

FRIMLEY INTEGRATED CARE BOARD

Freedom of Information Policy

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Equality Statement

NHS Frimley Integrated Care Board (ICB) aims to design and implement services, policies and measures that meet the diverse needs of our service, population and workforce, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others.

Throughout the development of the policies and processes cited in this document, the ICB has:

- Given due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people who have shared a relevant protected characteristic (as cited under the Equality Act 2010) and those who do not share it;
- Given regard to the need to reduce inequalities between patients in access to, and outcomes from, healthcare services and in securing that services are provided in an integrated way where this might reduce health inequalities.

Members of staff, volunteers or members of the public may request assistance with this policy if they have needs. If the member of staff has language difficulties and difficulty in understanding this policy, the use of an interpreter will be considered.

The ICB embraces the four staff pledges in the NHS Constitution. This policy is consistent with these pledges.

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1 Introduction and Policy Statement of Statutory Compliance

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide the Clinical Commissioning Group (ICB) with guidance in relation to the compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). It is a statement of the framework within which the ICB will work to ensure the organisation meets its obligations under the FOIA.

The Freedom of Information Policy:

- outlines the role of legislation (see section 1.2)
- defines roles and responsibilities (see section 3)
- details guidelines for the implementation of legislation (see section 4)
- indicates the way in which compliance with the policy will be monitored (see section 8).

1.2 Background

The FOIA 2000 replaces the non-statutory 'Code of Practice on Openness in the NHS'; it is part of the Government's commitment to greater openness and transparency in the public sector and enables the public to question the actions and decisions of public authorities more closely. Section 1 of the FOIA gives a general right of access to recorded information held by a public authority, subject to certain conditions and exemptions.

The main features of the FOIA are:

- a duty on every public authority to maintain a publication scheme
- a general right of access to recorded information held by public authorities
- the introduction of the office of Information Commissioner to promote good practice and with wide powers to enforce the rights created by the FOIA.

1.3 Principles

This policy supports the principle that openness, and not secrecy, should be the rule in public life. The ICB intends to create openness and dialogue with all stakeholders and improved access to information about the ICB and supports the following:

- Individuals have a right to privacy and confidentiality. This policy does not overturn the common law duties of confidence or statutory provision that prevent the disclosure of personal identifiable information under the Data Protection Act 1998 (See 'Procedure for the disclosure of records under the Data Protection Act 1998 and Access to Health Records Act 1990').
- Public authorities should be allowed to discharge their functions effectively. The ICB will use the exemptions contained within the FOIA where an absolute applies, or a qualified exemption can be reasonably applied in terms of the public interest of disclosure (see Appendix 1 – Exemptions).
- Staff should have access to advice to support their understanding of the FOIA.

1.4 Relevant Linking Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- the Freedom of Information Act 2000
- the Data Protection Act 1998
- the Procedure for the disclosure of records under the Data Protection Act 1998 and Access to Health Records Act 1990
- the Environmental Information Regulations 2004
- all ICB policies/documents relating to the application of Information Governance
- Freedom of Information – Information for Staff (Appendix 8)

2 Scope

This policy provides a framework for the ICB to ensure compliance with the FOIA and applies to:

- all employees of the ICB
- contracted third parties, including hosted organisations and agency staff
- students and trainees
- staff on secondment and other staff on placement within the ICB.

The policy applies to all recorded information that the ICB holds that is information created, received and maintained by staff in the course of their work. This can be held in a number of different media such as paper, electronic (including text and e-mail), audio and video.

3 Responsibilities

3.1 Statutory Responsibility

All public authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are covered by the FOIA. In addition, any company that is wholly owned by a public authority is also covered by the FOIA.

3.2 Managerial Accountability and Responsibility

All line managers should ensure their staff are aware of the obligations of the ICB under the FOIA and related legislation, of the rights of individuals making requests under the FOIA and of the process for dealing with requests under the FOIA.

3.3 Individual Responsibility

By law, all staff are responsible for any requests that they receive. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all staff to be aware of the obligations of the ICB under the FOIA and related legislation and of their individual obligations, which may involve locating, retrieving, and extracting (including editing and redacting) the information requested. Staff should also have knowledge of the rights of individuals making requests under the FOIA and of the process for dealing with requests.

Guidance for staff is set out in the:

- 'Procedure for handling Freedom of Information enquiries' (Appendix 4)
- 'Freedom of Information – Information for Staff' leaflet (Appendix 8)

3.4 FOI Function within NHS South Central and West Commissioning Support Unit

The FOI function is managed by the Freedom of Information team which sits within the overall information governance service of NHS South Central and West Commissioning Support Unit (CSU). It serves to ensure that legislation is appropriately and effectively implemented, and the specific roles are:

- Head of Information Governance – has overall responsibility for implementation of the FOIA within the CSU and the organizations (including the ICB) for which an FOI service is provided.
- Freedom of Information Team Leader – is responsible for the day-to-day management of, the handling of, and the response to all requests made to the ICB under the FOIA and compliance with the information governance toolkit and provides advice on the model publication scheme.
- Freedom of Information Officer – is responsible for the day-to-day handling and response of all requests made to the ICB under the FOIA.

4 Procedure for Handling Freedom of Information Enquiries

4.1 Introduction

Any member of staff in the ICB may be approached and asked for information under this legislation. Section 16 of the FOIA states that public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance to applicants, therefore every member of the ICB's staff has a legal duty to assist someone in making a request. Guidance for staff is set out in 'Freedom of Information – Information for Staff' leaflet (Appendix 8).

4.2 Verbal Requests

Under the terms of the FOIA enquiries must be written (letter, fax or e-mail), however, if a verbal request is received ICB staff have a duty to advise that requests must be written (letter, fax or e-mail) to the address in section 4.3 and include a full name and correspondence address (this can be an e-mail address). Staff must also inform the enquirer of the e-mail and postal addresses for the FOI team (see below).

4.3 Written Requests

- a. Written requests may come from any source and be directed to any member of staff. If the request for information is not classified as a complaint, solicitor's letter, request for access to personal records, or anything that can be classed as 'business as usual', it should be considered as a possible Freedom of Information enquiry and should be forwarded to:

E-mail: CSCSU.FOI@nhs.net

- b. The FOIA gives a right of access that is not based on 'need to know' and therefore the ICB does not have the right to question an applicant on the reason or purpose of their request. The ICB can, however, request the applicant to provide further detail or clarification in order to define a vague or broad request.

4.4 Requests for Information Received by Staff

Any member of staff receiving a request for information is expected to follow the staff process for handling requests. Guidance for staff is set out in:

- 'Procedure for handling Freedom of Information enquiries' (Appendix 4)
- 'Freedom of Information – Information for Staff' leaflet (Appendix 8)

4.5 Requests for Information Received by the Freedom of Information Team

The Freedom of Information team will follow the relevant processes for handling requests as set out in Appendix 3: 'Procedure following receipt of an enquiry made under the FOIA 2000'.

4.6 Timescales

- a. The FOIA requires that requests are responded to by the twentieth working day following the date of receipt. If the ICB decides to apply an exemption (see Appendix 1: 'Exemptions') to withhold information, the applicant will be informed within 20 working days.
- b. The 20-working day timescale may be extended only if the ICB:
 - requests further clarification relating to the enquiry from the applicant, in which case the 20-working day deadline restarts from the beginning once a reply is received
 - advises the applicant it is unable to complete the enquiry within the 20 working days and a revised timescale is agreed between the enquirer and the ICB
 - issues a fees notice, in which case the 20 working days is suspended until payment is received by the ICB
 - considers a qualified exemption applies, in which case, in exceptional circumstances, the response may be extended by a further 20 working days to consider the Public Interest Test.

4.7 Public Interest Test

Where a qualified exemption is thought appropriate, requiring the consideration of the Public Interest Test (PIT), this will be agreed between the persons/departments holding the information and the FOI team. Final approval of the PIT will rest with the chief officer of the ICB. The ICB may extend the timescale for response by up to 20 working days if necessary and will advise the applicant in this circumstance.

4.8 Charging and Fees

- a. In accordance with the FOIA (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004, the ICB will not charge for information that costs less than £450 to provide, calculated at a rate of £25 per person per hour. The table below illustrates what activities will and will not be included in this calculation:

Activities Included	Activities Not Included
Determining whether the requested information is held	Checking that the request is valid
Locating the information	Considering whether the request is repeated or vexatious
Retrieving the information	Considering whether the information may be exempt
Extracting the information (including editing or redacting)	Obtaining authorisation to send out the information
	Calculating any fee to be charged
	Providing advice and assistance

- b. Additionally, where the ICB considers it appropriate to charge a fee it will also consider the additional charge for non-staff costs or disbursements, such as photocopying, printing or postage.
- c. Where two or more requests are received for the same or similar information from the same person, or different people acting together or as

part of a campaign, within a 60-day period, the ICB will aggregate the requests and charge in accordance with the fees regulations.

- d. If the fee or charge is not paid within three months from the day on which the applicant receives the Fees Notice or is informed of the charge, the enquiry will be closed.

4.9 Complaints / Reviews Requests

South, Central and West CSU in conjunction with the ICB will deal with complaints and requests for review to ensure that the requirements of the FOIA and Environmental Information Regulations 20014 (EIRs) are met (Appendix 4: 'Complaints / Review Process').

4.10 Information Format

Information will be provided in the applicant's preferred format (so far as this is reasonably practicable). The ICB will notify the applicant of the reasons if it considers it is not practicable to comply.

4.11 Low Volume Data

A response to an FOI enquiry is effectively a provision of information to the public and not to one individual. The ICB has an FOI policy obligation to maintain patient confidentiality under the Data Protection Act 1998. Therefore, the ICB will generally adhere to guidance provided by the 'Code of Practice for Official Statistics' (UK Statistics Authority) and advice on using low volume data and maintaining confidentiality from the Association of Public Health Observatories, generally suppressing data with counts of less than five.

4.12 Vexatious or Repeated Requests

The ICB will not facilitate requests from applicants if that request could be considered vexatious or repeated, which will be identified by monitoring data.

5 Contracts and Confidentiality Clauses

5.1 Public Sector Contracts

- a. Contracts entered into by the ICB will not include contractual terms that restrict the disclosure of information held by the ICB or the CSU on its behalf, beyond the restrictions permitted by the FOIA, unless an exemption provided for under the FOIA is applicable. All contracts entered into by the ICB will include appropriate FOI clauses to ensure that both parties are aware of their responsibilities under the FOIA.
- b. When entering contracts, the ICB may be under pressure to accept confidentiality clauses so that information relating to the terms of the contract, its value and performance will be exempt from disclosure. As recommended by the Lord Chancellor's Department, the ICB will reject such clauses wherever possible.
- c. Under exceptional circumstances, where it is necessary to include non-disclosure provisions in a contract, the ICB will investigate the option of agreeing with the contractor a schedule of the contract that clearly identifies information that should not be disclosed. The ICB will take care when drawing up any such schedule and will be aware that any restrictions on disclosure provided for could potentially be overridden by obligations under the Act, as described in the paragraph above. Any acceptance of such confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons and capable of being justified to the Commissioner.
- d. The ICB will not agree to hold information 'in confidence' which is not in fact confidential in nature. Advice from the Lord Chancellor's Department indicates that the exemption would only apply if disclosure of the information would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that, or any other person.

5.2 Accepting Information 'In Confidence' from Third Parties

- a. the ICB will only accept information from third parties 'in confidence' if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the ICB's functions and it would not otherwise be provided.
- b. The ICB will not agree to hold information received from third parties 'in confidence' which is not confidential in nature. Again, acceptance of any confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified under the terms of the FOIA.

6 Consultation with Third Parties

- a. the ICB recognises that in some cases the disclosure of information pursuant to a request may affect the legal rights of a third party, for example where information is subject to the common law duty of confidence or where it constitutes 'personal data' within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). Unless an exemption provided for in the Act applies in relation to any information, the ICB will be obliged to disclose that information in response to a request.
- b. Where a disclosure of information cannot be made without the consent of a third party (for example where information has been obtained from a third party and in the circumstances the disclosure of the information without their consent would constitute an actionable breach of the confidence such that the exemption at Section 41 of the Act would apply), the ICB will consult that third party with a view to seeking their consent to the disclosure, unless such a consultation is not practicable, for example because the third party cannot be located or because the costs of consulting them would be disproportionate. Where the interests of the third party that may be affected by a disclosure do not give rise to legal rights, consultation may still be appropriate.
- c. Where information constitutes 'personal data' within the meaning of the DPA, the ICB will have regard to Section 40 of the Act, which makes detailed provision for cases in which a request relates to such information and the interplay between the Act and the DPA in such cases.
- d. The ICB may consider that consultation is not appropriate where the cost of consulting with third parties would be disproportionate. In such cases, the ICB will consider the most reasonable course of action for it to take in light of the requirements of the Act and the individual circumstances of the request.
- e. The fact that the third party has not responded to consultation does not relieve the ICB of its duty to disclose information under the Act, or its duty to reply within the time specified in the Act. In all cases, it is for the ICB, not the third party (or representative of the third party) to determine whether information should be disclosed under the Act. A refusal to consent to disclosure by a third party does not mean that information should be withheld.

7 Transferring Requests for Information

- a. A request can only be transferred where the ICB receives a request for information which it does not hold, within the meaning of Section 3(2) of the Act, but which it believes is held by another public authority:

- it is held by the authority, otherwise than on behalf of another person, or
 - it is held by another person on behalf of the authority.
- b. The ICB recognizes that 'holding' information includes holding a copy of records produced or supplied by another person or body (but does not extend to holding a record on behalf of another person or body as provided for in Section 3(2)(a) of the Act).
 - c. Upon receiving the initial request for information, the ICB will process it in accordance with the Act in respect of such information relating to the request as it holds. The ICB will also advise the applicant that it does not hold part of the requested information, or all of it, whichever applies. Prior to doing this, the ICB must be certain as to the extent of the information relating to the request that it holds itself.
 - d. If the ICB believes that some or all of the information requested is held by another public authority, the organisation will consider what would be the most helpful way of assisting the applicant with his or her request. This will generally involve either transferring the enquirer to that organisation having once gained their approval to do so or responding to the enquirer suggesting that they contact the other public authority themselves.
 - e. Where the ICB is unable either to advise the applicant whether it holds or may hold, the requested information or to facilitate the transfer of the request to another authority (or considers it inappropriate to do so) it will consider what advice, if any, it can provide to the applicant to enable them to pursue their request.

8 Records Management

- a. The ICB has a records management policy that meets the requirements of the Code of Practice issued under Section 46 of the FOIA. Together with the records management function this will serve to ensure that effective records management is undertaken within the organisation, thereby enabling the speedy location and retrieval of requested information.
- b. Although by its nature, e-mail seems to be less formal than other written communication, the same laws apply. Therefore, it is important that ICB staff are aware of the legal risks of e-mail.
- c. An e-mail is an electronic record; a printed copy of an e-mail is a hard copy record. Information contained in an e-mail may be disclosed either in part or in

whole to the public through the FOIA and whilst exemptions exist, the ICB will not be able to guarantee confidentiality of correspondence conducted by e-mail.

- d. Staff should be made aware that under no circumstances should they deliberately alter, deface, block, erase or destroy information which has been requested, in order to prevent its release. Doing so is a criminal offence under the FOIA and EIR, for which staff could be held individually responsible.

9 Re-Use and Copyright

- a. If there are concerns about information reaching a wider audience, without sufficient briefing relating to the circumstances surrounding the production of the data/document, or its context, then the ICB may indicate that the information is being supplied only for the use of the initial enquirer, and cannot be re-used or reproduced in any format, or relayed on to other people, without the organisation's consent. ICB information supplied under the FOIA continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (CDPA) 1988.
- b. Other forms of re-use, for example publishing the information, would need the permission of the organisation or person who owns the copyright. Information produced by government departments and agencies can be re-used under the Open Government Licence. Advice about this can be found via: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/opengovernment-licence.htm>. If, however, the copyright is identified as belonging to somebody else, then permission will need to be applied for. Information about how to obtain permission from a third party can be found on the Intellectual Property Office's website at: <http://www.ipo.gov.uk/>.
- c. Publishing information or issuing copies may be subject to the provisions of the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005 and will require ICB permission and maybe a fee.

10 Review and Reiteration

- a. The ICB (via the FOI team at NHS Central Southern Commissioning Support Unit) will log all requests via a database. This will be regularly reviewed to determine the type of request received and the originator. Information that is

regularly requested will then be considered for routine publication in the publication scheme.

- b. By making information routinely available the ICB will be able to proactively meet the public's information needs and reduce the requests made under the FOIA. Applicant satisfaction will be monitored via an evaluation form issued either electronically or by post with the final response from the FOI team. The FOI team will record all responses and will inform the ICB of these.

11 Training

- a. Ad hoc training will be provided on request by the Freedom of Information team.

12 Equality and Diversity

- a. This policy aims to have a positive impact for people protected under the Equality Act 2010 on the grounds of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. By following the guidance set out in this policy ICB staff will meet the general equality duty.
- b. So that people requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act are not discriminated against, and equal opportunities are advanced, ICB staff should be aware of the following equality issues:
 - When a Freedom of Information request is received staff must ask whether the information is required in an alternative format to make it accessible (section 4.10 Information Format). This might include a need for large print, braille, audio file or translation into another language. If so, a quotation must be obtained to decide whether providing the requested information is practicable. Staff should contact the ICB Communications and Engagement team for advice.
 - Under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 it is illegal (without explicit consent) to disclose information about whether an individual has applied for a gender recognition certificate or disclose someone's gender prior to the acquisition of a gender recognition certificate. Although the FOIA prohibits disclosure of personal data such as this, ICB staff must be careful not to break this additional law when meeting FOI requests

- FOI requests may be for equalities monitoring data. As stated in this policy (section 4.11 Low Volume Data) counts of less than five must be suppressed due to the risk of identifying individuals

Appendix 1

Exemptions under Part II of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

There are two types of class exemption:

- Absolute, which do not require a test of prejudice or the balance of public interest to be in favour of non-disclosure.
- Qualified by the public interest test, which require the public body to decide whether it is in the balance of public interest not to disclose information.

With the exception of section 21 (information available by other means) absolute exemptions apply not only to the communication of information but also to the duty to confirm or deny, if that itself would disclose information that it is reasonable to withhold.

The absolute exemptions under the FOIA are:

Section 21	Information accessible to applicant by other means – it may be reasonably accessible even if the applicant has to pay for it.
Section 23	Information supplied by, or relating to, bodies with security matters – this is aimed at the Security Services, Government Communications Headquarters and the National Criminal Intelligence Service.
Section 32	Court records – covers documents in the custody of a court, created by a court or served on or by a public authority for court proceedings.
Section 34	Parliamentary privilege – to avoid infringing the privileges of either House of Parliament.
Section 40	Personal information – where the applicant is the subject of the information the request must be dealt with in accordance with the Subject Access rights provided in the Data Protection Act 1998. Where the applicant is not the subject of the information, then it is exempt if disclosure of it would breach the Data Protection Act.
Section 41	Information provided in confidence – if the disclosure of the information would constitute a breach of confidence that could lead to action against the ICB.
Section 44	Prohibitions on disclosure – information is exempt if its release is prohibited under any enactment, it is incompatible with Community obligation or would constitute contempt of court.

The exemptions that are qualified by the public interest test are:

Section 22	Information intended for future publication – covers information held with a view to publication by the public authority or another person at some future date.
Section 24	National security – information can be exempt if it is required to safeguard national security.
Section 26	Defence – information can be exempt if its release would affect the defence of the British Isle, any British colony or the capability and effectiveness of the armed forces.
Section 27	International relations – information is exempt if its release would prejudice relations with another state, international organisation, international court or the interests of the UK abroad.

Section 28	Relations within the United Kingdom – covers information that would prejudice the economic interest of the UK or of any administration in the UK.
Section 29	The economy – covers information that would prejudice the economic interest of the UK or of any administration in the UK.
Section 30	Investigations and proceedings conducted by public authorities – covers information held for an investigation that the authority has a duty to conduct to decide if a person should be charged with or found guilty of an offence, relates to criminal proceedings that the authority has power to conduct or relates to civil proceedings brought by or on behalf of the authority.
Section 31	Law enforcement – information is exempt if its release would prejudice law enforcement. This includes the prevention and detection of crime, apprehension and prosecution of offenders, administration of justice, the operation of immigration controls and the security of prisons.
Section 33	Audit functions – this applies to authorities that have functions in relation to the audit of other authorities' accounts and the examination of efficiency and effectiveness of the use of their resources. This does not cover internal auditing functions of authorities.
Section 35	Formulation of government policy – relates to government departments and the National Assembly for Wales.
Section 36	Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs – information is exempt if, in the opinion of a qualified person, it would prejudice how the ICB conducts its public affairs.
Section 37	Communications with Her Majesty, with other members of the Royal Household, and the conferring by the Crown of any honour or dignity.
Section 38	Health and safety – information is exempt if its disclosure would endanger the physical health, mental health or safety of any individual.
Section 39	Environmental information – covers information that can be accessed via the Environmental Information Regulations.
Section 42	Legal professional privilege
Section 43	Commercial interests – information is exempt if it constitutes a trade secret or would prejudice or be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person or organisation.

Appendix 2

Procedure following receipt of an enquiry made under the FOIA 2000

Section A - Summary of Key Actions and Timescales

Timescale	Action	CSU FOI Team Actions
Note: the 20 working day clock starts the day after the enquiry is received		
Day 0	Request received into ICB via e-mail or post	
Immediately	<p>If received by staff member or alternative mailbox to the ICB FOI mailbox – request forwarded to CSU FOI team via the ICB FOI e-mail address: CSCSU.FOI@nhs.net</p> <p>If postal request, scan and forward to the ICB FOI inbox and send the original to the CSU FOI team (Rivergate House)</p>	
Within 3 working days	Request acknowledged by CSU FOI team and deadline provided to enquirer	<p>The FOI team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeps applicant informed of progress. • Provides advice/ assistance if required. • Requests clarification. • Decides if a fee/charge is applicable. • Decides if request can be met within applicable limits set in Fees Regulations. • Considers if information is exempt. • Decides if request is repeated/ vexatious.
Within 3 working days	<p>Request for Information (RFI) with deadline for receipt of response information sent to ICB contact to disseminate to ICB staff.</p> <p>Where CSU staff identified as more appropriate to assist with response information, RFI sent directly to CSU staff and ICB contact copied in to the request e-mail.</p>	
Within 10 working days	Information located and provided by staff and returned to CSU FOI team	<p>The FOI team will consider the applicant's preferences in regard to the format in which they wish to receive the information.</p> <p>The FOI team shows the PIT (Public Interest Test) to a qualified person where an exemption is qualified.</p> <p>The FOI team provides advice/assistance in the event of the applicant being unable or unwilling to pay the fee/charge.</p>
10th working day	If the information is not forthcoming, a reminder is sent to the appropriate person	
15th working day	1st breach warning sent to appropriate person	

Timescale	Action	CSU FOI Team Actions
18th working day	Final breach warning sent to appropriate person	If an exemption is applicable, the FOI team will issue a notice informing the applicant. The FOI team will notify applicant if the request is refused for any other reason.
Before the 20th working day	Final response sent to ICB chief officer for approval	
Within 20 working days	Response sent to applicant	
Within 40 working days	If complex public interest test was considered, response sent to enquirer.	
If a request for clarification is made to the enquirer then the 20 working day clock stops and restarts from the beginning once the information required is received by the ICB.		
If a fee or charge is applicable to the information requested a Fees Notice/notification of a charge will be issued. The 20 working day timescale is suspended until the fee/charge is paid.		
Additional time to respond can be requested from the applicant if the information is difficult to retrieve.		

Appendix 2 (cont)

Procedure following receipt of an enquiry made under the FOIA 2000

Section B - Processing Requests for Information

1. Receipt of a Request

Once the CSU FOI team receives an applicant's request, the following information will be recorded on the FOI database:

- Request identifier
- Date received by the ICB
- Name of applicant and organisation, if known
- Information requested
- Due date for response and closure of enquiry

The FOI team will write in the same format as the original request within two working days to inform the applicant that the request has been received and is being processed. A record of this contact will be kept.

If the FOI team has sufficient information to respond to the request, they will inform the applicant in the letter of acknowledgement that their request will be processed within 20 working days.

The FOI team will also inform the applicant in writing of any fees or charges, if known, that are payable for the provision of the information and that no information will be provided unless the fee or charge is paid within three months. In regard to the general right of access from 1 of January 2005, this will constitute the issue of a 'Fees Notice' as described in Section 9 of the FOIA. Charges and fees are addressed in section 4.8. If the fee or charge is not paid within three months from the day on which the applicant receives the Fees Notice or is informed of the charge, the enquiry will be closed

If the applicant has not provided sufficient information for the request to be processed, the FOI team will contact the applicant for clarification; if further clarification is not received within three months from the day on which the applicant receives the request for clarification the enquiry will be closed. The 20 working day clock restarts from the beginning once clarification is received and the enquirer will be informed of the new due date for the response to their request.

In accordance with sections 12 and 13 of the FOIA, if the FOI team estimates that the cost of compliance with the request for information exceeds the appropriate limit set by the Fees Regulations (section 4.8), they will notify the applicant in writing of the estimated cost. Under the FOI guidelines to advise and assist, the FOI lead will discuss with the applicant ways of bringing costs within appropriate limits. If it is not possible to comply with the request within appropriate limits, a Fees Notice will be issued.

If the FOI team believes that any of the information requested is exempt from disclosure under Part II of the Act, the applicant will be advised referencing the appropriate exemption. This includes circumstances where the information is available from another source other than the ICB, unless that source is a public authority, in which case the request may be transferred to that authority.

If a qualified exemption requiring consideration of the Public Interest Test is under consideration, and might delay response, the FOI team will advise the applicant of an extension of the time for response, the reason and an estimated date for final decision.

If the FOI team has evidence to demonstrate that the request is vexatious or repeated, as defined under Section 14 of the Act, the request will be refused.

2. Accessing the Information

The FOI team will either identify who within NHS South, Central and West Commissioning Support Unit holds the information the applicant has requested or will ask the ICB to do so from the staff within the organisation. Within two working days, the person(s) in either the ICB or the CSU who are most appropriately placed to meet the requirements of the applicant will be identified and contacted. The FOI team will keep a record of this contact.

Upon receipt of an information request, staff will be asked to respond within 10 working days and to locate and provide the information requested to the FOI team. If it is not possible to meet this deadline, the FOI team must be informed immediately; up to five additional working days may then be allowed to comply with the initial request; a record of these contacts will be kept.

The requested information will be forwarded to the FOI team who will review it in respect of any exemptions and/or fees payable. If exemptions are applicable, the applicant will be advised in the final response. If fees are payable the applicant will be issued with a Fees Notice.

If the FOI team feels that releasing particular information under the general rights of access could be contentious, the matter will be discussed with the ICB. The ICB will make a decision to release or deny access to the contentious information within the required time frame for responding to requests. If it is not possible to meet this timeframe the FOI team will contact the applicant to agree an extension. The FOI team will ensure that the applicant is kept informed as to the progress of their request.

3. Providing the Information

If no fees or charges are either payable or outstanding, or if no exemptions are applicable, the FOI team will provide the information requested directly to the applicant.

Information will be provided to applicants by any one or more of the following means, namely:

- as a copy of the information in permanent form (PDF) or another form acceptable to the applicant
- through the provision of a reasonable opportunity to inspect a record containing the information
- the provision of a digest or summary of the information in permanent form or in another form acceptable to the applicant

The FOI team will consider all the circumstances of the request for the release of information by a particular means, including the cost of doing so. If the FOI team determines that it is not reasonably practicable to comply with any preference for the provision of the information as requested by the applicant, they will notify the applicant of the reasons for this. The information will then be provided by such means as the FOI team deems to be reasonable. In the discharge of this function, the FOI team will have regard to other statutory obligations upon the ICB such as those established under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The FOI team will record within the FOI database:

- the date upon which the information was provided to the applicant
- any exemptions used.

4. Refusal of Requests

A refusal of a request may apply to all the information requested by an applicant or a part thereof.

A request for information may be refused if:

- the information is exempt from disclosure under Part II of the Act
- a fees notice or charge has not been paid within three months beginning on the day on which the fees notice was given to the applicant or the applicant was notified of the charge
- the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit
- the request is demonstrably vexatious or repeated.

If the FOI team chooses to refuse a request for information under any of the above clauses, the applicant will be informed of the reasons for this decision within 20 working days. The applicant will also be informed of the ICB's complaints procedures and of their right to appeal to the Information Commissioner (Appendix 4).

If the FOI team is to any extent relying on a claim that any provision of Part II relating to the duty to confirm or deny is relevant to the request, or on a claim that information is exempt information, a notice will be issued within 20 working days under Section 17 of the Act. The notice will:

- state that fact
- specify the exemption in question
- state (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

If the FOI team anticipates that it will take more than 20 working days to reach a decision as to whether any part of the information requested by the applicant is exempt under Part II of the Act, the applicant will be notified. A realistic and reasonable estimate of the date that a decision will be reached will be given and compliance expected unless there are extenuating circumstances. If an estimate is exceeded, the applicant will be given the reason(s) for delay and offered an apology. If the FOI team finds, whilst considering the public interest, that the estimate is proving unrealistic, the applicant will be informed.

If a qualified exemption is being applied, the FOI team will, either in the notice issued above or a separate notice given within a reasonable timescale, state the reasons for claiming:

- that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exclusion of the duty to confirm or deny outweighs the public interest in disclosing whether the ICB holds the information, or
- that, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The statement will not involve the disclosure of information which would itself be exempt information.

If the FOI team believes that the information requested is exempt as either the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit, or the request is demonstrably repeated or vexatious,

the notice will state that fact. If the ICB is relying on a claim that the request is vexatious or repeated under Section 14 of the Act, and a notice under Section 17 has already been issued to the applicant stating this fact, a further notice is not required.

The FOI team will keep records of all notices issued to refuse requests for information. When implementing this procedure, the FOI team will seek advice from those person(s) who hold the information that the applicant has requested and from senior staff.

5. Evaluation

Applicant satisfaction will be monitored via an evaluation form issued either electronically or by post with the final notice from the FOI team. The FOI team will record all responses and will inform the ICB of these.

Appendix 3

Complaints / Review Process

1. The right to appeal

The right to appeal is a fundamental part of the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). This right can be exercised in two ways: by an internal review using the ICB's procedures and by an external appeal to the regulatory body.

An applicant can make a complaint or request a review regarding any of the following:

- a refusal of a request for information under FOI Act or EIR
- dissatisfaction with a response to a request
- the ICB FOI and EIR policy
- non-compliance with the publication scheme

The ICB has one internal appeals process covering both Freedom of Information and Environmental Information requests, this gives dissatisfied applicants the opportunity for an initial review of how their request for information was handled. Having gone through this process, applicants who are still unhappy can complain to the Information Commissioner and the appeal will be dealt with according to the Commissioner's procedures.

2. Formal requests for an internal review

Applicants who are dissatisfied with the response that they have received to their request are advised within the response to write to the ICB via the FOI team.

The ICB will:

- acknowledge the complaint within two working days
- review the procedure and the handling of the request in conjunction with the FOI Act and EIR
- ensure that the review will be undertaken by staff who had no involvement in the original process or decision; generally this will be the CSU Information Governance team together with a ICB lay advisor
- make a fresh decision on consideration of all the factors relevant to the issue
- aim to provide a full response within 20 working days; if for any reason the ICB is unable to meet this target the applicant will be kept informed of the progress of their complaint; for complex complaints or where it is necessary to reconsider the public interest test, reviews should be completed within 40 working days of receipt.

If the applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the re-evaluation they have the right to refer their complaint to the Information Commissioner.

The Commissioner will investigate the case, and may serve ICB with an Information Notice specifying information which the Commissioner needs the organisation to provide in order to be able to make a determination. The Commissioner's judgment upholding or rejecting the complaint will eventually be published as a Decision Notice. If the complaint is upheld in whole or part, the Decision Notice may require the ICB to release information to the applicant which had previously been withheld or not provided. The ICB and the applicant have the right to appeal the Commissioner's decision to the Information Tribunal. Decisions of the Tribunal can then be appealed to the courts on points of law.

Appendix 4

Staff procedure for handling Freedom of Information enquiries

1. Introduction

Any member of the ICB staff may be approached and asked for information under this legislation. Section 16 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) states that public authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance to applicants, therefore every member of staff in the ICB has a legal duty to assist someone in making a request. Guidance for staff is set out in the 'Freedom of Information – Information for Staff' leaflet (Appendix 8 of the FOI policy).

2. Verbal requests

Under the terms of the FOIA enquiries must be written (letter, fax or e-mail), however, if a verbal request is received, ICB staff have a duty to advise and assist:

- the information requested may be in the publication scheme
- requests must be written (letter, fax or e-mail) to the address in section 3 and include a full name and correspondence address (this can be an e-mail address)
- there are a number of exemptions under the FOIA under which the ICB may not be obliged to provide the information requested
- a fee may be charged, depending on the type and size of request.

3. Written requests

Written requests may come from any source and be directed to any member of staff. If the request for information is not classified as a complaint, solicitor's letter or request for access to personal records it should be considered as a possible Freedom of Information enquiry, which should be forwarded to:

E-mail: CSCSU.FOI@nhs.net

The FOIA gives a right of access that is not based on 'need to know' and therefore the ICB does not have the right to question an applicant on the reason or purpose of their request. The ICB can, however, request the applicant to provide further detail or clarification in order to define a vague or broad request.

4. Requests for information received by Clinical Commissioning Group staff

Any member of staff receiving a request for information is expected to follow the staff process for handling requests, regardless of whether this is for information contained within the publication scheme or not. Guidance for CCC staff is set out in the 'Freedom of Information – Information for Staff' leaflet (Appendix 8 of the FOI policy).

5. Requests for information received by the NHS South, Central and West Commissioning Support Unit Freedom of Information team

The NHS South, Central and West Commissioning Support Unit (CSU) FOI team will follow the relevant process for handling requests as set out in Appendix 3 of the FOI policy: 'Procedure following receipt of an enquiry made under the FOIA 2000', and will ensure that the ICB receives timely notification of receipt.

6. Timescales

The FOIA requires that requests are responded to by the twentieth working day following the date of receipt and the CSU FOI team will work to this timeframe.

If the ICB decides to apply a condition or exemption (see Appendix 1 of the FOI policy: 'Exemptions') to withhold information the applicant will be informed within 20 working days.

The 20 working day timescale may be extended only if the ICB, via the CSU FOI team:

- requests further clarification relating to the enquiry from the applicant, in which case the 20 working day deadline restarts from the beginning once a reply is received
- advises the applicant it is unable to complete the enquiry within the 20 working days and a revised timescale is agreed between the enquirer and the ICB
- issues a fees notice, in which case the 20 working days is suspended until payment is received by the ICB
- considers a qualified exemption applies, in which case, in exceptional circumstances, the response may be extended by a further 20 working days to consider the Public Interest Test.

7. Public Interest Test

Where a qualified exemption is considered requiring the consideration of the Public Interest Test (PIT) this will be agreed between the persons/departments holding the information and the CSU FOI team. Final approval of the PIT (as part of the overall response as necessary) will rest with the ICB's chief officer. The ICB may extend the timescale for response by up to 20 working days if necessary and will advise the applicant in this circumstance via the FOI team.

8. Charging and fees

In accordance with the FOIA (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004, the ICB will not charge for information that costs less than £450 to provide, calculated at a rate of £25 per person per hour. The table illustrates which activities will and will not be included in this calculation:

Activities Included	Activities Not Included
Determining whether the requested information is held	Checking that the request is valid
Locating the information	Considering whether the request is repeated or vexatious
Retrieving the information	Considering whether the information may be exempt
Extracting the information (including editing or redacting)	Obtaining authorisation to send out the information
	Calculating any fee to be charged
	Providing advice and assistance

Additionally where the ICB considers it appropriate to charge a fee it will also consider the additional charge for non-staff costs or disbursements, such as photocopying, printing or postage.

For aggregate requests, where two or more requests are received for the same or similar information from the same person, or different people acting together or as part of a campaign, within a 60 day period, the ICB will aggregate the requests and charge in accordance with the fees regulations, via the CSU FOI team.

If the fee or charge is not paid within three months from the day on which the applicant receives the Fees Notice or is informed of the charge, the enquiry will be closed.

9. Complaints / reviews

Complaints and requests for review will be directed to the ICB chief officer's office and will be handled on behalf of the ICB by the CSU FOI team, to ensure that the requirements of the FOIA and EIRs are met (see Appendix 4 of the FOI Policy: 'Complaints / Review Process'). Final decisions will be sent from the ICB's chief officer.

10. Information format

Information will be provided in the applicant's preferred format (so far as this is reasonably practicable). The ICB will notify the applicant, via the CSU FOI team, of the reasons if it considers it is not practicable to comply.

11. Vexatious or repeated requests

The ICB will not facilitate requests from applicants if that request could be considered vexatious or repeated, which would be identified by monitoring data, with advice taken from the Information Commissioner's guidance to S14 of the FOIA:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guidance-index/freedom-of-information-and-environmental-information-regulations/dealing-with-vexatious-requests-section-14/>

Appendix 5

Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)

An EIR request may be made verbally as well as in writing and will be a request for environmental information if it is information in written, visual, aural, electronic or any other material form on:

- a. the state of the elements of the environment – such as air, atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscape and natural sites such as wetlands, coastal and marine areas, biological diversity and the interaction of these elements
- b. factors affecting (or likely to affect) the environment – including energy, noise, radiation, waste, emissions, discharges and other releases into the environment
- c. measures – such as policies, legislation, plans, programmes, environmental agreements and activities affecting or likely to affect the elements and factors referred to above
- d. reports – on the implementation of environmental legislation
- e. economic analyses – including cost benefit and other analyses and assumptions used within the framework of measures and activities referred to in (c) and
- f. the state of human health and safety – including the contamination of the food chain, conditions of human life, cultural sites and built structures insofar as they are or may be affected by the state of the elements of the environment.

Under the EIR, information is held by the ICB if it has been produced or received by it; is held by another person on its behalf; or is information which the ICB holds on behalf of a third party.

The EIR places various rights and duties on public authorities which include:

- a duty to actively disseminate environmental information
- a duty to make information available on request. Information requests must be answered within 20 working days, unless the ICB reasonably believes that it is impracticable to answer the request in that timescale due to its complexity and volume, in which event the ICB may have 40 days in which to provide the information
- a duty to provide advice and assistance to applicants
- a right to charge for information provided. Under the EIR, there is no cost limit beyond which information requests need not be answered. The EIR states that a charge may not exceed 'an amount which the public authority is satisfied is a reasonable amount'

Exceptions – Under the EIR there is an express presumption in favour of disclosure.

However, the ICB can refuse to disclose the information if it would adversely affect the following matters:

- international relations, defence, national security or public safety
- the course of justice, ability of a person to receive a fair trial or ability of a public authority to conduct a criminal or disciplinary inquiry
- intellectual property rights
- the confidentiality or proceedings of the organisation where such confidentiality is protected by law.

Appendix 6

Equality Assessment Tool

Policy Title: Policy for the Management of The Freedom of Information Act 2000		
Version Number: 1.0	Date of Issue: 28 Dec 2022	Review Date: 1 July 2024
Have you considered in your Policy development the impact of your Policy on:		
Health & Safety at Work Act 1974		Yes
Health and Social Care Act 2001		Yes
Sex Discrimination Act 1975		Yes
Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regs 1999		Yes
The Gender Reassignment Act 2004		Yes
Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended by the RRA 2000)		Yes
The Civil Partnerships Act 2004		Yes
Human Rights Act 1998		Yes
The Equal Pay Act (as amended) 1970		Yes
Disability Discrimination Act 1995		Yes
Employment Equality Regs (Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation) 2003		Yes
Promoting Equality and Human Rights in the NHS; a guide for Non- Executive Directors of NHS Boards (2005) DoH		Yes
Freedom of Information Act 2000		Yes
Environmental Information Regulations 2004		Yes
Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005		Yes
Data Protection Act 1998		Yes
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000		Yes
Civil Contingencies Act 2005		Yes
Mental Capacity Act 2005		Yes
Corporate Manslaughter & Corporate Homicide Act 2007		Yes
Other (please specify):		
1. When referring to the above, does this policy discriminate in any way?		No
2. Does it promote equality and enhance community relations?		Yes
3. Does it influence relations between different groups?		No
4. If Yes, could some groups be affected differently?		N/A
5. Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?		No
6. If Yes, do we need to gather evidence to check this?		N/A
7. Is the impact of the policy likely to be negative?		No
8. If Yes, can the impact be avoided?		N/A
9. Is the impact unlawful?		N/A
10. Can the impact be justified?		N/A
11. What alternatives are there to achieving the policy/guidance without creating the impact?		N/A
12. Can the impact be reduced by taking different action?		N/A

Freedom of Information



Information for ICB staff

Information for ICB Staff

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 encourages transparency within the public sector and assumes that openness is standard.

This guidance is designed to help you understand your responsibilities under the Act and the procedures that have been put in place to assist you in the management of requests.

- * The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) gives a right of access to information held by public bodies.
- * It does not require justification or the reason behind the request to be provided by the requestor.
- * Any member of the public, anywhere in the world can ask to see information that is held by the ICB.
- * Any member of staff may be asked for information to inform a response.
- * The statutory deadline for responding to FOI requests is 20 working days from the day after the request is received by the ICB.
- * The ICB is supported with its FOI function by the NHS Central Southern Commissioning Support Unit Freedom of Information Team.

Please use this address for all FOI correspondence: cscsu.foi@nhs.net

Staff Responsibilities

All staff have a duty to recognise requests made under the FOIA. Enquirers do not have to mention 'FOI', however, the following categories of enquiry are unlikely to fall within the remit of the FOIA (please ask the FOI Team if you are unsure):

- * A solicitor's letter
- * A complaint
- * A request for access to personal records
- * A press enquiry that does not refer to the FOIA or Environmental Information Regulations (EIR)
- * A routine enquiry which can be responded to as 'business as usual'

What to do if you receive an FOI request

Most requests are sent by e-mail to the CSU FOI Team directly, however, if you think you have received a request you should consult the Team as soon as possible to ascertain whether the request falls within the scope of the FOI Act.

Requests must be made in writing; if you receive a telephone request, please advise the enquirer to send their enquiry by post/e-mail and include a name and contact address.

If you receive an FOI request by e-mail, please send it to the FOI Team immediately.

If you receive an enquiry by post, please date stamp it. This is important as, by law, the ICB only has 20 working days within which to provide information that is requested and the clock starts ticking from the day after the request is received by the organisation, NOT the FOI Team. So, if a request takes a week to get to the Team, one quarter of the time available to find the information and draft and gain approval for a response is lost. The complete request should be scanned immediately and e-mailed to the FOI Team via cscsu.foi@nhs.net and the hard copy sent/given to them.

Requests from the FOI Team for information you may hold

The ICB must respond to requests; even if the information is not held, an obligation to inform the applicant exists. The ICB cannot refuse to respond because a request is inconvenient, or staff do not have the time to deal with it. Any failure to comply with the FOIA has legal implications not only for the organisation but for each individual member of staff.

Should the CSU FOI Team contact you requesting information you will be provided with a timeframe to respond. Please ensure you follow all the directions within the request e-mail as these highlight what to do if you don't hold the information or if you believe an exemption under the FOIA may apply.

Remember – the ICB is only required to provide the information it holds, so if you don't have the information, please do not go to another organisation for it; the enquirer can always be referred on for information, as necessary.

Under the FOIA all types of recorded information can be requested and may be disclosed, including everything written in notebooks or on "Post It" notes as well as your formal paper and electronic records. Very little information is "exempt" – exemption is only applicable where the public interest is best served by non-disclosure; embarrassment does not count. When writing anything down think, 'Would I want to see this on the front of the Daily Mail?'

Staff should ensure that they comply with all relevant ICB policies where these exist, such as the 'Records Management Policy' and the 'E-mail Procedure'.

In addition, you should make certain that information for which you are responsible is readily available.

Important.....

Staff must not alter, deface, block, erase, destroy or conceal information once a request has been received for it. Individuals who do this could face criminal prosecution.

Advise and assist

The FOIA (Section 16) places a duty on the ICB to advise and assist enquirers. If you can't answer the exact question because you don't hold the information, or because it will take too long to extract you need to consider what information can be provided that might help the enquirer; it is helpful when sending either a 'not held' or a refusal notice to the enquirer to state what is available.

Further information on the FOI Act:

The Information Commissioner's Office: <http://www.ico.gov.uk/>

You can also find more information in the ICB's FOI Policy.

CSU Freedom of Information Team contact details:

E-mail: cscsu.foi@nhs.net

If you have any concerns or queries relating to an FOI or EIR enquiry please do not hesitate to contact the Team.