

NOTE: This guide is an overview of some of the main provisions of the Act and should not be regarded as a legal interpretation.

What does the Freedom of Information Act do?

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 gives everyone the right to get information from public authorities. Public authorities include hospitals, health centres, health boards and health agencies - so the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust comes under the FOI Act. The FOI Act means that, from 1st January 2005, you will be able to get information to understand better how the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust works, how we spend public money and how and why we make our decisions.

You can also get information under:

The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) which, among other things, gives everyone access to their own personal information. The DPA covers businesses as well as public authorities. The South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust Policy on Confidentiality and Data Protection is available on our website (see details under How do I get information).



The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) gives people access to environmental information. Like the FOI, it is limited to information held by public authorities. Information on EIR is available from the Northern Ireland Commissioner (see contact details under How do I get information).

How do I get information about the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust under the FOI Act?

You can get information on our website: www.setrust.hscni.net - so check if what you want is there. You can download a lot of information free of charge, but if what you want is not there or cannot be downloaded write to the address given on the website.

If you do not have access to the Internet, write to the address given at the end of this leaflet. All requests for copies of

information under the FOI Act need to be in writing and give a return address so we can respond. You can send requests by email and we will respond to your email address.



How long does it take to get information?

Once a written request for information is received, we have 20 working days to respond - although that time can be extended in some cases. Working days generally means Monday-Friday (except for Bank Holidays). Sometimes we might need to contact you so we are sure about what you want. It will help if you can be as clear as possible in your letter about what you want. Make sure you give your name and address and a contact telephone number.

Is there a cost for getting information?

As a general rule, costs will depend on how much information is requested.

If it costs us less than £450 to gather the information together, it will usually be provided to you free of charge, although there may be a charge for things like photocopying and postage. If gathering the information you

want is likely to cost more than £450, we do not have to provide it, even if you agreed to pay the extra costs. In most cases though, we will provide it once you have paid the costs. The exception to this is EIR information. If the cost to gather EIR information is more than £450 and you are prepared to pay these costs, we MUST gather it for you.



What happens if the information I want is not available?

The FOI Act does not require us to gather information that is not already there, but we are required to assist you with your request. We will contact you and tell you what information we do hold that might help to answer your query.



South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Can I have any information at all?

The FOI Act allows you access to almost all information that a public body holds. But there are some things that cannot be given to the public. For example:

- information about national security
- information on law enforcement
- personal information about others

You can obtain your own personal information through the Data Protection Act (see over). Ask about the Data Protection Act if you are seeking your personal information.

What if I am refused information?

We will tell you if information is being withheld and why. We will also tell you who to contact if you are not happy. You can also contact the Northern Ireland Information Commissioner (see details over). However, you are required to contact us first to try to sort the matter out before contacting the Information Commissioner. The Commissioner will want to see proof of that before getting involved. Please get in touch with us if you are not happy and tell us why you believe we are wrongly withholding information from you.

Where can I get more information about the FOI Act?

You can get more information about FOI from the Northern Ireland Information Commissioner. The Commissioner's contact details are:

Website:
www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Phone: (028) 9026 9380

Fax: (028) 9026 9388

Post:
Information Commissioner's Office NI
51 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8FE

Email: ni@rco.gsi.gov.uk

The South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (www.setrust.hscni.net) will also give you information, along with contact details. Or you can ring us and ask to speak to the Freedom of Information Co-Ordinator - but remember that requests for copies of information need to be in writing.

Information Governance Team
Lough House
Ards Community Hospital
NEWTOWNARDS
BT23 4AS

Telephone: (028) 9151 2210

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**How it affects
Health &
Personal Social
Services**

