

# Printer procurement leads to lower costs

**All hospitals seek to minimise administrative costs, but the NHS is far from paperless – and printing costs are significant enough to deserve proper scrutiny. Steven Bliss describes how one NHS trust saved 30% on its printing costs**

The *NHS efficiency map* is designed to help trusts to achieve their savings plans and to manage their services better. One topic covered (improvement area 11) is procurement and non-pay. Printing costs are part of that. Although they are usually a small part of any one department's budget, when looked at across a whole trust, they offer scope for significant savings.

Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust is a medium-sized acute hospital trust, with a total income in 2016/17 of almost £300m. It employs about 3,500 staff and serves a population of more than half a million people.

Like other hospitals, it has ambitious savings targets and wants to achieve them whilst providing the best possible patient care.

The trust was spending about £450,000 a year on printing and faxes. Machines were purchased or rented in an ad hoc manner from many suppliers, with little central oversight.

As most machines were different

(there were 160 different models in use), they required a range of different toner cartridges, with each department holding its own small stock.

The costs of printing were small for any single department, but trust-wide they were large enough to give scope for savings. There was also scope to save on maintenance costs, and wasted time, by using up-to-date equipment throughout the trust.

The aim of the project was to replace all existing equipment and services with a single trust-wide managed service, paid for at a price per printed sheet. This would provide a cheaper and a better service.

## Implementation

Implementation of the project took six months. It was not a particularly difficult procurement exercise, as there were several companies capable of providing the sort of service needed.

The choice of supplier was, as always, based on quality and cost. The preferred



supplier was chosen largely because it offered a much wider range of machines to suit each department's needs.

It was also prepared to provide more machines in total than any other supplier (although not as many as the trust had held before), and this made implementation easier.

The supplier did most of the implementation work, with strong oversight and support from the trust's procurement team. The machines were easy to use, so staff got used to them quickly, and the implementation process was handled well. This has helped staff to cope with the change – they find it a better service than before, and say so.

### Savings and other benefits

The target was for a 25% saving (more than £100,000 a year). Actual savings in the first three months were 30%, and there is no reason why this should not be maintained.

The contract follows the trust's preferred model, with no provision for inflation increases and with volume metrics that incentivise efficiency.

The non-financial benefits were at least as important, with the most significant ones being:

- Much easier and more flexible printing – any computer has access to any printer on site. This makes the IT aspects much easier too
- A much quicker service when machines need repair, and hence a saving in both staff time and inconvenience
- The provision of scanning at all machines, which means faxes are hardly ever needed. This also



allowed the trust to roll out a trust-wide electronic system for processing travel claims

- Better quality printers for less money
- Automatic deletion of prints that are not collected within 24 hours
- Automatic reordering of toner cartridges, saving time for the procurement department and other staff
- Better security – the use of ID cards to collect the print means that prints are not left on machines
- Better use of staff time, giving them

more time to spend with patients

- A benefit for the wider environment – less paper used and a lower carbon footprint.

### Learning points

The trust has identified five key learning points from the project:

- It is crucial to get the implementation right. By making the right decisions, notably on the right number of machines, the concerns of staff were dealt with at the very start of the process. This set the tone and led to

more enthusiasm from staff when the project was completed.

- The tendering process needs to have something to allow bids to be clearly differentiated. Here, the quality of implementation, and willingness to listen to the concerns of staff, proved more important than the technical specifications of the machines.
- The change does not mean a worse service or loss of control. The strong feeling among all staff is that the present service is a lot better because it saves them time. The machines rarely appear to break down, partly because they are more reliable but also because any maintenance and repair work is done quickly. Time is saved and frustration avoided – real benefits that are less easy to quantify but are important.
- Cost savings that are small for any single department can be released from a trust-wide initiative, and then they become significant. Very few budgets offer scope for a 30% saving, but printing did when it moved to a trust-wide managed service.
- The final point, and a familiar one in managing any change, is that someone in-house has to believe in the change and make sure that it happens. In this case it was the trust's procurement team. ◦

### KEY CONTACT

**Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust**

- Paul Simpson, chief financial officer, [paul.simpson@sash.nhs.uk](mailto:paul.simpson@sash.nhs.uk)