

Kent County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4 December 2025

Prosthetic Limb Service

Report from: Mark Atkinson, Director of Strategic Commissioning and Operational Planning,
NHS Kent and Medway

1. Summary

The Prosthetic Limb Service for Medway, Kent and Southeast London is currently provided by Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust (KMMH) at Medway Maritime Hospital. The service supports around 1,100 people of all ages with limb loss and congenital limb deficiencies. Approximately 70% of people supported by the service live in Kent, with 20% in Medway, and the remainder in southeast London.

In 2023, KMMH served notice on their contract, prompting a competitive procurement process under the Provider Selection Regime. This included a requirement to identify alternative appropriate and future-proofed estate.

An extensive patient, carer, and staff engagement programme was developed with, and supported by, national charities to inform local requirements in the provider selection process, while also supporting the evaluation of bids received.

Hugh Steeper Limited (Steeper) was successfully awarded the contract with plans to begin delivery by the end of 2025. An update on the mobilisation of the new contract was provided to the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee in August 2025. At this stage, however, the provider had not confirmed the location of the new service, and the assessment of substantial variation could not be fully completed.

The location of the service has now been confirmed. A site has been secured in Maidstone town centre (ME14 2UU) meaning the service remains within the NHS Kent and Medway ICB geography. This site move improves access for patients from Kent whilst maintaining the provision for patients from Medway.

Patient, carer, and staff engagement will continue as part of the mobilisation plan. All partners involved have committed to minimising disruption and maintaining high-quality care during the transition.

2. Recommendations



- 2.1. The Committee is asked to note the update on the re-procurement and mobilisation of the Prosthetic Limb Service.
- 2.2. The substantial variation assessment (Appendix 1) has been developed on the basis that the Prosthetic Limb Service will be delivered from a different location. This location remains in Kent and Medway and there will be no other changes to service delivery or clinical models. It has, therefore, been assessed that this does not constitute a substantial variation requiring formal public consultation.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Under the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 the Council may review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision, and operation of the health service in Kent. In carrying out health scrutiny a local authority must invite interested parties to comment and take account of any relevant information available to it, and in particular, relevant information provided to it by a local Healthwatch. The Council has delegated responsibility for discharging this function to this Committee and to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in the Council's Constitution.

4. Prosthetic Limb Service

The Service

- 4.1. The Prosthetics Service is an all-age service that provides support from prenatal diagnosis and advice of limb deficiency through to support for children, adults, and veterans. The service supports around 1,100 people, including approximately 40 children and 38 attributable veterans (patients that are entitled to a higher, enhanced specification limb following approval the National Veterans Prosthetic Panel).
- 4.2. Approximately 70% of patients supported live in Kent, with 70% in Medway, and the remainder in southeast London.
- 4.3. Patients can be referred by consultants, GPs, Allied Health Professionals or self-refer. Once referred, patients are assessed at the clinic, and an individual care plan is discussed and agreed. The service is led by a consultant in Rehabilitation Medicine and offers amputee rehabilitation and prosthetics services, including artificial limbs to amputees and those with congenital limb deficiency and design and manufacture bespoke aids to daily living. This is all currently done locally at the onsite workshop at the DSC.

Commissioning arrangements

- 4.4. The Prosthetic Limb service has historically been commissioned by NHS England South East Regional Specialised Commissioning team, on behalf of the ICBs in the southeast. This is one of 70 specialised services for which Integrated Care Boards assumed commissioning responsibility in April 2025, following delegation from NHS England.
- 4.5. KMMH currently provide the Prosthetics Service, at Medway Maritime Hospital, from the Disablement Services Centre (DSC), originally known as the ALAC, (Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre). This has been located on the Medway Maritime Hospital site since 1964. Following several organisational changes, the DSC became part of Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (now KMMH). The current estate requires significant upgrading to make it fit for purpose.

- 4.6. In 2023, KMMH served notice on their contract. This led to a competitive procurement process under the Provider Selection Regime, managed by the Specialised Commissioning team. The Specialised Commissioning team used the insights from patient, carer, staff and stakeholder engagement to include the local requirements of the service, develop the evaluation criteria, and to help guide in effectively scoring bidders.
- 4.7. On completion of this process Hugh Steeper Limited (Steeper) was awarded the contract for the service, due to commence delivery by the end of 2025.
- 4.8. There are 35 NHS England commissioned prosthetics services in England. These services all deliver to a nationally defined service specification. They order prosthetics via NHS supply chain which ensures quality of products, consistent prices across the NHS, and equal access to the most appropriate prosthesis for patients' specific conditions. There will be no significant change to service offered to patients – this paper is focused on the change to a new provider and the location of this service.

Stakeholder Engagement

- 4.9. In order that the service specification meets local requirements an important element of the procurement process was to hear directly from patients, carers, and staff.
- 4.10. The Specialised Commissioning team worked very closely with patients, the ICB, and the three national charities, LimbPower, Limbless Association and Blesma, who support individuals with limb loss and their carers to together, design a robust engagement strategy. These charities were also formally part of the evaluation panel in the provider selection process, ensuring that the patient voice was carried through.
- 4.11. Blesma, one of these national charities, commented that:
- “Being invited to be part of the engagement process was encouraging as it showed a commitment to seeking views of patients (via charity representation). Having the opportunity to feed into this process has provided some confidence in the process and I hope that this engagement continues as the service develops”
Brian Chenier MBE MIHSCM, Representative from Blesma
- 4.12. The Specialised Commissioning team ran an online survey for all existing patients and carers. The survey ran for a six-week period from 13 September to 28 October 2024 and received 277 responses by the deadline. Based on the size of the mailshot, the response rate was 25.6%.
- 4.13. Recognising the demographic of this group, copies of the survey were printed and posted to all on the patient list, with free-post return envelopes, to encourage responses. So as not to worry patients, the accompanying patient letter made clear that the service would continue at the existing site until a new provider and location for the service were identified.
- 4.14. The aim of the survey was to understand:
- What is important to patients for a good prosthetics service?
 - What did patients like about the current service?
 - What changes would patients like to see in a new service?
 - What is important to patients in a future location / site?
- 4.15. Key themes from this feedback included:
- Located somewhere central to Kent and Medway - people would like the service to be up to an hour's travel time.

- The building needs to be large enough to accommodate a gym, workshop as well as the other clinical requirements.
 - Importance of ground floor location
 - Good parking is important - both blue badge and non-blue badge
 - Patients want a quick turnaround on things like socks and sleeves
 - Onsite repair service
 - A combination of virtual and face to face appointments should be available
 - Patients are contacted for annual review appointments
 - Empathy from all staff
 - Access to clinical, prosthetists, and physio staff in any single appointment
 - Continuity of care, seeing the same healthcare professional, is preferred.
- 4.16. A separate anonymous survey was shared with staff to complete, and the Specialised Commissioning team attended a staff listening event, to ensure all questions could be answered about the process as well as enable us to hear key questions, priorities, and concerns. There was good engagement via both processes, and some staff showed enthusiasm toward the new opportunities that a new provider would bring. Steeper has also visited the existing service to speak with staff and talk through the next steps and way forward.
- 4.17. The final engagement report has been shared with the Steeper to support them with mobilisation. Steeper has committed to ensuring that patient, carer, and staff insights continue to be at the forefront mobilisation the service and in future service provision

Mobilisation of the re-procured service

- 4.18. The prosthetics service has a unique set of requirements in terms of the building, equipment, ventilation, gym, and workshop facilities. A key part of the procurement process was to ensure that the future location of the service provided more appropriate and sustainable estate.
- 4.19. In line with previous discussions with scrutiny committee chairs from Kent and Medway, the service specification also mandated that the service should continue to be delivered from a location within Kent and Medway.
- 4.20. The location of the service has now been confirmed. A site has been secured in Maidstone town centre (ME14 2UU) meaning the service remains within the NHS Kent and Medway ICB geography. This site move improves access for the majority of patients whilst maintaining the provision for patients from Medway.
- 4.21. Steeper has agreed with Medway Foundation Trust that they will commence operations from the existing site and will continue to do so until necessary works have been completed on the new site, ensuring continuity of provision and a planned and safe transition.

Advice and analysis

- 4.22. This background outlined above aims to ensure the Committee is aware and assured of the work carried to date on the re-procurement and mobilisation of the Prosthetic Limb service.
- 4.23. The notice given by the current provider and the need to find sustainable alternative premises for the incoming provider have required action – to ‘do nothing’ was not an option if a service was to be maintained for our patients.
- 4.24. This is not a proposed service reconfiguration, but a change in where the service is delivered from. The new location of the service remains in Kent and Medway within 10 miles from the current location. This site move improves access for patients from Kent (which is approximately 73% of all patients who use the service), while maintaining the provision for patients from Medway.
- 4.25. The new site will enable Steeper to create an improved environment for a service that has a unique set of requirements in terms of the building, equipment, ventilation, gym, and workshop facilities.
- 4.26. The Specialised Commissioning team have undertaken significant engagement to ensure that feedback from patients, carers, and staff, has informed decisions about future service design. Steeper has committed to ensuring that patient, carer, and staff insights continue to be at the forefront mobilisation the service and in future service provision.
- 4.27. Steeper has experience of moving services between estates, and the Specialised Commissioning Team will be monitoring and assuring this process as part of the workplan on behalf of the ICB with the overriding priority to maintain continuity of care while securing a safe, stable and future-ready service model.

5. Risk management

- 5.1. There are no risks for the Council arising from this report. Risks, including any arising from mobilisation of the new service, are managed by the Specialised Commissioning team on behalf of NHS Kent and Medway.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. There are no financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Prosthetic Limb Service SV Assessment

Appendix 2 Steeper presentation