

Freedom of Information at North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust



The **Freedom of Information Act 2000** gives people a general right of access to information held by or on behalf of public authorities. This leaflet tells you how North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust provides information under the Act.

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It is intended to create better public understanding of:

- how public authorities carry out their duties;
- why they make their decisions; and how they spend public money.

It is also intended to promote a culture of openness and accountability across the public sector.

What information can I have access to?

As a public body, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust strives to give you a general right of access to all recorded information held by the Trust. However, we are exempt from providing you with information not covered by the Act, such as someone's medical records or other documents which should not be released into the public domain.

Recorded information can be held in the form of documents, emails, notes, videos, letters and even audio tapes. It does not have to be about you, and you do not need to give a reason for wanting it.

How do I get hold of the information?

There are two ways to ask for information.

You can make a formal **freedom of information request** in writing, clearly describing the information you want and include your name and address.

Alternatively, every year we make some information publicly available already, for example, annual reports, policy documents and financial information. We describe this information in our '**publication scheme**'.

You can ask for a copy of our publication scheme to check what information is already available or look on our website at

www.combined.nhs.uk/aboutus/Pages/PublicationScheme.aspx

To get information that is covered by our publication scheme, you can ask for it in a less formal way. Simply ask for it verbally or in writing by contacting the Trust, details below, and where appropriate this will be sent to you soon afterwards.

Mrs Laurie Wrench
Associate Director of Governance
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare
NHS Trust
Trust Headquarters
Lawton House
Bellringer Road
Trentham
ST4 8HH

FOIRequests@combined.nhs.uk

When will I receive the information?

If the information is covered by a publication scheme, we will provide it without delay. However, if you make a formal Freedom of Information Act request, we have up to 20 working days to decide whether the law permits you to have the information, starting from the day after we receive your request.



In some cases this time limit may be extended. If so, we will write to let you know when we will be able to send you the information.

Will the information cost me anything?

Charges for information covered by our publication scheme will be stated in the scheme itself. We will provide as much information as possible free of charge; and if charges are made – for example if you ask for a lot of paper documents or the information has been produced for sale – our charges will be reasonable.

If I make a freedom of information request, will I get everything I ask for?

We will provide all the information you have requested other than exemptions. We are allowed to withhold information that should not be released into the public domain. Examples include information that identifies other people. If we decide to withhold information from you, we will send you a refusal notice stating the exemption and saying why it applies.

More information about exemptions is available from the Information Commissioner's Office website www.ico.gov.uk

Could there be other reasons for refusing my request?

We may also refuse your request if:

- we estimate that the cost and the time of complying would exceed the appropriate cost limit for a request, which is £600 for central government and Parliament and £450 for other public authorities.
- we cannot identify the information you want – in which case we will work with you to clarify your request;
- we think your request is vexatious – in other words, if the primary purpose of your request is to cause harm or annoyance and not to obtain information; or if we have already given you similar information recently.

Can I complain?

Yes, you may complain to us if you are unhappy about how we have handled your Freedom of Information Act request, or the decisions we reached over what to disclose.

You may also complain if we:

- failed to respond to your request within 20 working days or to explain why an extension to the 20day reply period is needed;
- failed to offer advice and help in connection with your request; or made excessive or unreasonable charges for the information we supplied.

You can also complain if you think we are not publishing information in accordance with our publication scheme, for example, if we were to refuse to let you have information that seems to be covered by our scheme, or it takes a long time to send it to you.

Who should I complain to at North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust?

The Chief Executive
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare
NHS Trust
Trust Headquarters
Bellringer Road
Trentham
ST4 8HH

If appropriate, we will reconsider all the relevant factors and make a fresh decision.

If you believe that we have not dealt with your complaint properly, you should complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. You should send in your complaint as soon as possible and preferably not later than two months after our response to your request for information.

More information

More information on the Freedom of Information Act can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website. For more general advice on freedom of information visit the website at:

[www.ico.gov.uk/for the public](http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_the_public)

For advice on complaints in relation Freedom of Information Act requests, please visit the site at:

www.ico.gov.uk/complaints/freedom_of_information.aspx

Information available in other formats

The information in this leaflet can be made available to you in another language, large print, Braille or on audio cassette tape. Contact our PALS Freephone on **0800 389 9676**.

Website

The North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust website address is:

www.combined.nhs.uk

