



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Accessibility Notification App

16 June 2022

Reference: SPCB (2022) Paper 40

Executive summary

1. The SPCB previously approved funding from the Disability Allowance for the pilot of the WelcoME App by one Member and requested further investigation into assistance application options available to local offices. This paper describes market research undertaken and invites the SPCB to discuss and agree whether it wishes to pursue a centralised procurement or alternative conditions for future applications of a similar nature.

Issues and options

2. There are many apps designed to make life for people with disabilities more accessible, all with different capabilities and meeting different needs. Market research suggests that at present there appears to be few smartphone-based application solutions that enable venues to tailor their welcoming assistance to support the needs of their disabled visitors. **Annex A** provides examples of applications researched that can be used in a venue setting.
3. The SPCB currently uses WelcoME at Holyrood. This is a cloud-based disability aware customer service solution that combines user communication and practical guidance to front line staff to help them prepare to meet visitors' accessibility needs. Venues use the tool to advertise their business on the system and to explain any accessibility aspects of the venue and the assistance its staff can provide. The app (downloadable on iOS or androids) enables disabled visitors to set up a basic profile and connect with the venue and plan personalised assistance in advance of arrival. The system alerts the business when the visitor is due to arrive, gives an overview of the disability the visitor has (28 different disabilities are currently supported by WelcoME), provides links to information about the specific disability and advises on how to prepare and amend their welcoming style to best meet the customer's needs. Direct

web chat can be established that improves relationship between the venue and the visitor and ensures any changes to requirements or issues are captured.

4. Should Members wish to procure an assistance app to make their local office more accessible, there are two ways in which this could be done

Option 1 - A centralised SPCB umbrella contract

4.1 The current contract for the Holyrood site is due to expire on 28 February 2023 and a low value procurement exercise scheduled to re-let the requirement. This is therefore an opportune time to consider whether awarding an umbrella contract would deliver wider benefits. The contract would be negotiated for 5 years or more, with annual break points to enable the SPCB to terminate it early should it wish to. The contract would be subject to public procurement regulations and advertised as a Regulated procurement at the higher value threshold to avoid early termination should that level be reached before the end of the contract period. Should market research have missed accessibility notification apps that facilitate assistance to visitors with disabilities, the app providers would have the opportunity to put forward their solution. Bids would be evaluated and the contract awarded to the best value for money bid, combining service offer and pricing.

4.2 Benefits:

- Whilst all local offices would have access to the contract, there is no obligation to call from it;
- Straight forward process for Members to sign on to the contract - this would be done via a simple agreement;
- Checks undertaken to provide assurance that winning app provider is compliant with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act and has sufficient cyber security controls in place;
- Contract terms agreed with the app provider that apply to all contract's users;
- Management information available to the SPCB to assess visitors' usage;
- Contract centrally managed by officials and costs allocated to the disability provision for each Member.

4.3 Value for money could be derived from undertaking a competitive procurement at scale. Our research shows that should the WelcoME tool win the competition, incremental financial savings would derive from the number of local offices signing up to the solution (**Annex B** provides a breakdown of costs and estimated savings of the WelcoME supplier as an illustrative example). The Allowances Office has received 3 requests that are pending SPCB consideration of this paper and we are aware that there is further

interest in adopting an app from other Members who have as yet not approached the Allowances Office. Whilst we are unable at this stage to establish the full scale of interest from Members, take up is likely to rise as additional Members become aware of the tool.

- 4.4 A full tender exercise will require time input from Procurement Services over a 6-month period. To free up the necessary staffing resources to take on this higher value procurement and deliver the contract by January 2023, another requirement would need to be pushed back. This is being explored and should the SPCB wish us to proceed we are hopeful that agreement can be reached in this respect without detrimental impacts.
- 4.5 Should we be unable to secure early resources, we would be looking to award a contract by summer 2024. If the SPCB was content to allow individual Members to enter into direct agreements until such time as an umbrella contract is set up, we would recommend that those individual agreements were time limited to no more than 2 years and that Members are encouraged to join the contract when their individual agreement comes to an end, maximising any volume discounts and other benefits offered by a centralised contract.

Option 2 - Members enter into individual direct agreement with WelcoME or another app provider for their local office

- 4.6 Members would be responsible for negotiating and checking their contract agreement with the app provider. In particular, it would be the responsibility of Members to satisfy themselves that the app provider complies with data protection law and has cyber security controls in place. Members would be responsible for managing their own contract with the supplier and submitting claims/invoices for the costs.
 - 4.7 A key disadvantage of individual contracts would be cost as there would likely be no opportunity for volume discounts.
5. Either of these procurement routes could be funded, with SPCB approval, through the Disability Provision within the Members' Expenses Scheme and would enable Members to make constituents aware of the accessibility of their local office and services and to interact with and understand the needs of disabled constituents in accessing their local office and using their services.

Governance

- 6. The Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme provides for Members meeting the cost of improving the accessibility of their local

office and services through the Disability Provision. The Scheme requires Members' local offices to be accessible or be able to be made accessible.

7. We would recommend that, if content, the SPCB agree in principle to the one off and annual costs of an app being met from the disability provision for those Members interested. Any funding applications, either as part of a central contract or individual contracts, will be delegated to the Head of Allowances to administer.
8. One element we will need to explore further is that when calling off from the umbrella contract, operational data management (including personal data) remains the responsibility of the individual Members and their staff, to reflect the existing separation between Members and the SPCB.

Resource implications

9. The one off and annual costs of providing this service could be met within the overall Members' Cost budget for 2022-23 and ongoing needs would be considered in any future budget submissions as necessary.
10. Resources from Procurement Services would be required to deliver a centralised SPCB contract. Whilst we are fully committed at present, we will know by the end of June whether we can free up the necessary resources to deliver a contract by January 2023. Should we be unable to secure resources to this timeframe, then the procurement can be input to our resource planner and future resourcing allocated, for a contract award by summer 2024. Low level contract management is expected and engagement would be carried out in due course to agree the office best placed to deliver this.

Publication Scheme

11. This paper, except the Annexes that contain commercial information, can be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

Decision

12. The SPCB is invited to:
 - Note the current market position and discuss the options.
 - Consider whether it wishes to instruct the competitive tendering of a centralised contract. To be awarded January 2023 if resources can be secured, otherwise by summer 2024.
 - In the absence of a centralised contract, to agree that in order to qualify for funding under the disability provision, individual direct agreements should be limited to up to two years duration.

- Whether option 1 or 2 is chosen, agree in principle that annual costs for signing up to an app for the purpose detailed in the paper can be met from the disability provision for those Members interested.
- Agree that the administration of any applications for funding through the Scheme be delegated to the Head of Allowances to action.

Procurement Services Office

June 2022