

National Ambulance Uniform framework: review and retender

A major project is under way to retender the National Ambulance Uniform framework. NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services is working closely with end users to create a contract that provides fit for purpose items while ensuring value for money.

The current National Ambulance Uniform framework was established in 2015 and was created in collaboration between NHS Commercial Alliance, the National Ambulance Procurement Board, and the National User Group.

The creation of the Procurement Transformation Programme saw the award of NHS North of England Commercial Procurement Collaborative (NOE CPC) as the Category Tower Service Provider for NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services and as part of these changes the Supply of National Ambulance Uniforms and Workwear Framework was moved into the Category Tower. Kevin Chidlow, Category Tower Director for NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services, said, "Our new contract will build on the great work done by NHS Commercial Alliance and we will continue to consult with partners to ensure the range of items meet the needs of our frontline paramedics."

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NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services intends to build on the success of the existing framework, while bringing the uniforms up to date to meet the needs of the modern-day ambulance service. The current framework is due to expire in September 2021. New discussions with the National User Group have started to see what has changed in the last five years, if there are any new

requirements, and what the core essential products should be.

The goal is to implement a uniform range that is fit for purpose, comfortable to wear and incorporates all the safety features needed, while ensuring that value for money is maintained and, where possible, ambulance trusts are able to achieve a saving.

Increased flexibility

Kevin added, "Our paramedics are at the forefront of our NHS; these last few months have highlighted the vital importance of ensuring our frontline workers have the necessary items to carry out their work effectively and safely. By working closely with key stakeholders throughout this process, we can establish a contract that ambulance trusts can have confidence in. Our working relationship with the National User Group will help us to take on board the views of end users, enabling their input to form part of the final products."

The first engagement sessions with the end users involved an in-depth review of the current range of products, which includes: high visibility jacket, high visibility tabard, softshell, operational shirt, trousers, belts, and non-core garments, eg polo shirts. Some key themes and requirements were identified and are being discussed further, for example requests for additional belt loops and the use of a fabric with better mechanical stretch for increased garment flexibility.

At this point of the process further changes will be discussed and the final specification is yet to be agreed. Further discussions are also needed to determine the full potential for development within this framework and collaboration with the National User Group, ambulance trust procurement professionals and suppliers will continue. The tender opportunity is due to be published in the first quarter of 2021, with the view to award the framework by the end of next year.



Working together

Chair of the current National Ambulance Uniform User Group, Mark Ainsworth, Director of Operations for South Central Ambulance Service NHSFT, said, "The National Uniform User Group is a mixture of staff, union leads and procurement leads and the group are working together to develop a specification that meets the needs of the end users. Having staff involved with designing the specification is key to an effective and seamless implementation. Staff need to be assured that the uniform meets their needs, is compliant with any legislative requirements and will conform to all infection and prevention requirements. We would encourage any staff who would like to contribute to speak with their trust representative on the national group."

Alongside the National Ambulance Uniform framework, NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services is working on a similar project with key stakeholders to establish the scope and specification of a National Healthcare Uniform (those worn by clinical staff such as care assistants, nurses and allied health professionals). This project will be running simultaneously, but independently of the Ambulance Uniform Project and is expected to run to similar timescales.

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