

A brief guide to online meeting services for the NHS

Key points:

Online meeting services save travelling time, reduces costs and carbon emissions.

They can be used for clinician to patient consultations, multi-disciplinary team meetings and office meetings.

Meetings are shorter, more focused and productive.

There are services which are available on a pay-as-you-go basis, without the need for tendering and with no contractual tie in.

You must consider Information Governance. The security of patient details is paramount. Guidance is available to help you with this.

What are online meeting services?

Online meeting services allow people, regardless of their location, to come together virtually, without the need to be in the same room.

There are three types of online meeting services currently available:

- **Audio:** this can be accessed from anywhere using a mobile or desk telephone. This type of service is good for ad-hoc meetings to discuss a single topic, or regular team meetings.
- **Web conferencing:** can be accessed from laptops and desktop computers. Audio only content can be accessed via a telephone.
- **Video conferencing:** typically accessed from fixed locations, e.g. designated meeting

The QIPP Digital Technology procurement guide shows how NHS organisations can now purchase online meeting services with zero initial outlay, no minimum contract term and pay as you go billing. This significantly lowers the barrier to entry and purchasing risks.

Why should I be using online meeting services?

Online meeting services can deliver significant cost reductions and personal productivity improvements, for both clinical and administrative roles. It is seen as enabling channel shift in care, particularly for long term condition patients, from in-person to virtual online consultations.

Patients, community care professionals and clinicians can quickly meet to discuss on-going treatment and care. By removing the need to travel clinicians can hold more consultations and patients can remain at home. It is easier to share information across carers in a single meeting.

Who's using online meeting services, and have they seen any benefits?

NHS Derbyshire

A case study of audio conferencing at NHS Derbyshire showed cash-releasing savings of over £92 per person for each meeting.

This equates to an annualised saving of £115,000 at current usage levels, which are expected to increase. Non cash-releasing benefits, in terms of more focused and productive meetings, have also been realised including avoiding 3,000 lost hours due to travel and 20 tonnes of carbon emissions.

A spokesperson from NHS Derbyshire explains, "Ours is a large county and our staff spend a lot of time travelling – collectively over five million miles each year. Much of that's essential, visiting patients in their homes for example, but many other trips such as for internal meetings could be avoided."

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For clinician to patient online consultations, there is a need to consider clinical safety and professional indemnity.

North East SHA report cash-releasing savings of £1,785 have been made by switching a regular face-to-face meeting to a web based online meeting. This will lead to annualised savings of over £21,000 for that meeting alone.

When considering which online meeting option to select, an NHS organisation must consider a number of factors including current utilisation and expected future growth.

“The attraction of BT MeetMe became immediately clear. There was no financial outlay, we would only pay when we used the service, and the benefits in terms of efficiency and travel savings were well evidenced.”

Key questions

Q: Will I need to run a procurement or tendering exercise to start using an online meeting service?

A: No. There are existing arrangements in place through a cross Government cabinet office agreement.

Q: Where can I find out more details on existing services?

A: You can read the procurement guide on [NHS Networks](#).

Q: What is the typical cost of running an online meeting?

A: If a typical meeting runs for one hour and has 10 people dialling in to an 0800 number for an audio only conference the cost would be in the region of £1.68 per person.

Q: If I am planning to use the meeting service for a multi-disciplinary team, what do I need to do about Information Governance (IG)?

A: Use existing team meeting guidance as a base for creating local processes. You can also refer to the IG guide on [NHS Networks](#).

Q: If I am planning to use the meeting service for online consultations with patients what do I need to do about Information Governance and clinical safety?

A: Again use existing local process as a starting point and the IG guide, referenced in the answer above, for additional information.

To find out more visit www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/qipp or email qippdt@nhs.net

You can also find us by searching for 'QIPP Digital Technology' on NHS Networks and LinkedIn.

