

Document filename:	Requirements Specification for NHS App Services		
Project / Programme	NHS App Programme	Project NHS App	
Document Reference	n/a	Status	Final
Owner	[redacted]	Version	2.0
Author	[redacted]	Version issue date	02/10/2023

NHS App Services - Requirements Specification

Document management

Revision History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
1.0	Mar 2023	Final
1.1	Sept 2023	Updated to include API integration with Electronic Prescriptions Service
2.0	Oct 2023	Taken to version 2.0 for publication

Reviewers*

This document must be reviewed by the following people:

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[redacted]	NHS App Technical Architect	Jan 2022	0.5
[redacted]	NHS D lead Technical Architect	Jan 2022	0.5
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[redacted]	[redacted]	Delivery Director	Mar 2023	1.0
[redacted]	[redacted]	Assistant Director /IAO	October 2023	2.0

Glossary of Terms

Term / Abbreviation	What it stands for
Black box	In computing, a black box is a system which can be viewed in terms of its inputs and outputs (or transfer characteristics), without any knowledge of its internal workings.
CDN	Content Delivery Network
CSOC	Cyber Security Operations Centre
HSCN	Health and Social Care Network
LTP	Long Term Plan
NDC	National Digital Channels
OLC	Online Consultation
PHR	Personal Health Record
WAF	Web Application Firewall
ODS	Organisation Data Service
Patient/User	The term patient and user are used interchangeably and mean that an individual has used the NHS login service and been matched to a record on the Personal Demographic Service

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Purpose of document

This document sets out the requirements for the NHS App Services and should be read alongside the:

- NHS App Directions 2023 (**the Directions**) issued by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which revoked the provisions of the “Health and Social Care Information Centre (Establishment of Information Systems for NHS Services: NHS App Services) Directions 2018” and the NHS Account Messaging and App Push Notifications Service Directions issued by NHS England to the Health and Social Care Information Centre (NHS Digital),¹ which were to be treated as if contained in directions given by the Secretary of State by virtue of Regulation 3(1) and (2) of The Health and Social Care Information Centre (Transfer of Functions, Abolition and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2023; and
- NHS App Technical Specification (**the Technical Specification**).

Introduction

NHS England has been directed by the Secretary of State to deliver a system delivery function defined as ‘NHS App Services’; the Services will provide significant benefits to patients and empower them to take control of their care. The NHS App Services are operating as an IT system, which collects some information for monitoring and auditing purposes, to support commissioners and policy teams by providing anonymous statistical data to help them understand health issues and challenges better, and where reasonably, required to enable the NHS App Services described in paragraph 3 of the NHS App Directions 2023 to be delivered. Additionally, other information may be processed based on an individual’s preference (i.e. cookies).

The NHS App is one of the National Digital Channels (NDC) providing citizen access to ‘public-facing digital health’ services.

To extend the NHS App service to support a wider range of digital tools and services, a review of and change to the directions is needed to support the wider range of delivery. To this end, the Health and Social Care Information Centre (Establishment of Information Systems for NHS Services: NHS App Services Directions 2018 (2018 Directions) (issued by NHS England) have been replaced by the NHS App Directions 2023.

Purpose of the NHS App Services

The purpose of the Directions is to require NHS England to develop and operate the NHS App platform and related services (collectively the NHS App Services). The NHS App Services will support the provision of a system for the NHS, and services which are assessed by the NDC Board² (or its equivalent body in existence at the time) and, where required, by an authorised officer of the Department of Health and Social Care on behalf of the Secretary of State as being beneficial to both health and adult social care services and to the recipients and providers of health and adult social care services provided in England.

¹ NHS England merged with NHS Digital on 1st February 2023 retaining the name NHS England

² National Digital Channels Board – The Board feeds into Governance boards and meets monthly to discuss key points relating to Mission 2 delivery and escalate items requiring management attention.

The data processed by the NHS App Services will be used to:

- give the public access to high quality, efficient and safe digital services with the aim of achieving better health outcomes for individuals and populations;
- make it straightforward and quick for local and regional service providers, commissioners and third parties to interact with other local, regional, and national services;
- deliver a service with consistent quality, safety, and security and which meets the range of user needs;
- provide secure access to systems by integrating with the Identity Verification and Authentication solution provided by **NHS login**³;
- support commissioners and policy teams by providing anonymous statistical data which may be used to understand health issues and challenges better;
- support strategies which may improve health outcomes for the population and reduce inequalities in health.

The NHS App Services provided by NHS England will be used in the following scenarios and in situations which the NDC Board agrees are in line with the NHS App Direction 2023.

High-Level Scenario	Architecture Implications
User wants to manage a GP appointment	Assumes identity is assured and requires connectivity to backend GP systems provided by approved suppliers in order to retrieve and book appointments
User wants to manage a Secondary Care Appointment/Booking/Referral including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Booking, changing and cancelling - Access to relevant resources whilst waiting for care - Viewing waiting times - Accessing letters and documents - Answering questionnaires - Seeing notifications related to their secondary care appointments 	Assumes identity is assured and requires connectivity to Patient Care Aggregator Service and trust portal systems. Identity proofing using NHS login. Driven by deep-link functionality - built on existing NHS App web-integrations - to hand off to specific services to enable book, edit and cancel functions Existing Manage Your Referral (MYR) synchronous-booking functionality re-used Mixture of synchronous and asynchronous rebooking and cancelation journeys presented within Patient Engagement Portals (PEPs)

³ <https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/corporate-information-and-documents/directions-and-data-provision-notice/secretary-of-state-directions/nhs-login-directions-2021>

	<p>Driven by deep-link functionality - built on existing NHS App web-integrations - to hand off to specific services to enable edit and cancel functions</p> <p>Dynamic presentation of Trust-curated documents to patients via App, based on Specialty - available within PEPs only</p> <p>Addition of Wait Times Service(s) to Aggregator</p> <p>API integration with My Planned Care data set and Wait List Minimum Data Set for personalisation of content</p> <p>Additional view of waiting lists provided in the NHS App</p> <p>Addition of Letters and Documents Service(s) to Aggregator</p> <p>Integration & reconciliation between NHS App Letters & Documents Functionality and PEP Letters & Documents Functionality</p> <p>Single easy-to-use view of all correspondence for patients, in one place.</p> <p>Will utilise existing deep-link functionality to link to relevant questionnaires at a point in time Driven by notification functionality, avoiding Aggregator integration. Existing notification mechanisms, such as SMS or email, will act as a fallback.</p>
User wants to manage/book vaccinations	Use NHS login Single Sign On to connect to the National Booking Service
User wants to order and manage medication	Assumes identity is assured and requires connectivity to backend GP systems provided by approved suppliers in order to retrieve and order repeat prescriptions

	Integration with the Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) Prescriptions for Patients API in order to retrieve and display prescription information and prescription barcode (digital prescription).
User wants to view their patient record, downloading files or attachments which have been made available by their health care professional.	Assumes identity is assured and requires connectivity to backend GP systems for all provided by approved suppliers in order to retrieve medical record
User wants to manage their National Data Opt-out data sharing preferences	Optimal user experience in consuming an existing service
User wants to manage their organ donation preferences	Optimal user experience in consuming an existing service
User wants to check their symptoms	Optimal user experience in consuming an existing service
User management of NHS account and profile	No architecture implications – currently some features are available via NHS login
Manage linked profiles (proxy)	Managed linked profiles is a feature accessible via the NHS App but not established by the NHS App.
NHS App Service wants to enrol users in User Research to improve the functionality of the NHS App; support user needs; support clinician needs; and to understand the future service requirements.	Passing email to 3 rd party services contracted by NHS App, to register interest once the user agrees to the activity.
User wants to access a 3 rd party NHS procured transactional service for example, Online Consultation (OLC) (including video consultation) and Personal Health Record (PHR) services. As part of the consultation, the user will be able to upload documents to support the consultation. The feature will also publish entries into the user's calendar to support the management of appointments.	Use NHS login Single Sign On to connect to 3 rd party service
User wants to manage their nominated pharmacy	NHS App needs to connect via HSCN to Spine
Users who want to use the NHS App services to connect to services which provide a health and/or a social care benefit.	Use NHS login for authentication to connect to 3 rd party service – the authentication mechanism can either be directly from the App, or via the Single Sign On feature.
Users who want to be notified when something in the NHS App needs their attention (NHS App Notification Service).	Native app Push Notifications to be used by the various integrated services in the NHS App to alert users when something needs their attention. The

	<p>services that can send a push notification include both 3rd party services as well as NHS App services.</p>
<p>Users want quick access to the various 3rd party messaging services they could use to communicate with their health and care providers</p>	<p>Through the IM1 interface and web integration with Patients Know Best (PKB), messaging is facilitated through the NHS App to give users a single place to find and access the messaging services of their health and care providers. Access to these services will be facilitated by NHS login to enable a seamless patient experience.</p>
<p>Users want a single place to access the messages they receive through the NHS App and respond.</p>	<p>NHS App Message hub, a national messaging service for people who use health and care services in England to safely and securely receive communications from their healthcare providers and other national health services. Initially available to users of the NHS App who have fully verified their identity.</p> <p>Onboarding of 3rd party sending services who are either a health and care provider or communication supplier (operating on the provider's behalf) to the NHS App Messaging API.</p> <p>Securely receive, store and present message content containing personal and clinical information from third parties to the authorised user of the NHS App.</p> <p>Enable users to reply to a message, with features such as keyword replies and free text replies.</p> <p>In order to ensure that patients receive and process information about their health and care, we need to track the delivery status of the messages received and inform the sending services in a timely manner.</p> <p>In order to help sending services determine the best way to communicate with a patient, we need to report to them if a recipient of a message is using the NHS App to receives messages.</p> <p>Note: The message content is effectively a black box to those building and running the service and is not used for any other processing.</p>

NHS App overview

The NHS App was announced by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care at Expo 2017. It is a mobile and tablet application, currently available for download in both the Apple and Google Play stores, that provides a simple and secure way to access a range of face to face and digital NHS services and advice, as well as access to third-party digital tools. Full details on the NHS App and its functions and roadmap can be found online at: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/the-nhs-app/>

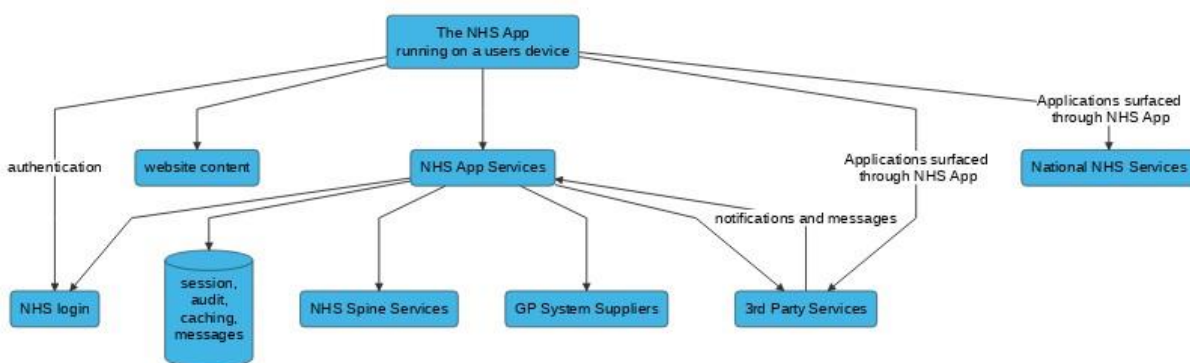
The NHS App programme is subject to a number of key ministerial commitments and is a committed investment as part of the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP). The NHS App focuses on integrating digital health and care services into a single, easy to use and standardised channel, to improve the citizen experience and to empower patients to take more control of their health and care.

The NHS App has evolved significantly since 2019 and the launch of the NHS App strategy, which set out how we can help make the digital infrastructure that the NHS App is built on available to others so they can benefit from it. In December 2020, a number of NHS App roadmap items were taken forward to support Citizen Health Technology (CHT) strategy, planning and prioritisation discussions.

A core part of the functionality of the NHS App is to retrieve information from clinical systems and present that information to the end user. This data will be medical in nature, and as such, has undergone a formal NHS England Data Risk Assessment to make sure suitable security controls are applied.

The NHS App service is providing a range of integration points to new local digital services such as Personal Health Record (PHRs), messaging services and online consultation tools, and has an associated onboarding process.

An overview of the NHS App service is illustrated below.



Data collection

Scope

The NHS App Service processes personal data which is made available to NHS App users and GP system suppliers by GP practices. GP practices are Data Controllers for this data. To the extent that NHS England facilitates the transmission of this data, it acts as a Data Controller independent of the GP Practices (as part of its Joint Controller arrangements with the Secretary of State arising from the NHS App Direction 2023 and this Requirements Specification). This is to enable the services requiring transmission of personal data from GP Practices on the NHS App to be delivered.

NHS England and the Secretary of State as Joint Controllers determine the purpose and means by which such transmission of personal data takes place in the NHS App, but in all other respects the GP Practice is the Data Controller of such personal data. This role of NHS England as a joint controller with the Secretary of State applies where files containing personal data are surfaced in the NHS App – for example, during a file upload and download and also notification and messaging action as part of the provision of OLC and PHR services.

Additionally, the purpose of collecting or analysing data is jointly determined by NHS England and the Secretary of State where the NHS App directly processes data from data subjects for the purposes of audit, service desk functions, user research, fault resolution and improving performance.

Personal data is collected and anonymised in order to provide anonymous statistical information to support commissioners and policy teams and support strategies to improve health outcomes for populations and reduce inequalities in health.

NHS App Messaging and NHS App Notification Services*

The NHS App Messaging and NHS App Notification Services processes personal and special category data in order to receive, store and present messages from health and care providers in England. It also enables users to reply to a message, with features such as keyword replies and free text replies. The health and care providers are Data Controllers for the message content. To the extent that NHS England facilitates the transmission and storage of this data and monitoring of this service, it acts as a Joint Controller with the Secretary of State.

*NHS App Messaging and Push Notification Service was previously known as NHS account Messaging and App Push Notifications.

Source

Personal data processed by NHS App Services will be provided:

- by the data subject (the user)
- by the GP practice system
- via user research form input
- via linked profiles (proxy)
- by the NHS Trust system
- by NHS commissioned organisations sending messages via NHS App Messaging and NHS App Notification services

- other organisations which deliver a connected service via the NHS App.

Category

Where NHS England is a Controller, the personal data processed will comprise of the following:

Data Categories	Justification
Personal Data	
Name	<p>Patient Contact Information Service Support Desk Collection (processed by NHS England to manage the service desk). Required to make contact with the user to resolve their issue.</p> <p>Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.</p>
Registered GP Organisation Data Service (ODS) code	The ODS code is used by the NHS App to produce Management and statistical information at a level which does not disclose personal information or directly identify an individual.
Organisation Data Service (ODS) codes of sending services	The ODS code of the sending service is used by the NHS App Messaging Service to uniquely identify the sending service as well as look up information related to that service such as the service's name.
Email Address	<p>Patient Contact Information Service Support Desk Collection (processed by NHS England to manage the service desk). Required to make contact with the user to resolve their issue.</p> <p>Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.</p>
DOB	Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.
Age	<p>Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.</p> <p>Direct use of the Age to support analytics and provision of management information and dashboards.</p>
Sex	Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.
Gender	Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.
Physical Description	Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information – May be included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.
NHS Number	<p>NHS Number required as Basic Patient and User Identifier - Included in the Personal Medical Record</p> <p>Data is retained as part of Audit Tracking and within the analytics pipeline. Also required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.</p>
Home Phone Number	<p>Patient Contact Information Service Support Desk Collection (processed by NHS England to manage the service desk). Required to make contact with the</p>

Data Categories	Justification
	user to resolve their issue. Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record. Required in order to enable consultations and file downloads.
Online Identifier e.g. IP Address/Event Logs/ NHS login identified	Event logging, Fault Tracing and Security Protective Monitoring Log Data.
Website Cookies	Session & performance management
Mobile Phone Number	Patient Contact Information Service Support Desk Collection (processed by NHS England to manage the service desk). Required to make contact with the user to resolve their issue Is available from NHS login to support notification and messaging campaigns
Special Category Data	
Medical Record Information	Transmission of medical information, including GP letters, test results and record extracts between GPs and patients is required in order to enable consultations and file downloads; this is extended to file uploads, where patients may wish to upload an image to support a consultation. Secondary Care appointment, booking and referral letters Prescriptions information from prescribing and dispensing systems.
Messages from health and care providers	Messages processed as part of NHS App Messaging and NHS App Notification Services will persist within the NHS App repositories.

ODS code and personal data, including NHS Number and the NHS login pseudonymised Identifier, is collected for statistical purposes as set out in the dissemination section below

The data items listed below are viewable by an authorised user of the NHS App. These data items do not transit the NHS App infrastructure, and therefore are not retained by NHS England for the purposes of the NHS App:

Data Categories	Justification
Personal Data	
Address	Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record.
Postcode	Basic Patient and User Identifier/Contact Information - Included in the Personal Medical Record.
Physical Description	There's a risk it could be part of the Medical Record Information . The GP can write comprehensive free-format comments about a patient. NHS England does not control the content that is contained within, but the information may be viewed by a user of the App. There is a probability that the physical description of a patient would be included in those notes.

Data Categories	Justification
Special Category Data	
Physical / Mental Health or Condition	Maintained as part of the Personal Medical Record. Patients will have the opportunity to view this data via the NHS Online App.

Frequency

The data has been and is being collected by the NHS App since the service went into Private Beta in September 2018 in accordance with the Health and Social Care Information Centre (Establishment of Information Systems for NHS Services: NHS App) Directions 2018 issued by NHS England.

Collection will be ongoing under the NHS App Directions 2023 from the Secretary of State to support new users and services.

Analysis

Internal processing

NHS England may process data (noted in the Category section) from the NHS App for analysis.

NHS England will process identifiable data from the NHS App Services as follows:

- Use of data provided by the user to the service desk function to resolve issues
- Use of tools such as Qualtrics to allow a mechanism for users to, optionally, provide feedback so that service can be improved
- Use the NHS number and NHS login identifier to assist in fault resolution
- User research to support the continued improvement of the service by inviting users to take part in interviews/usability tests and surveys
- Provide event logs and audit events into the Corporate Protective Monitoring service managed and delivered by NHS England's Cyber Security Operations Centre
- Monitor the delivery status of messages via the NHS App Messaging and NHS App Notification Services e.g. successful / failed and real-time read receipts
- For the prevention and investigation of fraud
- Analysis is carried out on the activity of the users in the App and monitor App usage, to improve the functionality of the NHS App and to improve health outcomes for the population and reduce inequalities in health
- Processing data for the purpose of linkage and dissemination

NHS England will process anonymised data from the NHS App Services as follows:

- Use of non-identifiable data such as the Organisation Data Service (ODS) code and anonymised data such as general symptom criteria to provide high level statistical information.
- Use of anonymised data to assess service usage and equality impact

Data linkage

The NHS number will be used as a unique identifier within the NHS App service. This will allow the service to resolve issues raised by the users.

Data may be linked to other datasets for the purpose of dissemination/publication, management information reporting and internal analysis. This will be done for the purposes of monitoring NHS App usage and understanding user behaviour to improve the product offering. This linkage will only occur where approved by information governance team and in accordance with information governance procedures and controls, including where required, advice from the Advisory Group for Data.

Where data may be linked for these purposes, this will be subject to the Data Protection Impact Assessment being updated to provide details on the linkage and assess any associated risks.

Dissemination/Sharing

Planned Dissemination/Sharing

To support commissioners and policy teams and to improve health outcomes for populations and reduce inequalities in health by providing:

- Management Datasets which will be available to the NHS England Data and Management Information (Data and MI) teams via NHS England managed technology and information governance controls, which will include precedent access purposes which the Advisory Group for Data have approved. This will allow the Data and MI teams to access:
 - Anonymous statistical information derived from the collection and processing of personal information, such as the NHS Number and the NHS login pseudonymised Identifier, to summarise user activity whilst using the NHS App.
 - Anonymous statistical information derived from the collection and processing of personal information, such as the NHS Number and the NHS login pseudonymised Identifier, to summarise the uptake of digital services to support strategies which may improve health outcomes for the population and reduce inequalities in health.
 - Anonymous statistical information derived from the collection and processing of personal information, such as the ODS code, NHS Number and the NHS login pseudonymised Identifier, to understand health issues and challenges better.
 - Anonymous statistical information about service usage – which may be shared on a periodic and ad-hoc basis to the Department of Health and Social Care and its associated bodies, including but not limited to the UK Health Security Agency

Ad-hoc Dissemination/Sharing

Other dissemination of data may take place where required for purposes such as research or audit. All dissemination of data obtained through the Directions, other than aggregate anonymous data, will be in accordance with precedents approved by the Advisory Group for Data or subject to advice from the Advisory Group for Data.

Any information collected or obtained as a result of the NHS App Directions may be disseminated in line with NHS England's discretionary powers under section 261 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (**the 2012 Act**).

Publication

Data to be published

Data collected as a result of NHS App will be used to compile statistical charts and dashboard information.

Data prohibited from being published

Information will be published in line with NHS England's duty to publish under section 260(1) of the 2012 Act, unless it falls within section 260(2) of that Act. For the avoidance of doubt, identifying or identifiable information about NHS App users is specifically excluded from publication.

Consultation

There has been a continuous consultation process for the development of these Directions, taking account of feedback obtained for the previous 2018 Directions, this has included stakeholders from:

- The Department of Health and Social Care
- NHS England
- External legal advisors
- Data Subjects – Representative members of the public target user groups who were consulted during user research interviews and have been continually engaged along the life cycle of the project.
- Data Subjects – GPs and GP practice groups consulted throughout the discovery and alpha stages to understand their perspective of the solution.

Should NHS England wish to process or disseminate data for the purposes of research, NHS England will provide further consultation.

NHS App Messaging and NHS Notification Services

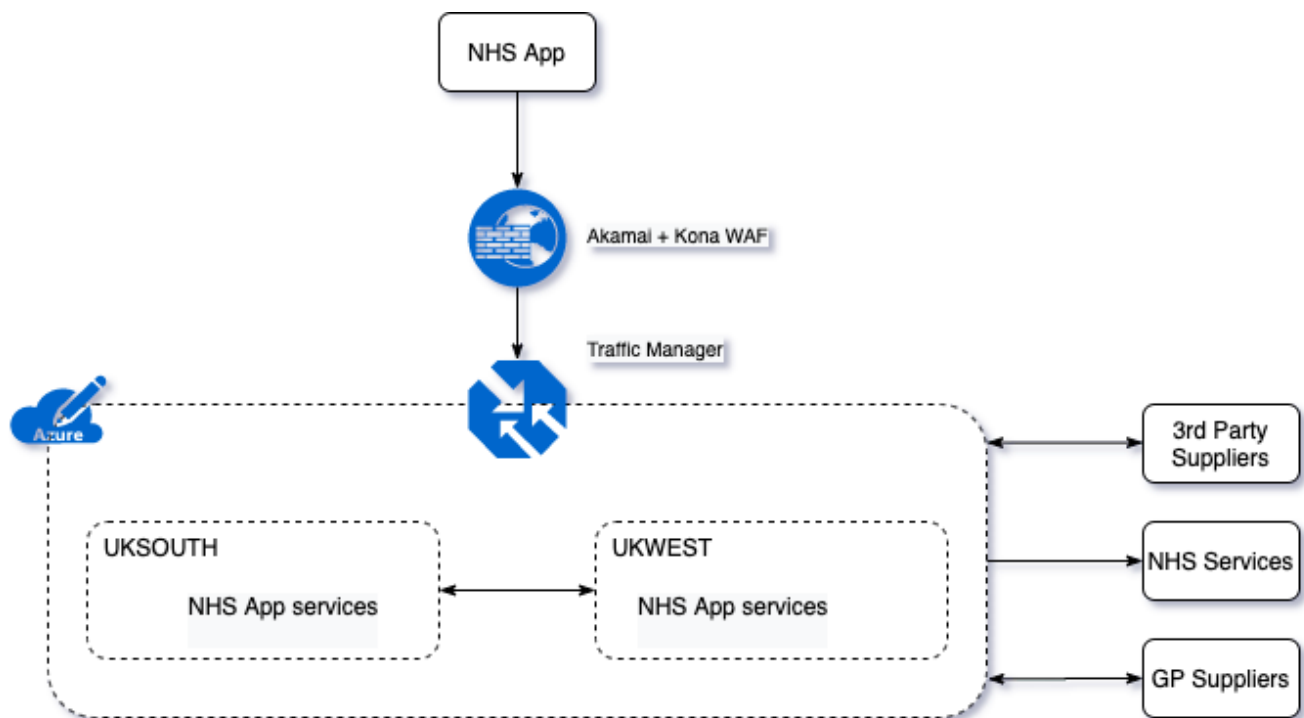
Specifically in relation to NHS App Messaging and NHS Notification Services, the following stakeholders were consulted:

- GP IT Communications suppliers
- Pilot with an individual GP IT Communication supplier
- GP practices
- Ofcom
- National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)
- NHS England
- Digital First Primary Care
- Commissioners of health care services in England
- IT suppliers across the whole health care system, including secondary care

- Consulted Irish government department (Digital Postbox) - messaging for public sector bodies
- a firm which has delivered national messaging services for other countries

System Delivery Function

The diagram below provides an illustration of the service. Key components of the service are described below, and additional content is set out in the NHS App Technical Specification.



- Microsoft Azure. NHS App is a cloud-based service hosted on Microsoft Azure. This is a UK hosted service. The service has a High Availability design and uses a Content Delivery Network (CDN) to maintain this and provide resilience to the service. The system is also protected by a Web Application Firewall (WAF) which checks each transaction for malicious content. All data in transit and at rest is encrypted, with the overarching system subject to security controls which have been assessed independently via a Penetration Test.
- Performance monitoring. NHS App use Splunk Cloud performance monitoring software to manage and monitor the platform. NHS App also uses this software to send log and audit data to the Cyber Security Operations Centre (CSOC).
- User experience and feedback – Hotjar and Qualtrics.
- Analytics – Adobe Analytics.

Change control process

In accordance with paragraph 5.2 of the NHS App Directions 2023, NHS England will manage any changes to this Specification in conjunction with, and by written agreement of an authorised officer of the Department of Health and Social Care. Where necessary, the Department of Health and Social Care will be consulted on the changes.