcome
Legacy systems may only be readily accessed within the practice.	Access from locations outside the practice i.e. mobile, community and home.	More efficient use of estates future as practice staff able to work from a range of locations. Reduce travel time for staff. Improve staff recruitment and retention with flexible working capability.
Local practice premises hosted telephony infrastructure (lines and PBX) creates critical dependency on the premises remaining operationally viable. At risk from floods, fire and access incidents.	Telephony services (and clinical system) not dependant on presence of infrastructure hosted within general practice premises. Access from locations outside the practice i.e. mobile, community and home	Can offer a cornerstone for business continuity plans and practice resilience.
No integrations with practice OC and VC systems.	Integrate with practice OC and VC systems.	Practice efficiency improvements. Improved patient experience.
No standard facility or integration to support peer-to-peer VC and collaboration activities. Where this happens usually needs separate technology.	Integrate with MS Teams for peer-to-peer VC and collaboration activities such as case conferences.	Improved quality of care. Better clinical risk management. Reduce travel time for staff.
No integration with practice clinical system.	Cloud-based telephony to clinical system integration.	Practice efficiencies. Time saving for clinical staff e.g. one click dial up. Supports telephone consultations. Improved patient experience.
Integration with practice clinical system based on locally installed middleware applications which require interface to local infrastructure with complexity and security challenges.	Opportunities for more advanced telephony to clinical system integration benefitting from at scale deployment and centralised interfaces.	No local management overhead. More efficiencies but also quality and data improvements.