

## Record of operational decision

<b>Decision title:</b>	To approve transferring the Integrated Community Equipment Service (ICES) to an in-house service, operated by Hoople Ltd
<b>Date of decision:</b>	18 July 2025 (updated 9 October 2025)
<b>Decision maker:</b>	Paul Walker (Chief Executive)
<b>Authority for delegated decision:</b>	<p>Under Part 4 Section 2 (4.2.52) special urgency of Herefordshire Council's Constitution:</p> <p>If because of the date by which a decision must be taken, paragraph 4.2.49-51 (general exception) cannot be followed, then the decision can only be taken if the decision maker (if an individual) or the chairperson of the body making the decision, has obtained the agreement of:</p> <p>(a) the chairperson of the relevant scrutiny committee; or</p> <p>(b) if there is no chairperson of the relevant scrutiny committee or in his / her absence, the chairperson of the council, or</p> <p>(c) in the absence of the chairperson of the relevant scrutiny committee or the chairperson of the council, the vice-chairperson of the council</p> <p>that the making of the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred.</p>
<b>Ward:</b>	Countywide
<b>Consultation:</b>	<p>The following internal representatives / teams and external organisations have been engaged with as part of this emergency process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader of the Council</li> <li>• Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Chairperson Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee</li> <li>• Corporate Director Community Wellbeing</li> <li>• All Age Commissioning Team</li> <li>• Legal Team</li> <li>• Procurement Team</li> <li>• Finance Team</li>   <li>• Hoople Ltd</li> <li>• NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB)</li> <li>• Wye Valley (NHS) Trust</li> <li>• Directors of Adult Social Care Services (ADASS)</li> <li>• Local Government Association (LGA)</li> </ul>
<b>Decision made:</b>	<p>To transfer Herefordshire's Integrated Community Equipment Service (ICES) from an external provider to an in-house service, operated by Hoople Ltd.</p> <p>This is in the event that the current external provider, NRS Healthcare, is</p>

	<p>unable to continue delivering the service on behalf of the council and ICB.</p> <p>The service will be delivered by Hoople Ltd for an initial period until 31 March 2027, with the option to extend for further periods up to 31 March 2030, subject to service performance and budget availability.</p> <p>The contract value is £1.822 million per year.</p>
<b>Reasons for decision:</b>	<p>The Integrated Community Equipment Service is a joint contract between Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and both organisations have a statutory duty to provide community equipment, as set out in the Care Act 2014 and Children and Families Act 2014.</p> <p>The council and ICB have been advised by the current ICES provider, NRS Healthcare, that it is experiencing significant financial challenges, which will impact on its viability to continue delivering its services both in Herefordshire and across the UK beyond July 2025.</p> <p>The council and ICB have considered different service options and developed an emergency contingency plan, in the event this occurs, to ensure service continuity both now and in the future for Herefordshire's residents.</p> <p>The transfer of the service in-house, operated by Hoople Ltd, which is a Teckal company of Herefordshire Council, will provide service stability and flexibility to ensure the council and ICB continue to observe their statutory duties and provide community equipment to meet the assessed eligible health and social care needs of people of all ages in Herefordshire.</p>
<b>Equality considerations:</b>	<p>Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:</p> <p>A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act</li> <li>b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it</li> <li>c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.</li> </ul> <p>The provision of this service will have no negative impact on any group with a protected characteristic. The service is available to anyone with an assessed eligible health or social care need, in order to maintain users' safety and independence. Therefore, it positively helps to advance equality of opportunity between different groups.</p>
<b>Highlight any associated risks / finance / legal / equality considerations:</b>	<p>There are minimal associated risks with transferring ICES to an in-house service with Hoople Ltd, as not only does the organisation deliver care related services through Hoople Care, it is also subject to Teckal Exemption.</p>

	The Commissioning Manager sought advice and guidance from the council's Legal and Procurement Teams prior to recommending the service change.
<b>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</b>	<p><b>Do nothing:</b></p> <p>This option is not recommended, especially as the current provider has indicated it may not be able to continue providing the service in Herefordshire beyond July 2025. The council and ICB have a statutory obligation to provide community equipment for those with an assessed eligible health or social care need. The service also forms a crucial part of the council's prevention agenda, as it helps keep residents safe and independent in their own homes and communities for longer, delaying the need for more formal health and / or social care interventions.</p> <p><b>Direct award to another national provider:</b></p> <p>This option is not recommended. The national market for community equipment providers is limited to three main providers (Medequip, Millbrook Healthcare and NRS Healthcare) with NRS Healthcare currently contracting with over 40 councils / ICB's across the UK.</p> <p>Given the small number of providers in the market and the real likelihood that a large number of councils / ICB's, currently contracting with NRS, will transfer to the other two providers, there are concerns about their ability to take on multiple new contracts in a short time period. The council is not prepared to accept the potential risk of destabilising service delivery for residents in Herefordshire.</p> <p><b>Run the service in partnership with another council:</b></p> <p>This option was investigated, but is not recommended at this time. Following emergency meetings with neighbouring councils, it has been confirmed that this cannot be achieved in the short or medium term, particularly where there are operational service differences or where an external provider is contracted.</p>
<b>Details of any declarations of interest made:</b>	None.

Signed: Paul Walker

Date: 18 July 2025 and 9 October 2025

This record of operational decision was updated on 9 October 2025 to include the contract value.